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Larranaga has Miami on the verge of ACC history

CBS Sports

Gary Parrish

March 4, 2016

The University of Miami played basketball a long time ago. Then it stopped playing in 1971. Then it started playing again in 1985. And it's been playing ever since, mostly in the Big East, but also, and now, in the ACC. And in all those years of playing basketball, Miami won exactly one league title before the school hired Jim Larranaga in April 2011.

Just one.

But now Miami is on the verge of winning its second ACC title in four years.

Granted, it won't come easy -- because the No. 7 Hurricanes are at Virginia Tech Saturday, and Virginia Tech is above .500 in the ACC and in possession of a win over Virginia, meaning Buzz Williams' Hokies could be a tough out. That said, it is more likely than not, statistically speaking, that Miami will win another ACC championship, and an outright title, which is possible, would be historic, and here's why: there's never been a four-year stretch in which either Duke or North Carolina didn't share the ACC's regular-season title at least once. But if Miami wins the outright title, the past four ACC champions would then be ...

2013: Miami

2014: Virginia

2015: Virginia

2016: Miami

Who could've predicted that? So the stakes are high atop the ACC this weekend. And that Miami is even involved in the conversation is a testament to the job Jim Larranaga is doing.

Miami & Virginia PGs show subtle improvement can be season-changing

NCAA.com
Joe Boozell
March 3, 2016

Virginia and Miami squared off a little more than a week ago, and it almost felt like watching clones of one another run up and down the court in different colored jerseys.

The Hurricanes topped the Cavaliers by three on Feb. 22 in Coral Gables, but their similarities were hard to ignore.

The teams both feature star shooting guards in Malcolm Brogdon and Sheldon McClellan; dominant interior forces in Anthony Gill and Tonye Jekiri; play at a snail's pace (Virginia ranks dead last in the country in adjusted tempo; Miami is 301st) while maintaining high efficiency in doing so. Virginia is 10th in adjusted offensive efficiency; Miami is 12th.

That's all fine, but so what? It's not the first time we've seen two schools from the same conference resemble one another.

But the above factors don't even mention Virginia and Miami's most obvious common denominator: their point guards share an eerily similar career trajectory. And one could make the argument that if Angel Rodriguez and London Perrantes performed exactly like they did a year ago, the Hoos and the Canes wouldn't be ranked inside of the top 25.

It might sound harsh, but in 2014-15, Rodriguez and Perrantes were better point guards in theory than they were in reality. They were inefficient offensive players, and despite logging heavy minutes, their teams generally fared better with them on the bench

*Note: Offensive Rating = Points per 100 possessions a team scores with Player X on the floor

Team Net Rating = Difference between offensive rating and defensive rating

Player Net Rating = Difference between offensive rating and defensive rating with Player X on the floor

Miami lost a few mild contributors in the

offseason, and its newcomer that's made the biggest impact is Kamari Murphy – a versatile forward that has been solid for the Canes, but is certainly no star. In 2015, Miami missed the NCAA tournament. This year, it's challenging for a high seed.

McClellan, Jekiri and Davon Reed have improved marginally, but Rodriguez' jump is the most noticeable, and frankly, the most important. The senior floor general scored 19 points on 13 shot attempts in Wednesday's big win over Notre Dame, and his ability to burn defenses from deep or with slithery drives to the basket has made life easier for McClellan and Reed.

Miami head coach Jim Larranaga sung Rodriguez' praises after the Hurricanes' win over Louisville on Saturday, too, and said his senior point guard was the biggest reason why the Hurricanes escaped with a win.

"He [Rodriguez] was absolutely sensational," Larranaga said on Saturday. "He was the best player on the court on both ends. Scoring, dishing, rebounding; his on-ball pressure created a vision for his teammates of how we expect them to play."

Perrantes' narrative is similar, for the most part. But unlike Miami, Virginia was an excellent team last season, winning 30 games before bowing out to Michigan State in the NCAA tournament.

However, the Hoos lost two major contributors in Justin Anderson and Darion Atkins from last year's team. So as Rodriguez' evolution was organic, Perrantes' was necessary if Virginia wanted to replicate last season's success. Suffice it to say, he's answered the bell in a huge way.

Perrantes always had a (warranted) reputation as a clutch shot-maker, but he had a tendency to disappear early on in games. While the scrappy point guard is still as clutch as ever, he's also now become a consistent third option in a good Virginia offense.

Like Rodriguez, he's made life infinitely easier for his star teammates.

Brogdon will tell you as much. Their chemistry is one major reason for the Hoos' success.

"Our chemistry has evolved as much as chemistry between two players can," Brogdon said of Perrantes earlier this season. "On the court, we just need eye contact to know what each other is going to do with their next step. For example, when they started full-court pressing us at the end, he throws it right over the top. I don't have to point, I don't have to gesture, its just eye contact like 'you know where to throw it and I know where to be.' We read each other very well."

Guys like Grayson Allen and Ben Bentil are widely recognized as the most improved players in college basketball, and rightfully so. They transformed into leading scorers on good teams after averaging single digits in 2014-15.

But Rodriguez and Perrantes have shown that subtle improvements, such as becoming vastly more efficient despite not lighting the box score on fire, for instance, can be just as important to winning.

It's time to give these two their just due.

Miami Basketball News and Notes: 3/3/16

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
March 3, 2016

The Miami Hurricanes remain alive for an ACC Regular Season Championship.

With a win on Saturday Vs Virginia Tech and a UNC loss at Duke, they would clinch the title outright.

We'll touch upon that and a whole lot more this morning.

Let's get right to it:

Can they 'Canes get a #1 in the ACCT seed if UNC beats Duke?

No.

If the 'Canes and Heels finish with identical conference records, Miami will share the conference title (good for a banner) but UNC WILL get the #1 seed in the conference tournament.

Per the ACC website:

When two teams are tied in the standings, regular season head-to-head results are used as the tiebreaker.

UNC beat Miami head to head earlier this month.

Now let's say UM finishes tied for second in the conference with UVA, whom they split the regular season series with.

If the tied teams played each other twice in the regular season and split their games, then each team's record vs. the team occupying the highest position in the final regular season standings (or in case of a tie for first place, the next highest position in the regular season standings) and then continuing down through the standings until one team gains an advantage.

Edge UVA by virtue of their 1-0 record Vs North Carolina and UM being 0-1.

With Louisville self imposing, and Duke two games back of the Hurricanes, the worst Miami can do at this point is third place. The ACC Tournament double bye is already clinched.

I hope this clarifies everything for anyone who was wondering. Let's hope UM wins Saturday and UNC loses. But either way, Miami is in great shape.

Some on the court observations:

The D over the last 8 minutes Vs Louisville (held the Cardinals scoreless 5 minutes of that span and forced 9 straight misses) and through out the entire game last night (holding the #2 ranked team in offensive efficiency to 50 points) has been championship level. Tonye Jekiri continues to be an anchor, and the perimeter players are applying great ball pressure. With Angel Rodriguez, Davon Reed, Kamari Murphy, and Sheldon McClellan rounding out the starting line-up, you have 5 plus defenders physically. Add in increased intensity as the team has bought in to Coach L's emphasis on D, and you get the results mentioned above.

The one weakness of late has been rebounding. But the 'Canes out rebounded the Irish last night 39-26. That is also a very positive sign.

Talk about stepping it up. Angel Rodriguez' stats over Miami's last 7 games are: 13.1 ppg, 4.9 apg, 50% FG, & 41.9% 3Ps. No shock UM has won 6 of those contests.

Sheldon McClellan is a very unselfish player. But his consistency remains a big part of the success of the team. The senior has scored in double figures in 17 straight games.

Early Predictions for March Madness

Bleacher Report

Rob Goldberg

March 3, 2016

The NCAA tournament is just a couple of weeks away, but we still don't have a great idea about the top contenders for the national championship.

Obviously, there are a group of teams that have been ranked near the Top Five for much of the season and are considered the favorites. Kansas, Oklahoma, Villanova, North Carolina and others will remain top contenders for a title after proving themselves for much of the year. Then again, this season has been filled with plenty of parity and crazy upsets, something that can continue in March Madness.

If you are making predictions for the top picks in the field, make sure to have a few options in mind. Here is a look at the odds for the top teams available along with the best choices on the board.

Best Value: Miami (Fla.)

Miami has been ranked in the Top 25 since early in November and has been among the top 15 teams in college basketball for much of the season, yet people completely overlook the squad on a national level.

If the Hurricanes can beat middling Virginia Tech on Saturday, they will clinch at least a share of the ACC regular-season title. If North Carolina loses at Duke—a realistic possibility—Miami will have the title outright. This isn't all due to an unbalanced schedule, either, as the team has wins over Duke, Virginia, Louisville and others.

Going out of conference, the Hurricanes still have an impressive resume, including neutral-court victories over Utah and Butler. Some of the losses are a bit embarrassing, including home against

Northeastern, but at their best, they are certainly a team to fear in the postseason.

One of the biggest keys is the experience, which KenPom.com ranked 32nd in college basketball and fourth among major-conference teams. Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan are both fifth-year seniors in the backcourt after transferring from other schools, and they are as trustworthy as they come with the ball in their hands. Senior Tonye Jekiri also helps out with his defensive work in the post by blocking and altering plenty of shots near the rim.

With Davon Reed and Ja'Quan Newton (assuming he returns from suspension) also providing plenty of scoring, this squad has all the tools to succeed with few weaknesses. At least a Final Four run is possible, and with these odds, don't be afraid to take a chance on winning it all.

Larranaga's Miami team will practice at George Mason

The Washington Post

Dan Steinberg

March 3, 2016

Jim Larranaga was always going to be in the news this month. It's now been 10 years since he took George Mason to the Final Four. (And more on that soon. Lots and lots more.) And the beloved ex-Patriots coach was coming back to Verizon Center, with two of his former Mason assistants, as part of the rarely-in-Washington ACC tournament.

So the nostalgia was already ready to flow. And then came word that Larranaga's Miami team would spend a few days practicing at his old Mason haunts in advance of next week's ACC tournament, and well, if you don't see a story in that, you probably also think the media should spend more time on Jim Gilmore and less on Trump.

As it turns out, the Hurricanes are finishing off their regular-season schedule Saturday afternoon against Virginia Tech in Blacksburg. That's a lot closer to Washington than to South Florida. So Miami reached out to George Mason about using the school's Fairfax practice facilities while preparing for the ACC event, which starts Tuesday at Verizon Center. George Mason first-year coach Dave Paulsen has embraced his school's Final Four history, and had no problem with helping out Larranaga and friends. (The Atlantic 10 tournament begins next Wednesday in Brooklyn.)

And with the Miami staff also including a pair of former Mason assistants in Chris Caputo and James Johnson, and the George Mason athletic department including a bunch of longtime employees who overlapped with Larranaga, well, there will be plenty of hugs and goosebumps

next week, anyhow.

Miami is ranked No. 7 and can still clinch a share of the ACC regular season title, but even with such a tremendous season and some local ties, the Hurricanes will face a hostile Verizon Center atmosphere next week. Not so in Fairfax. Larranaga spent more than a decade off Braddock Road, and remains the school's all-time leader in wins and winning percentage. It's not hard to find memories of the Final Four inside the athletic department, which has spent this season celebrating the 10th anniversary.

The Miami practices will be closed to the public, but Larranaga is expected to address local media members at some point during his time at George Mason, which will include up to three days of practice.

Hurricanes back in the top 10 and chasing championships

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 2, 2016

March is nearly upon us. How confident are the Hurricanes?

Quite.

"Everybody knows we're right there," forward Kamari Murphy said. "Two more games in the regular season, then the tournament, then another tournament. Everyone has the mindset to finish strong. Even after that bad loss to UNC, we're still 'the chasers.' We still call ourselves that."

The chasers, meaning that while the Hurricanes are ranked No. 7 this week — their highest ranking in three seasons — they're going for No. 1.

Even though they're tied for first in the ACC, they're looking to own the regular-season title. When they open ACC tournament play next Thursday in Washington, D.C., they'll be gunning for the title, too.

"We have the right balance," coach Jim Larranaga said. "We've got really good experience in the backcourt and the frontcourt. We've got good balance in the way we score. We've got a very good group that has improved defensively. If we rebound well in addition to that, we can be a tough out."

Miami (23-5, 12-4 ACC) can lock up the best regular-season record in school history, besting the 24-6 mark set in 2012-13. They have two games left — Wednesday at Notre Dame, Saturday at Virginia Tech — to accomplish that.

They also want to stay in the top 10, which they haven't done in consecutive weeks since 2012-13, when they were there for seven weeks. The last time the Hurricanes reached the top 10, in early January, they lost at No. 13 Virginia and unranked Clemson.

"It'd be nice to be in there for two weeks this time, instead of one," guard Davon Reed said.

They'll be watching North Carolina, whose loss at Virginia on Saturday put Miami back in a tie for first place. UNC hosts Syracuse on Monday and visits No. 17 Duke on Saturday. "Now we have to do our part," Reed said. "We've got another blessing. We can't ask for any more favors."

Miami, which set a program record for home wins (15-1) this season, is just 5-4 on the road (and 3-0 at neutral sites). Notre Dame, which ranks second nationally in offensive efficiency per KenPom, is just 192nd on defense.

The Hurricanes are No. 7 in RPI, according to NCAA data, and is projected by ESPN and CBS Sports to be a 2-seed in the NCAA tournament.

"Our goals are always the same," Larranaga said. "We want to win the regular season championship, the tournament championship, then the national championship. It's nothing new. It's something we strive for every year. Some years you have a better potential to accomplish those goals."

So how does he assess his team's potential to hit all three of those marks?

Miami ranks 13th in offensive efficiency and 49th on defense. If they improve the latter figure, Larranaga said, there's potential to win a national championship.

"The reason I say that is right now, there's nobody ahead of us," he said. "It's not like I look around the country and say, 'Well, those five or 10 teams are much better than us.' No. We're in the strongest league in the country and we're tied with North Carolina [for first place], and a lot of people think North Carolina has an excellent chance of winning the national championship. They probably think Virginia does too. And yet, in a week, we could be regular season champions."

"Maybe the thought will change on us. I don't know. It hasn't changed in my mind."

Stepping up

With standout sixth man Ja'Quan Newton suspended for the final two games of the

regular season, Larranaga is counting on Angel Rodriguez and others to play more. "We don't replace him," Larranaga said, speaking of Newton. "We just tell Angel to play a lot more minutes." If Rodriguez can duplicate his performance against Louisville (17 points, 12 in the second half, with seven assists and five rebounds), Miami will be in good shape.

Aside from Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Davon Reed, James Palmer will see an increase in workload. Palmer had his best night in a while last Saturday, going 3-for-3 for six points. He played 15 minutes, marking the third time in his last seven games he played double-digit minutes. It was arguably his best shooting performance since he went 6-for-9 in November against Mississippi State. "It's been a while since James really played with that confidence and happiness," Larranaga said.

Homecomings

Miami will not return to Coral Gables after finishing the regular season at Virginia Tech on Saturday. It will practice at George Mason, in Fairfax, Va., before the ACC tournament. That school, of course, is where a decade ago Larranaga took the Patriots to the Final Four, the first time any mid-major had made it that far.

On another note, Miami is projected to be a No. 2 seed in the tournament by two major outlets. CBS Sports has the Hurricanes heading to Raleigh to open the tournament, while ESPN has UM in Brooklyn. A UM source said the Hurricanes could also be sent to Providence.

Brooklyn is Murphy's hometown. Providence is where Larranaga, a Bronx native, played his college ball. The Hurricanes have no apparent connection to Raleigh.

Mason Men

CBS Sports.com

Matt Norlander

March 4, 2016

March makes believers of us all. The NCAA Tournament is more than 75 years old, yet every year it gives us something we've never seen before. The charm of the bracket lies in how we always allow ourselves to be shocked even when we know the shock is coming -- it's just a matter of who and when. For decades, those flares of surprise were contained to the corners of a few opening-weekend thrillers. Double-digit seeds dramatically cutting down aristocrats.

In the modern tournament era (since 1985, when the field expanded to 64 teams) late March and early April were only available on the calendar to the sport's richest and biggest. Villanova, a bona fide Big East power with a future top-10 pick, was seeded eighth but became national champs in '85. LSU, a founding program of the SEC, was an 11 seed that broke through to the national semifinals a year after Nova. Four years after that, UNLV won a national title behind a Hall of Fame coach and one of the most talented, intimidating starting fives in college basketball history. There was nothing about Vegas that was synonymous with mid-major. These were the teams regarded as Final Four long shots.

As college basketball stylistically transformed through many eras and into a new century, a constant rule remained: Mid-major teams did not win four games in the NCAA Tournament.

Until 2006, of course, when a commuter school out of Fairfax, Va., burned down the country's brackets, not to mention sport's precedents. George Mason became one of the best stories in America that year. The Patriots' Final Four run remains one of the most unexpected, groundbreaking achievements in college hoops history.

Before Butler. Before VCU. Before Wichita State. Before all of them, there was George Mason. Those other programs had proud histories and some tournament success in years before their Final Four runs. But Mason, which barely made the field in 2006, truly came out of nowhere when it cracked the dam. The school had three tourney bids in its history -- and had never even won a game.

George Mason. A college named after a man who defied convention and redefined the Constitution when he fathered the Bill of Rights. The Patriots defied convention and redefined the rules of the tournament when they defeated three legendary programs and provided the greatest upset in Elite Eight history.

"I got chillbumps on me right now even talking about this," James Johnson, an assistant on that team, said. "Absolute joy. Still to this day."

Everyone remembers the epic vs. UConn, the shot that didn't go in and Jim Larranaga, the fun-loving coach who inspired his team to one of the most unforgettable tournament trips ever. But there is a deeper story to Mason's glory. Many don't realize that team dealt with death, physical altercations and suspensions. A couple of events almost prevented Mason from being in position to make the tournament. The fact it dodged those obstacles makes that run even better. This is the story of college basketball's first true Final Four Cinderella.

DEATH AND WICHITA STATE 1.0

The BracketBuster era was fully fledged in 2006. The mid-February, made-for-TV tilts gave quality mid-major teams a chance to earn credible non-conference wins. Larranaga asked for the toughest possible opponent. He was awarded a road game vs. Wichita State. Tony Skinn and Folarin Campbell were originally not supposed to play in that game -- for very different reasons.

The name "Folarin" means "walk with glory" in the African language of Yoruba. When he was born on Feb. 27, 1986, it wasn't Campbell's parents who named him. It was his grandmother, Christina. In late January of '06, Christina Campbell died at the age of 72 in her home city of Lagos, Nigeria. Campbell met Larranaga at his office and told him the news, then said he wanted to attend her funeral.

Which would be held in Nigeria. In February.

He'd be gone two weeks.

"My heart jumped into my mouth," Larranaga said. "He asks for permission to attend the funeral. It's an extremely close family. What do I say to this request?"

The news came shortly after Mason discovered it was heading to Wichita State on Feb. 18. Larranaga was torn. The Campbell family was so generous, so loving. They attended every GMU home game. He knew if Folarin left, Mason's chances of beating Wichita State would leave with him on that plane to Africa.

The coaching staff was invited to the Campbell family

home in Silver Spring, Md., to hash out the dilemma. They ate Folarin's mom's cooking and watched home videos for hours. It was an emotional gathering. Folarin's father, Festus, was a staunch supporter of his son and George Mason, but didn't fully understand how college basketball worked. Larranaga delicately explained to him the situation with the Wichita State game, the season at hand, how this was the program's best chance in its history to make history.

Festus Campbell slept on it. Prayed on it. Larranaga had empathy as a father and ambivalence as a coach. The next day, he received a call from Festus. Folarin would stay with the team while the rest of his family flew to Nigeria for the funeral. Folarin became upset.

"I really wanted to go," Campbell said. "At that time, when I was younger, whatever [my dad] told me, I did. But after that game, I kind of, I think everything happened for a reason. The way we won the game, the atmosphere, how the team played, it was so great. For us to win the game -- that was the only reason we got in -- if we lost that game, we wouldn't even be talking right now."

"George Mason became a symbol of what is great about college basketball."

There was a second late obstacle and possible pitfall regarding a starter's availability for Wichita State. Three days before that game, Skinn and Drexel's Bashir Mason (now the coach at Wagner) nearly came to blows in George Mason's 67-48 romping of the Dragons. The officials took two separate trips to the monitor to review the incident, and it was only after the second review that both players were ejected. League rules stipulated that if you were thrown from a game for fighting, a mandatory one-game suspension immediately followed. Skinn was ruled out for Wichita State. Larranaga appealed to the national officiating board, and in that appeal it was determined the refs did not properly conclude after a first video review to eject the players. Within the rules, Skinn should have been eligible to play.

Wichita State's Koch Arena was the most intimidating environment George Mason played in that season -- until it faced Florida in the Final Four.

"It was something out of a horror movie," sixth man Gabe Norwood said. "I'd never been to Wichita. The school was kind of plopped down there. We got to the arena two hours before, and there's no one else in there other than the student section."

Campbell remembers the building shaking, his body compelled to sway because of how overpowering the din was.

"It was like all the fans were on top of you," he said. "So as they were yelling, I felt I was being moved from side to side because of how loud they were."

Assistant Scott Cherry: "That place is 10,000 people strong now. They've got seats filled an hour and a half before the game. Our guys go out for shootaround and their fans are killing them."

"It was the loudest game we played all year," Butler said. "And Tony had a field day."

Yes, George Mason won its appeal. And not only did Skinn play, but he was the deciding factor.

"It was a tremendous game," said current Maryland coach Mark Turgeon, who was Wichita State's coach at the time. "Big-time atmosphere. I remember George Mason not being intimidated at all and controlling most of that game. We made a run late. The thing I remember is how complete they were. They could drive it, shoot it, had defenders and their post players were so good. I remember saying after the game, 'That's an NCAA Tournament team.'"

With Koch Arena in a rave, Skinn took a pass from Jai Lewis on the right wing and put in the final three points of his game-high 23 on a winning shot with 10.8 seconds to go. Patriots 71, Shockers 68. As you'll discover below, that final play -- dubbed "3" -- was an omen to Mason's tournament success.

"The older and older I get, I see things do happen for a reason," Skinn said. "If I'm not playing in that game, maybe we're not having this conversation. Obviously that was a big game for us, and it was a program-changer."

It was national validation. The win put George Mason into the top 25 of the coaches poll for the first time. It was the victory that became the deciding factor in getting George Mason its controversial at-large bid. Without that win, GMU is an NIT team. Without that win, this story is not written.

BELIEVING THE UNBELIEVABLE

One twist: Mason's Final Four team was not as good as it should have been. That '06 run was all the more surprising considering the Patriots lost one of their most important players on the first day of school, when John Vaughan tore his ACL. Larranaga had him penciled in as a starter. Vaughan's medical redshirt was a blow to a team coming off a forgettable 16-13 campaign the year before. GMU didn't even qualify for the

NIT in 2005; that season was a significant drop-off from the '03-04 team that won two NIT games and finished 23-10. It's overlooked now, but at the time that '03-04 group produced one of the best seasons in school history. GMU began playing basketball in 1966, and its 23 wins in '03-04 were the most in one season to date. The record-setting season was made possible in good portion by three players still finding themselves: Skinn, Jai Lewis and Lamar Butler.

In the summer of 2005 Larranaga told his staff the upcoming season could be the best in program history. He and assistant Scott Cherry scheduled ambitiously. They wanted to become the first CAA team in two decades to be good enough to qualify as an at-large. Like many mid-major coaches in the early 2000s, Larranaga learned how to manipulate the RPI. He wanted his players to play in terms of the unprecedented but achievable.

"We were thrown into the fire," Butler said. "You knew when you played against George Mason it wasn't going to be an easy night, no matter who we played. That summer we got good with swimming-pool conditioning, tire flips, a lot of new workouts. We knew we had the talent. The offseason workouts were actually workouts. Open gyms were competitive. It was unlike anything I'd seen in my years at Mason."

In the preseason he brought in an old friend from the University of Virginia, Bob Rotella, who is world-famous for his sports psychology work. (Larranaga credits Rotella's methods for pushing the 1984 Virginia team to a Final Four and for getting his 1997 Bowling Green team to its first conference championship in 14 years.)

So, on Oct. 30, 2005, Larranaga brings in Rotella, who asks everyone to put their heads down on their desks and dream about the year ahead. Butler reveals he believes the team can go to the Final Four. His teammates laugh.

But by the time they left that classroom in the physical education building on George Mason's campus, Larranaga was convinced every player on that team believed in what Butler had the audacity to say.

Everyone of course remembers those four huge games in March of 2006, but there were four other critical and defining games prior to the tournament that altered Mason's season and make this story even more inconceivable. After a five-point overtime road loss against a Wake Forest team that was ranked 18th that preseason, Mason lost by 20 at home to Creighton.

"The Creighton game was the motivation for our run," Larranaga said.

It remains one of the most embarrassing losses of his career. The next day, Larranaga held what he claims was the longest game film session he's ever had.

"We had to watch every single play, write something down about every play -- and it must have been 80 degrees in the locker room," Butler said. "We were scorching. It was a sweatbox."

The upshot of the blowout leads to two changes that alter Mason's season for the better. The first was taking Skinn -- who Larranaga had to concede was too shot-happy to truly play the point -- off the ball, and instead letting Campbell, a small forward, run the offense.

"My coaches thought I was absolutely crazy," Larranaga said.

The second decision came on defense. Larranaga and assistant coach/defensive coordinator James Johnson opted to play a pack line-type D. Larranaga swallowed his pride and abandoned his usual presses and traps. Instead, GMU would mind the gaps, clog the paint and force teams to shoot from deep. Mason evolved into one of the best defensive teams in the country, compounded by the fact it was not prone to foul. This was vital, as the Patriots lacked depth.

The second critical outcome came on Dec. 21 against Hampton, of all teams. If Larranaga's Creighton lecture was for the players, this lashing was for his assistants -- and it came following a 79-66 home win over a 1-6 Hampton squad. It was a wakeup call to a young staff perhaps not taking their jobs seriously enough.

"He was pretty heated," Scott Cherry, who's been the coach at High Point since 2009, said. "That meeting with coach got us mad but got us centered around the right things as assistants. Now being a head coach, I understand where he was coming from. We got a little fat and happy. We came back after Christmas, and from that point on our guys sensed a different thing from us."

Mason's season from then on:

It lost once more in December

It lost once in January

It lost once in February

It lost once in March

It lost once in April

Mason Men (cont.)

By the time the calendar turned to 2006, Mason was an anonymous 7-4 group, its four losses coming to the four best teams it played. What's forgotten: The 54-53 road loss at Old Dominion on Dec. 7 and the 63-61 loss at MSU on Dec. 30 both came on those teams' final shots. And Mason nearly won at Wake. It was a 7-4 team believing it should have been 10-1.

"A philosophy we had was to treat every team the same -- it doesn't matter if [it's] the worst team in Division I or the top team in Division I," Larranaga said.

Over the next nine weeks, Mason went 16-3, nabbed its precious signature victory with the road upset of Wichita State in the process and built an at-large case, should anything drastic happen.

Drastic arrived with a punch to the crotch. Literally.

SKINN'S PUNCH AND SELECTION SUNDAY

After Skinn skirted one fracas-related suspension in February, a second skirmish at the worst time forced Larranaga's hand. Hofstra was George Mason's foil that season. The teams played twice, the Pride beating the Patriots by an average of double digits each time. The second game came in the CAA semifinals. Skinn socked Loren Stokes in the groin with less than a minute remaining. Though most didn't see the jab, Skinn immediately admitted the act to the team in the huddle after it happened. A local TV cameraman happened to catch a low angle of the punch and showed it to Larranaga after the game ended. On his walk back to the locker room, the coach decided he was suspending Skinn, a senior, no matter what their next game was.

"In the heat of the moment, at 33 now as a coach, and at 22 as a player, your mentality is a lot different," Skinn, who's now an assistant at Louisiana Tech, said. "Frustration kicked in. I look back at it, and I was pissed off, and I knew once it happened there were going to be repercussions. Lesson learned and a lesson I needed."

Larranaga's decision drew praise from Mike Krzyzewski and Gary Williams, both of whom said they could not vow to do the same thing if they were in Jim's position. Skinn publicly apologized to Stokes and in the process cemented reinforced respect from his teammates.

"I did not want him to go out like that," Campbell, who spoke from Poland, where he's currently playing, said. "It looked bad in the media."

Skinn's suspension meant Mason's roster for its next game would not resemble Mason's roster that built a 23-7 record. The losses to Hofstra (which would fall in the CAA title game to UNC Wilmington) combined with this suspension led many to believe GMU spelled NIT. Mason was eliminated a week before Selection Sunday. It finished with an RPI of 26 -- very respectable and higher than any team in the CAA. (Hofstra was 30th.) GMU had a top-30 strength of schedule vs. Hofstra's No. 62. Hofstra's then-coach, Tom Pecora, openly campaigned for his team to be included above Mason.

A week of waiting that felt like a month of agony culminated with Larranaga inviting his team and about a dozen members of the media to his house in Oakton, Va., to watch the Selection Show. His wife, Liz, baked chocolate chip cookies.

"The longest couple hours of my life," Skinn said. "I didn't care about anything as long as they got a chance to play."

Before the Selection Show started, Larranaga turned the TV off.

"It was very, very, very, very tense," Johnson said. "Tony was tense."

Larranaga asked his players to envision themselves being selected. He told his guys this was the best team in George Mason's history and the best group he'd ever coached. He wanted them to flash back to that preseason meeting in the classroom when Lamar Butler put the Final Four on the table.

"Then I turned the TV back on, began to sweat, and wondered if I'd made a mistake," Larranaga said.

Then things got really strange.

"All of the sudden, someone called us and five minutes before it started, they told us (Joe) Lunardi put us in," Cherry said. "We thought that was kind of weird, and we're thinking, maybe he knows something. We don't know how. It was a ray of hope."

Other coaches and players also recalled discovering Lunardi's bracket projection changed to put Mason in just minutes before the CBS Selection Show began.

"I was telling Tony we were getting in and he was going to get to play in the NCAA Tournament," Butler said.

The Washington, D.C. region was the third to be unveiled. The top-right quadrant flashed MICHIGAN STATE and then it revealed GEORGE MASON.

"I remember Tony jumping so high I thought he was going to jump through Coach L's roof," James Johnson said.

The team, of course, went bonkers.

"I was there with my wife, and had my six-month-old boy,

Brody," Cherry said. "When our name came up, I remember my son being woken up when we erupted. I remember looking at Tony, the look of relief on his face. He was going to take that with him, if we didn't get in."

The team had a few minutes to bask in making history. It was the first at-large bid for GMU, which previously went dancing in '89, '99 and '01. The previous two trips came under Larranaga, but those teams were not the caliber of this group. It didn't take long for the Mason backlash to begin, though. Analyst Billy Packer led the charge.

"Packer and [Jim] Nantz ran through our non-conference schedule on the air, basically saying we shouldn't be in," assistant Chris Caputo said.

What made matters more interesting -- and controversial -- was who served on the Selection Committee that year. George Mason's athletic director, Tom O'Connor, was part of the process, as was Virginia athletic director Craig Littlepage, a longtime friend of Larranaga's, dating back to their time as assistants at UVA in the mid-1980s. Littlepage was chair of the committee that season.

"It was a fairly unremarkable selection weekend in that regard," Littlepage told CBS Sports. "George Mason was not subject to any more or less scrutiny than any at-large teams."

Littlepage said he wasn't certain whether or not Mason was the last team included, but according to his memory the Patriots were not the final at-large team above the cut.

"There were some that did not vote Mason to get in," Littlepage added.

Gabe Norwood remembers four stages of reaction.

"Joy, relief, celebration -- and then excitement when we saw the bracket," he said. "We saw that these were winnable games for us. It wasn't like we were in and that was good enough."

The committee could not have put George Mason in a better position. First up: Michigan State, which, the season prior -- months before it made the 2005 Final Four -- struggled to defeat none other than ... George Mason.

"Nantz and Packer helped us out," Cherry said. "Those guys came right out and said we didn't belong, we shouldn't have been there. It was a bad choice, that the committee made a huge mistake. ... Our guys already had fuel in their tank, and when they said that, it was all we needed."

THE MASON MEN

Every starter on that '06 team had ties to the area. The fact they were all regional recruits is what made the run extra special on a local level. Butler was team captain. A charmer and great ambassador for his school; they call him Mr. George Mason. The one whose face you probably remember, Butler was a stellar shooter and the guy most likely to be logging lonely sessions in the gym at odd hours. The type of player who's built to thrive on a big stage, evidenced by him eventually winning Most Outstanding Player of the Washington D.C. (i.e., East) Region. His heart was exposed on his sleeve and he was stronger because of it.

"What you saw on the court, that's what he's like in real life," Skinn said. "High-energy, super positive guy. Affordable."

Skinn was 6-feet-small but sinewy. A feisty and fearless competitor who teammates said had the biggest heart on that squad. There was Allen Iverson to his game. Skinn landed at Mason after two stops at junior college. Larranaga offered him on the spot after watching him in an open gym in 2002.

Coincidentally, it was Bashir Mason of all people who was scheduled to visit to GMU right after Skinn. Larranaga told Skinn he only had room for one or the other, and he'd need a verbal commitment from him to ensure he'd get the scholarship. (He pulled the same move previously with Butler.) Skinn, who was finally starting to attract attention from other D-I schools, committed on the spot.

"I was just hooping man. I didn't know nothing about nothing," Skinn said. "No one had my back as far as the process. I hadn't even taken my SAT, and when I did I didn't qualify with the score I had. There was a chip on my shoulder and I finally got a chance with somebody that I thought did want me, and it was local, so it was a no-brainer."

Then there was Jai Lewis: Big, bright, smooth, nimble. The most naturally gifted and smartest basketball player on the team. Considered, endearingly, as a freak because of how much he could do with that wide, 6-foot-5 frame. He was fast, athletic, had great feet, great hands and splendid feel. Barkley-esque in that regard.

"We'd be doing sprints, you'd turn around and he's right behind you, this big man," Butler said. "He could do just about whatever he wanted to on the basketball floor."

Will Thomas was a quiet assassin, the son of a military man. His favorite words were "let's" and "go." His upbringing led to a neat-freak mindset hardened on the edges with a hatred of

losing, a selfless attitude and a discipline never to talk out of turn. With Will, everything had to be done right. He cared about the details more than most. The coaching staff remembers getting one-word answers throughout his recruitment.

"One of the hardest-working players, toughest, most competitive kids I ever coached," James Johnson said. "When Will said something, everybody understood it was important."

Thomas wasn't a dynamic player -- the team would joke he only had one real move -- but that move, a left-handed hook, was automatic. It became an anchor to Mason's offense that season and was critical to the team's win over top-seeded UConn in the Elite Eight.

Folarin Campbell was George Mason's Magic Johnson. (Yet, for reasons still mysterious to some, his nickname was "Shaq.") An endearing loudmouth who loved the limelight and was a pleasure to be around, he didn't rattle and was long on confidence. He had a vibrant personality that lit up any room.

"He came in as a freshman and demanded respect, even if we didn't want to give it to him," Gabe Norwood said. "We wanted to make him earn it. He did -- quickly."

Many thought Campbell would attend Georgetown. That fizzled when, the day before he was supposed to take his official visit there in September of 2002, then-Hoyas coach Craig Esherick told him he'd taken another player. That player finished his Hoyas career with a 1.5 points-per-game average. Campbell, who is still playing professionally in Europe, became the floor general for the greatest season in George Mason history.

MICHIGAN STATE

Once his team was in, Larranaga became fixated on fun. He vowed he and his team would enjoy the experience more than any other in the bracket. It became a personal and public ambition. The team was unconventional in its approach. After it had what coaches described as an "awful" practice the day before leaving for Dayton, players held a makeshift game of Wiffle Ball at the Patriot Center to ease the stress.

Larranaga's will was tested again the night before the Michigan State game, when he was lying in bed with his wife. The hotel bar band's sound was bleeding through from one floor up. Liz insisted her husband call the front desk to get them to stop. Larranaga refused. He would not let anything bother him.

During GMU's public shootarounds, it did the unthinkable: It actually practiced its sets. MSU team managers picked up on this pretty quickly and scrambled to write everything down.

"Most teams are confident," Butler, who embodied fun more than anyone on that team, said. "We were very confident."

Larranaga didn't care who saw his stuff; he was thankful the turnaround wasn't for a Thursday game, that they got an extra day to prep for Friday. Coach L wanted his guys prepared but not rushed. After practice, he asked them to go into the stands, shake hands with fans and sign autographs. The idea being: There would only be one fan base in the building for certain cheering against George Mason. He wanted to do whatever he could to get every other fan rooting for the Patriots. It was a transparent and charming political move.

"Everything was light," Norwood said. "We took our job seriously, yes, but we enjoyed every moment."

Norwood was a junior that season, and his role suddenly became the primary story line for GMU-MSU. With Skinn suspended, he was starting in Tony's place. As you're seeing, things had a way of falling perfectly for George Mason that March.

"The year before, I had maybe the best game of my college career against Michigan State," Norwood said. "I wanted to win it for Tony. I wanted to give him a chance to play in the NCAA Tournament."

Teammates viewed Norwood as a sixth starter, and they were eager to see him flourish. He was a very good on-ball defender and was the most athletic asset Mason had. GMU was better in its defensive matchups for that one game because Norwood needed to be on the floor so much.

"He had toughness to him, his father being a football coach and his brother playing in the NFL," James Johnson said, referring to Jordan Norwood, who just won a Super Bowl with the Denver Broncos.

Skinn said his nerves were awful for that MSU game. He remembered how close Mason came to beating MSU before losing 66-60 the season prior. (Coincidentally, Skinn did not play in that game either, forced to sit because of a wrist injury.)

"I always had great respect for Jim," MSU coach Tom Izzo said. "It was one of those things, I think he's a damn coach good. I had a big collar team, and so did he. Those forwards were tough. ... Shannon Brown and Mo Ager struggled to shoot it. Most importantly we got hurt down low. That was kind of surprising to me. But they were 6-7 and tough as nails."

George Mason shot 59 percent and committed only 10 fouls

Mason Men (cont.)

in a clear-cut 75-65 upset over sixth-seeded Sparty. Lewis and Thomas combined for 31 points and 22 rebounds. Campbell had his best game of the tournament, going 8 for 8 and scoring a team-high 21.

"We came together and played for Tony," Lewis said. "We didn't want his last game to be known for hitting a guy in the nuts."

A forgotten fact: That was the first NCAA Tournament win in program history, and winning that day felt like reaching the Final Four -- little did they know. In the locker room afterward, every player but one mobbed Skinn. A few feet away, as the rest of his team was celebrating, Gabe Norwood was picking up a marker and writing a message on the whiteboard: TONY IS BACK.

"I got the chills just thinking about that," Norwood said.

James Johnson said "this is a guy who was the ultimate teammate" in retelling the memory of Norwood's gesture.

In the midst of an upset-themed opening two days of the tourney, Mason didn't stand out among all the other headlines just yet. Beating one 2005 Final Four squad wasn't good enough. It would now have to take down not just another '05 Final Four team, but the reigning national champions.

NORTH CAROLINA

The '06 run was when Larranaga's legendary, eccentric locker room speeches became known outside of the Mason program. His pep talk prior to Carolina was vintage Coach L. He referred to how UNC fans saw their program's players as gods -- Superman. Then he told his guys to look at their green uniforms. Green. As in kryptonite.

Then someone brought out a mini boombox and Larranaga, 56 at the time, pushed play. He began to dance. The team absolutely lost it. The song was "Kryptonite" by Big Boi and the Purple Ribbon Allstars.

"Seeing Coach L doing that before a serious game, it got us all in a relaxed state of mind," Campbell said.

Too relaxed at the start. Carolina smacked Mason with a 16-2 opening run.

"That was a scare," Jai Lewis said. "I believed in the first four minutes of the game our season was over."

Sure. Mid-major team shocks college hoops big boy in the first round, then gets dispatched two days later in the Round of 32. That's how March usually works for most small schools who get to enjoy 48 fleeting hours of bliss on a national stage. But, in this spot, it's important to emphasize just how perfect a pod that first weekend was for the Patriots. Just as Michigan State was an ideal first-round foe, UNC -- yes, North Carolina -- was a beatable blue blood.

In the first timeout, Larranaga refused to let his players sit. He told his team to remain standing and to look at UNC's bench. They were celebrating.

"I said, 'We got these guys right where we want them,'" Larranaga said. "They think this game is over, and we haven't even begun to play."

Norwood started the game, but Skinn -- suspension now over -- checked in.

"You're thinking in the back of your head it's almost time to go home," Skinn said. "Those 16 points felt like 35."

Skinn's desperation 3-pointer from 24 feet with the shot clock set to expire banked in, making it 16-5. A few people interviewed for this story said it was the most important shot of the game.

With UNC threatening to blow GMU out, Larranaga was about to coach one of the best games of his life. He refused to show his hand; he wanted UNC to go into halftime without any notion of needing significant adjustments. Mason's advantage was assistant Scott Cherry. He played at Carolina and was on the '93 national title team. After dropping an overseas career in the '90s, he sold forklifts in Greenville, N.C., only to find his way back to basketball after three years. Cherry thoroughly predicted what Williams would run because Williams learned from Cherry's coach, Dean Smith.

"We didn't feel like they were going to be a team that was going to overpower us like typical Carolina teams," Cherry said. "It wasn't hard to prepare for them. UNC plays fast, there's a lot of possessions, so you've got a lot of chances."

Larranaga bailed on his man-to-man scheme, instead inserting a 3-2 matchup zone for the first time all season, and behind that, a tide was stemmed and the Patriots trailed 27-20 at the break. It was an old pull for Larranaga who, as a young assistant, helped coach Virginia to the 1984 Final Four because of that exact defense. Will Thomas, always assigned to defend the best big man, held national Freshman of the Year Tyler Hansbrough to 10 points and three turnovers.

"We never took any opponent for granted, no matter who, and that's why we were good in the tournament and why big

schools fail," Skinn said. "When that competitiveness isn't reciprocated, then you have a ballgame."

Mason came out of the second half and completely shook Carolina by dosing the Heels with their own medicine. Larranaga unleashed the Dobermans, calling on his dormant press out of nowhere. The Patriots hadn't used it all season. They forced four straight turnovers and took the lead. Williams called timeout. Larranaga again asked his team to look at the Carolina bench. They weren't celebrating this time; they were arguing. Later that half Williams got so angry he slammed his chair to the floor.

GMU's discipline not to foul was never more critical that season than in this game. UNC took four free throws the entire contest; Mason had eight fouls total. GMU won 65-60 and became the third CAA team in history to reach the Sweet 16.

"I was very surprised we won," Campbell admitted.

In an interview for this story, Norwood shared publicly for the first time what that game meant to him. Larranaga rewarded Norwood with a second straight start because of how well he played against Michigan State. What no one knew then was how Norwood grew up idolizing UNC. He wore No. 5 because of former Carolina point guard Ed Cota. When he was 10 he wrote a letter to Dean Smith, asking to be recruited. Smith wrote back; Norwood still has the letter.

Mason's Sweet 16 run leads to Lamar Butler landing the cover of Sports Illustrated. The plane ride back was pandemonium. Ragtag boosters, band members, cheerleaders. When they got back to campus on Sunday night, an arena full of fans was waiting for them. This after George Mason failed to sell out even one game that season.

WICHITA STATE 2.0

It took a beat for most to realize, but Mason's players and coaches saw it immediately on Selection Sunday: We reach the Sweet 16, we play the second weekend in our backyard. The Patriots won their way into the Washington, D.C. regional. And now they were a local phenomenon in addition to a national sensation.

"For the first time in the history of the area, it became a George Mason town," Chris Caputo said. "After the Redskins, it's a basketball city. The Big East and ACC are intertwined there. It had never been anything but a Georgetown/Maryland town. I remember seeing people on the streets wearing George Mason gear, and it was really surreal for that to be happening."

Mason players congenially embraced two days worth of hometown attention from fans, students and media. Jai Lewis said a five-minute walk to class became a half-hour meet-and-greet. Lamar Butler recalled ordering a cheeseburger on campus, then getting up to go to practice 45 minutes later having never taken a bite.

"That burger was ice cold because I got caught up talking to fans and media," he said. "The cheese wasn't even melted anymore -- it was back to being cheese."

There was also an element of stress in the lead-up to the Sweet 16. Since almost every player on the roster grew up less than 30 miles from D.C., tickets for friends and family became an issue. Players had to turn off their Nextel flip phones to preserve their batteries and sanity. Calls and texts flooded in from people they had not heard from since high school. Skinn put an outgoing voicemail message on his phone alerting everyone he did not have tickets for them. The team got solace and silence by staying just over the Potomac River, in Crystal City.

"I think it was smart for us," Butler said. "College kids being on campus at that time might not have been a good thing. Thank god we had a mature team and didn't let that stuff go to our head. It was definitely hard to focus because, nationally, we were the one team that was allowing full access to the media. We were approachable for everybody."

At the shootaround the day before the regional semifinal, more than 10,000 fans showed up to watch practice. The state of the city and team in that moment is lost to the Final Four run now, but players recalled how incredible being a Sweet 16 team was.

It's rare for non-conference teams to meet in the NCAA's after facing in the regular season. And it's like a comet to see it with mid-majors. Wichita State was a 7 seed that upset No. 2 Tennessee -- a group Larranaga believes would have likely beaten George Mason. Instead, the Patriots had the pleasure of getting a Shockers crew they'd already defeated in Wichita a month prior.

"That game was over before it even started," Cherry said. "We didn't have to tell them anything. Wichita State walked into that building and you could see the looks on their faces. They knew they were in trouble."

To a man, every GMU player interviewed for this story echoed Cherry's words. They remembered how Wichita State

looked fraught the day before, at media day.

"We knew there was no way we were going to lose this game," Campbell said.

Turgeon tried to emulate what Hofstra did in its two wins over Mason that year, but it was to no effect. GMU won 63-55, but it was never a close game.

"I don't know if we were intimidated by who were playing," Turgeon said. "We might've been intimidated by who we were playing and the environment. It was electric in there. It was an amazing crowd. We could have played them 100 times and probably wouldn't have won 99 of them in that building."

Mason's win came on Friday night before No. 1 UConn escaped in overtime against a talented Washington team. Just as Larranaga thought Tennessee would have likely beaten George Mason, he also believes Washington would have been tougher than UConn. Strange, right? But Larranaga didn't want UW because 1) He thought his guys would have no shot at stopping Brandon Roy, 2) It was the only opponent his players had no familiarity with, and 3) UConn being the No. 1 seed offered the final carrot of motivation.

"If we had beat Washington it would not have been as big as beating Connecticut," Larranaga said. "I wanted UConn to prove how good we were. ... This is exactly what you want as an underdog, because no one gives you a chance except you. Could we beat them three out of 10? Maybe not. You only have to beat them one time."

"BY GEORGE, THE DREAM IS ALIVE!"

The Elite Eight in one sentence: Connecticut lost because it disrespected George Mason and that really pissed the Patriots off.

"I remember Denham Brown before, when he was at the press conference," said Jai Lewis. "He was coming out saying they were going to beat us and it was going to be an easy game."

When asked, most Huskies couldn't name a GMU player. They thought GMU was in the Patriot League because its nickname was the Patriots.

"For them to say they didn't know who we were or where we were from, it was a slap in the face," Norwood, who spoke from the Philippines, said.

Mason players watched ESPN from their hotel room and were texting each other, riling themselves up.

"Man, we play you tomorrow," Butler said. "Either you don't care or you don't respect us. That was all we needed to get ready. If you don't know us now, you'll know us by the end that game."

The only UConn player who knew anyone on Mason's roster was Rudy Gay, and with good reason. Will Thomas, still, has never lost to Gay. His Baltimore high school team beat Gay's seven times in four years, twice in the Catholic League championship. Those wins didn't land Thomas interest from high-major schools, and it bothered him.

"You only see teams like UConn, Duke and Maryland on TV, so that's the colleges you want to go to," Thomas, who spoke to CBS Sports from Spain, said. "You don't see George Mason on TV. When they started recruiting me, I had no idea where or who George Mason was."

Thomas got to 8-0 against Gay on March 26, 2006. The ice broke for Mason when, on its ride to the arena for the game, the team bus crashed into a parked car.

"We had a police escort, we were flying," Larranaga said. "I thought, 'We're going to be late for the game. The police escort said, 'Don't worry about it, he was illegally parked. You keep going. I'll have him towed.' Our players roared laughing and we just kept rolling from there."

Remember, Jim Calhoun's team wasn't just the No. 1 seed in its region -- the Huskies were regarded as the best team in the country. UConn had the best frontcourt in America and led the nation in blocks. Six players from that team play(ed) in the NBA, with four of them taken in the first round. It would have been seven future pros for that UConn crew had top-10 pick Andrew Bynum not de-committed from the Huskies and put his name in the NBA Draft out of high school. (Tiny twists make the Mason run that much more folkloric. If Bynum is in a Connecticut uni, does this story ever get told?)

Before the game, Larranaga again played "Kryptonite." But his final words initially confused the team. He reminded them how UConn didn't even know what league Mason was in.

"You guys are in the CAA."

Players were like, "Yeah, coach, we know."

"No, the CAA," Larranaga said. "The Connecticut Assassin Association!"

The locker room detonated. But just as the incredible UNC pre-game speech didn't lead yield immediate dividends, Mason fell behind early to UConn, 16-8.

"I just remember thinking, we're going to have to keep

Mason Men (cont.)

scoring because I don't know if we can stop them," Cherry said.

The Verizon Center had a respectable UConn contingent, but it was undeniably a Mason crowd. Calhoun said it was "a national championship crowd." Cherry remembered talking to people who'd been to many kinds of games there. They said the place never reached as fevered a pitch as it did on that day.

"Even though we had belief in ourselves, in modern college basketball there was nothing you could point to that you could make the Final Four as a mid-major," Caputo said. "Back then, people would wonder if one could ever do it."

It's an incredible game to go back and watch, objectively one of the best in tournament history. It's not just the David-Goliath element and the unprecedented ending. The game was so well played. Mason could not win defense-first, the way it did in its previous three games. It had to take off the chains and go.

"In [2006], we had one point guard on the team," Calhoun said. "It was our flaw. It was a very talented team up front, but the best teams I've had were when we could beat you at two positions. If (Marcus) Williams didn't have a great game, we didn't have a great game. We did not have a great tournament yet made a final eight because of what we were: powerful. When a team like us -- the No. 1 seed -- when we're up six, we're in trouble. When they're down six, they got us just where they want us."

Campbell was put on Gay, UConn's best prospect. It was the toughest assignment of his career to that point.

"That whole team was big," Campbell said. "That's what makes it better, a more memorable game for us."

The teams combined for 20 turnovers and shot 49 percent. No one fouled out. There were a handful of awesome shots, including Campbell's acrobatic and-1 layup to end the first half that cut UConn's effortless run and lead to 43-34.

"Had the ref called a charge and wiped out the basket, we probably never would have won the game," Larranaga said.

In the second half Mason finally took the lead on a 3-pointer from Butler with 11:09 to go, capping a 14-4 run. From then on all pressure was on UConn. Crazy fact: Mason played its starters for the final 15:37. And for most of that span, that same, simple play that Larranaga called in Wichita that led to Skinn's winning shot in February -- "3" -- became the team's only offense. GMU's staff was shocked UConn opted not to double-team, but Calhoun clarified he did call for it once in the second half -- and on that play Mason nailed a 3, so he never doubled again.

"They outplayed us up front, which is still shocking to me," Calhoun said. "But I've been in those situations. They believed in themselves and they caught us and were able to expose by beating us at what we could do, not what we couldn't do. They did things to us that teams hadn't done to us all year. Basketball is all about accentuating what you are and hiding what you're not."

UConn refused to double in the post, and some chemistry issues were exposed. See, Larranaga did not allow his players to wear headphones when they had team activities or while walking around campus. He wanted open communication and for his players to be accessible.

"And I remember this," said Norwood, "because as we were walking in together at media day, UConn was walking out, and it was one of those things like, none of them were talking to one and other. It was almost like they didn't like each other, at least compared to our team. We're cracking jokes, laughing. I don't know if they were trying to intimidate us or what. I don't know what it was, but it was two totally different dynamics. As we went into the game, I wondered if we could get them on the ropes, if they would really be able to lean on each other."

The fracture materialized when Gay kept UConn going late in the second half. After he hit a mid-range shot to give UConn a 63-62 lead with 6:11 remaining, Butler remembers Gay yelling at Marcus Williams.

"He said, 'Pass me the f---ing ball,'" Butler said. "And after that Williams shied away from doing just that."

Mason should have won in regulation. One of the dozen or so "OHMYGOD" moments came when Williams cut GMU's lead to two with 7.9 seconds to go. Butler said he couldn't hear Larranaga over the arena noise in the ensuing timeout. On the next play, Skinn, an 81-percent foul shooter, missed the front end of a one-and-one. Williams fed a streaking Denham Brown, who went under the rim and released the ball with 0.2 seconds on the clock. It bounced three times on the rim. Bucket. Overtime. World on fire.

"You're not supposed to be winning, and every [UConn] shot looks good," Skinn said. "I remember thinking, You idiot. You missed those free throws. Now we're going into overtime and we're definitely going to lose."

The '92 Duke-Kentucky epic is probably the only regional final better than UConn-Mason. Think of the backdrop: Calhoun recalled how his team got a real scare from No. 16 Albany, then

barely beat eighth-seeded Kentucky by four. Brandon Roy and No. 4 Washington took UConn to OT and probably should have won in the Sweet 16. Calhoun admitted he never had a comfort level with his team that season. They were great in spite of their pieces. And here they were again, seemingly nudging off tournament death.

As UConn regrouped before overtime, Larranaga stood a few feet from his team. What came next is a moment every single GMU player and coach interviewed for this story remembered exactly the same way. Larranaga swears these were his exact words: "Guys, we didn't play defense for five seconds, and now we've gotta play great defense for five minutes. But you know what? There isn't any place on earth I'd rather be than here with you guys, playing Connecticut with a chance to go to the Final Four. Where else would you rather be? Are you having any fun yet?"

The only shot that stands the test of time from that OT is the one that did not go in: Denham Brown's missed 3-pointer to end of the game. But there were two shots from Mason everyone connected to that team remembers. No. 1 was Thomas scoring the first points of overtime. It gave the Patriots a similar feeling of calm the way Skinn's banked-in prayer against UNC eased the tension in that game. The second shot was courtesy of Campbell, who hit a gorgeous fall-away from the right side over the lanky Gay to put Mason up 84-80 with 1:13 left. Campbell still deems it the biggest shot of his life.

But of course, it's the miss that we remember. If Gordon Hayward's half-court heaveagainst Duke in the 2010 title game is the most famous miss in NCAA Tournament history, Brown's miss qualifies as the most shocking. Because UConn is not supposed to lose that game, not to George Mason, not with the Final Four in the balance. The play unfolded almost identically to how the Huskies got the game to OT.

"Denham Brown dribbled right by me, and I was so tempted to knock the ball away from him," Larranaga now admits. "I was thinking, God, I wish I could just hit that thing."

GMU again missed a foul shot (Jai Lewis this time) with 6.1 left. Brown gets the rebound and hurries up the court.

"The ball was in the air for the longest time ... it took forever," Campbell said. "As the shot went up, I was praying he didn't make it."

Brown gives Campbell a little push, then steps back to launch. Campbell said he "jumped out of his shoes" trying to contest the shot. On the bench, Gabe Norwood drops his head in fear, convinced -- like pretty much everyone else who understands how the universe works -- the shot is going in.

Only it doesn't. The universe hiccups as the ball harmlessly nicks off the rim.

"When I heard the buzzer sound, I was looking down at the floor," Norwood said. "I only saw feet. Tim Burns was on one side of me, John Vaughan was on the other. When they jumped, I jumped."

Time is done, the game is over, but still Lamar Butler hustles for the rebound.

"At that point in the season, once you doubt, you're out," he said. "Even when the shot went up. I made sure they were not getting this rebound to win this game."

Butler and Skinn run to the George Mason section. Coaches and players sprint diagonally across the court to join them. Skinn's jersey is already off, and it's instantly a TV highlight that will last for a hundred years if not longer.

"We won that game off the court," Butler said. "Down the stretch, as times got tough, they started fighting. They weren't a team. We were huddled up, every time."

Butler was joined within minutes by his dad at midcourt. Lamar grew up 15 minutes from the arena where he just made history. As father and son hugged, Larranaga looked on from a few feet away, his eyes welling. Butler credits his father for teaching him the game, and Larranaga for showing him to have fun playing it.

"Those moments are memories that last a lifetime -- that took a lifetime to get there," Larranaga said.

Players recalled seeing faces of fans who supported the program dating back to its D-II years. These were local diehards who lucked into having the hometown team play right there in their city -- and pull off the most unpredictable Final Four run in college basketball history.

Campbell vividly remembers taking the bus back to campus, getting there very late -- and seeing the parking lot filled with hundreds of cars.

"Man, like we had another game there that night," he said.

Said Calhoun: "George Mason became, to me, they became a symbol of what is great about college basketball."

THE DANCE FINALLY ENDS BUT THE LEGACY NEVER WILL

With its red-letter run through the region, the Patriots beat a

Michigan State team coached by a man who's made more Final Fours than anyone this century; twice defeated a terrific mid-major program; and downed both the 2005 national champions (UNC) and the 2004 national champions (UConn). If Mason's season had to end in a loss, it was fitting it fell against Florida, which went on to win the next two national titles. A forgotten fact of that '06 Final Four: That was the first time in the modern era wherein none of the 1 seeds made the final weekend.

"I think we helped set the precedent of mid-majors being able to be in the [Final Four] discussion," Skinn said. "You saw it years after. A lot of guys play college basketball at all sorts of levels, and you have a small amount that say they have played in the Final Four. From a university standpoint, it's a blessing [that because of] basketball everyone across the world knows George Mason."

The school's admission application numbers spiked in the months following the Final Four. The campus bookstore sold more than \$800,000 worth of merchandise that March alone. A university study conservatively estimated GMU's Final Four run to be worth north of \$677 million in free advertising. On March 27, 2006, GMU appeared on the front page of more than 100 newspapers across the country. Buildings were added on and around campus. Out-of-state enrollment has grown by 32 percent in the decade since.

"We were the Roger Bannister of college basketball," Caputo said. "VCU, Wichita State and Butler came after. Those programs had been getting money pumped into them for years. There can never be another George Mason."

The team's run is ever-praised now, but the players did not handle the Florida loss well. That was in part because -- to a man -- they all believed they would have been playing in the national championship had they drawn LSU or UCLA instead.

"There was no sense of, 'Hey, guys, don't worry about it, we're a small school, we weren't supposed to be here anyway,'" James Johnson said. "There was none of that. Guys were emotional. We should have won. I don't think at that time they had a chance to even look and think about what they had done."

Will Thomas knows he didn't. "I never stopped in the moment to think about it," he said. "Years later I've thought, 'Wow, I actually went to the Final Four.' But during and while it was happening, no. It was just too much."

Butler could not watch a replay of the Florida loss -- until last March, during the tournament.

"It was time for me to face the demon that had been haunting me for nine years," he said.

He watched it once, called Larranaga as means of therapy, then put the DVD away. He has no plans to watch it again any time soon.

Campbell and Thomas went on to become top-10 scorers in program history. Thomas has the third-most rebounds at GMU and Campbell ranks fourth in career assists. Norwood, who is still playing, wound up landing the most successful, stable overseas career. Skinn, Lewis and Butler have since retired from basketball and remain best friends.

"Coach I changed my life," Lewis said. "I saw him two weeks ago and told him that."

Campbell never made it to Nigeria after his grandmother passed and, tragically, Festus Campbell died at 55 in 2012. The plan was always for them to go together. Without his father alive, Folarin has no urge to visit his family's home country. Larranaga, as coaches often do with their players, has remained a mentor to him.

"The best coach I've ever had," Campbell said. "He gave me confidence that, to this day, I wouldn't have and wouldn't be the player I am now. I love him. He's done a lot for me and my family. I remember him saying at George Mason he wanted to be an ACC coach. I'm glad he's gotten that opportunity and he's doing so well."

Larranaga's 271 wins at Mason are more than double the coach in second place. And now he is having a late-career revival. His Miami Hurricanes team this season has a great chance to do what GMU accomplished 10 years ago. In his office, Larranaga keeps Mason mojo in the room. He has a big, signed Final Four poster and the five bobbleheads of those starters. He has a Final Four chair and a plaque with his picture on it that says "2006 Washingtonian of the Year." On his desk is a George Mason snow globe and a rock that shares the same color for Miami now as it did then for Mason: green.

Kryptonite.

Larranaga won't make the mistake Kennedy did leaving ACC

Palm Beach Post

Dave George

March 3, 2016

Don't know if the Miami basketball team will win the ACC tournament next week but it has happened before, which still blows my mind just a little bit.

The only thing wilder when it comes to famous football schools collecting basketball trophies instead is Florida winning back-to-back national hoop titles in 2006-07.

The Hurricanes haven't gotten there yet. Matter of fact, you have to go back to Duke in 1991-92 to find anyone other than UCLA stringing together national titles in the last 50 years.

Miami isn't shying away from any goal, however, and as a potential No. 2 seed in the NCAA tournament, there is no reason that the Hurricanes should.

That is the Jim Larranaga effect. He was the national coach of the year in 2013, his second season at Miami. That's when the Hurricanes won both the ACC regular-season and tournament championships, and that's when everything turned upside-down in the relationship between the school and the regal basketball conference it joined in 2004.

Miami basketball was supposed to set up shop at the bottom of the ACC standings and stay there, but that hasn't come true either.

At the moment the Hurricanes are No. 7 in the AP basketball poll.

Has anything this amazing ever happened to a relatively new ACC school hustling to gain a foothold in America's most storied basketball conference? The answer is yes,

and we're talking about another supposed football school, Florida State.

FSU joined ACC basketball play in the 1991-92 season. The Seminoles hadn't made it out of the first weekend of the NCAA tournament in 20 years at that point. It was a football-first move that brought FSU into the ACC, just as it later was with Miami.

Still, FSU surprised everybody by finishing second in the ACC regular-season standings right away, and again the following year. Even more eye-opening, the Seminoles advanced to the NCAA's Sweet 16 and Elite Eight rounds, respectively, in 1992 and 1993.

The coach at the time was Pat Kennedy, and he made the mistake, after going 202-131 in 11 total seasons at FSU, that he could be better appreciated and more comfortably situated somewhere else. What helped convince him of that was having to claw his way to an 82-78 record in ACC play during six years in that league, and the somewhere else wound up being DePaul.

Kennedy, 64, is no longer a head coach, having failed to get anything going at DePaul and in later years at Montana, Towson and Division II Pace University.

Larranaga, 66, is just hitting his stride at Miami and shouldn't be looking to get out. Playing and winning in the ACC seems to him the perfect springboard to natural NCAA tournament prestige, not to mention the best way to maintain a stream of top recruits for years to come.

This Miami basketball thing doesn't have to be a fad. If the Hurricanes make it to the Elite Eight this month, as ACC tournament champions or not, it doesn't have to be anything but a great program in a great

league, and the most fascinating story on campus.

Sure, that blows my mind a little bit, too, but Miami fans surely are getting used to it.

Three Things to Know Before Miami-Notre Dame

Canes Warning

Austin Sapin

March 1, 2016

When the Miami Hurricanes tip-off against the Notre Dame Fighting Irish on Wednesday night in South Bend, everyone will have already had their calendars flipped to March. This entire season for the Canes has been spectacular with buzzer-beaters, monumental wins and finally some national recognition for 'The U', but as those calendars flip and hit that third month of the year, now is the time that matters most.

Miami will look to wrap up this brutal four-game ACC stretch as they travel to Notre Dame looking to start March as they hope to end it, with a win. On the heels of possibly the best week ever in program history, a win against the Fighting Irish will keep the hopes of an ACC Regular Season title alive as well keep them in the hunt for a No. 1 seed.

The two teams played just under a month ago at the BankUnited Center and the Hurricanes easily dispatched the Irish in a 79-70 victory. This time around, Coach Jim Larranaga's squad will have to play in the always difficult Edmund P. Joyce Center and will be without star sophomore point guard Ja'Quan Newton, who will be serving the second game of his three game suspension for violation of team rules.

For Miami to come out of this four-game stretch with a 3-1 record would be quite incredible and would show that the Hurricanes are ready for all the madness later this month. Before tip-off of this crucial game, here are the three things you need to know:

Tonye Jekiri will need to continue to play his All-ACC caliber defense against Zach Auguste.

Against both Virginia and Louisville, Miami center Tonye Jekiri didn't fill up the stat sheet, but his presence on the court was certainly felt. Whether it was impressive defensive plays both on and off the ball or tough rebounds against some of the most athletic big men in the ACC, the 7-foot senior was crucial to both of the Hurricanes victories. Against Zach Auguste on Wednesday night, he'll need to do just the same.

In the last matchup between the two teams, Auguste got into foul trouble early and could just never get going, but that also had to do with the defense from Miami's interior. Keeping Notre Dame's big forward off the board has been so important to the success of the Fighting Irish's opponents

this season. When Auguste has scored less than 13 points this season, Notre Dame is 5-7 and when he scores more than 13 points, they are 14-2. Obviously the Canes aren't guaranteed a victory if Auguste finishes below 13 points, but it sure give Miami a significantly better chance at grabbing a victory.

Auguste along with Bonzie Colson are really Notre Dame's only threats on the boards and after playing Virginia and Louisville back-to-back, the Hurricanes will be more than ready to battle the Fighting Irish on the glass.

Tonye Jekiri will never get the recognition of an Angel Rodriguez or Sheldon McClellan, but just watch him on defense and you'll see the type of impact he has on this team.

With the Hurricanes on the road and without Newton, Miami needs its offensive leaders aggressive from the start.

Ja'Quan Newton had 12 points in Miami's last matchup against Notre Dame and that is 12 points the Hurricanes will need to find a way to replace come Wednesday night.

With their sixth man suspended, the Canes are heading into a real tough environment where their leaders are going to need to lead. Sheldon McClellan, Angel Rodriguez and Davon Reed can't be passive early on and try to find their way into the game because if they do that, Coach Mike Brey's team will pounce.

In that last matchup, those three combined for 32 of Miami's 79 points, which isn't bad, but it'll need to be better this time around. The star of that game in early February was actually Amp Lawrence, who finished with a career-high 18 points including four three-pointers. Now, I'm not saying Amp can't go off once again, especially because he is a good matchup against Notre Dame, but the Canes can't rely on a freshman to lead them on the road against a very solid ACC team.

Sheldon McClellan hasn't been up to his usual standards with an ankle injury that has limited him a bit the past four games. The Houston, TX native hasn't scored more than 14 points in any of the last four games, but I expect his ankle to be close to 100% and for him to put in a good performance in South Bend.

Angel Rodriguez will look to build off his magnificent second half against Louisville where he single-handedly pulled the Canes off the mat and was the catalyst in their comeback. He'll have a tough matchup against Demetrius Jackson, especially with

no Newton behind him, but the Hurricanes need that exact same performance on Wednesday night that he delivered against the Cardinals.

In terms of Davon Reed, there isn't enough you can say about how important he's been to this team. Night after night, he does exactly what this team needs whether it is scoring, defense or rebounding and has recently been one of Miami's hottest shooters. He only had eight points the last time these teams met, but the way he's playing and the way he makes big shots for this team, Reed will certainly be a huge factor against Notre Dame.

Of course Miami could get some unexpected contributions from someone like Amp Lawrence or Ivan Cruz Uceda, but in such a big game in such a tough environment on the road, the Hurricanes need their leaders aggressive from the tip.

The only thing Miami's resume is missing is a quality road win. Beating Notre Dame would satisfy just that.

The No. 7 RPI, the No. 19 strength of schedule, four wins over the RPI Top 20 and a 13-2 record against the RPI Top 100. Those statistics all reside on the resume of the Miami Hurricanes and with Selection Sunday around the corner, the only thing missing is a quality road win.

Miami's resume is certainly quite impressive, but all of their big wins this season have come either on a neutral site in Puerto Rico or at home at the BankUnited Center. As it stands, the Hurricanes best road win would be a toss-up between Florida State and Georgia Tech and that's not too impressive.

If the Canes do fall to Notre Dame, it won't be the end of the world to not pick up a quality road win all season, but a victory would certainly just add another feather to their cap. When trying to find the little margins to determine whether the Canes should be a 1, a 2 or a 3 seed, not having an away win could be the difference.

A road victory over a Notre Dame team that is currently ranked 30th in the RPI would also give the Hurricanes nine wins over the RPI Top 50, something not too many teams in the country can boast about at this time in the year. While it isn't necessarily a must-win, beating Notre Dame on the road could serve as a pretty shiny trophy on the resume come Selection Sunday.

Larranaga feels good about this Miami team

Associated Press

Steve Wine

Feb. 29, 2016

Miami Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga says he hasn't been around long enough to anticipate how a team will play in March. He's only in his 32nd season as a head coach.

"I'm going to have to do this 20 or 30 more years before I get a feel," Larranaga said with a smile.

It's an unpredictable business, but Larranaga does have a good feeling about this year's Hurricanes. Consecutive wins last week over ranked teams propelled them to a season-high No. 7 in this week's poll and allowed the Hurricanes (12-4, 23-5) to forge a tie in the loss column with No. 8 North Carolina (12-4, 24-6) in the ACC. With road wins in their final two regular-season games at Notre Dame on Wednesday and at Virginia Tech on Saturday, the Hurricanes would be assured of a share of their second league title in four seasons. And Larranaga said his balanced, experienced team has the talent to win the national championship.

"There is that potential," he said. "There's nobody ahead of us. It's not like I look around and there are five or 10 teams much better than us. We think we're in the strongest league in the country, and yet in a week we could be regular-season champions."

A reason for Larranaga's optimism is that he considers guard play critical in March. The Hurricanes' backcourt includes lead scorer Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez, the catalyst in their victory Saturday over Louisville.

But they remain in a come-from-behind frame of mind.

"We're still the chasers," forward Kamari Murphy said. "We still call ourselves that. We have a lot of self-motivation. We've got to finish strong."

Murphy and teammate Davon Reed smiled

when informed they had climbed five spots in the poll and were back in the Top 10.

"I believe we lost the last time we were in the top 10," Reed said. "It would be nice to be there for two weeks instead of one." The Hurricanes briefly climbed to eighth in January and promptly endured back-to-back losses for the only time this season — at Virginia and at Clemson.

They've gone 10-2 since.

"We're feeling very good," Reed said.

"Things are clicking at the right time.

"We're definitely hitting our stride right now. Everybody is very confident and playing very well together."

Late run lifts No. 12 Miami past No. 11 Louisville

Sun Sentinel
Christy Cabrera Chrinos
Feb. 29, 2016

They're separated by just one spot in the most highly-regarded college basketball poll and for much of the day, Miami and Louisville played like equals.

The Hurricanes and Cardinals matched each other shot for shot, rebound for rebound, play for play.

There were seven lead changes, six ties and neither team led by more than eight at any given point.

Ultimately, it was the 12th-ranked Hurricanes that prevailed, picking up a 73-65 win over the 11th-ranked Cardinals in a key late-season ACC matchup Saturday afternoon at the BankUnited Center.

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Miami, playing on its home floor for the final time this season, sent its four seniors out in style using a 10-0 run that spanned a little more than four minutes late to distance itself and secure the win, its second over a top-10 team in the past six days after a victory over No. 3 Virginia at home Monday.

Photos: Miami Hurricanes vs. Louisville Cardinals

And during that same stretch, the Hurricanes defense did its part, with Louisville (22-7, 11-5) closing the game hitting only one of its last 12 shots from the field.

Miami's Angel Rodriguez and Davon Reed each had 17 points to lead the Hurricanes, who finished with 13 consecutive wins on their floor, the second-longest such streak in school history.

Sheldon McClellan, meanwhile, added 13 points while Ivan Cruz Uceda, who started as part of Miami's tributes to its seniors, had nine points. Fellow senior Tonye Jekiri added eight points and eight rebounds, capping a memorable afternoon for the four players widely credited with helping the Hurricanes (23-5, 12-4) establish themselves as ACC Tournament contenders.

"It was a very big day for us. It was Senior Day and we had four great seniors in Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan, Ivan Cruz Uceda and Tonye Jekiri and the one thing we didn't want is them to end their senior years on a loss," Miami coach Jim Larrañaga said.

"The game was very much in doubt midway through the second half. We fell behind and had a timeout, I stopped Angel as he came off the court and said to him, 'Listen, you need to show everyone in this arena how hard you're willing to play to win this game. ... Your teammates will follow.'"

Rodriguez, one of Miami's more vocal and emotional leaders, responded.

With the Hurricanes trailing 44-36 early in the second half, Rodriguez scored Miami's next seven points, eventually helping his team pull within three before his teammates rallied, as Larrañaga predicted.

But it was Miami's final run — one that came after Louisville took a 62-58 lead on the strength of a lay-up by Donovan Mitchell — that proved the difference.

First, McClellan converted on a 3-point play. Then Jekiri hit a pair of free throws. McClellan did the same, Reed hit one of his four 3-pointers, the Hurricanes grabbed three key rebounds and Miami pulled away.

"I think that set the tone right there," Rodriguez said.

"In the first half, we really weren't getting stops. They were getting whatever they wanted, open threes, open lay-ups. It's hard to play offense like that when you're not getting stops. ... In the second half, I thought we did a better job and once we started getting stops, it seemed like the basket started opening. That got us going."

Now, the Hurricanes, who entered the day in second place in the ACC, will finish the regular season with road games at Notre Dame and Virginia Tech, where a pair of wins could help them clinch the ACC regular-season title if North Carolina falters down the stretch.

After that will come the NCAA Tournament, where Louisville coach Rick Pitino said the Hurricanes have the potential to make a championship run.

"When you go to a Final Four after your tournament, you've got to be tough enough to win four games to get there. It has to be consistency," Pitino said.

"Miami has all the tools. They shoot free throws well, they're long, they're physical, and they have experience. ... They have all the little things, they're very well-coached and well-drilled. They can be one of many teams to win four games and get to a Final Four."

•Ahead of the game, Miami announced sophomore guard Ja'Quan Newton was suspended for three games after violating an undisclosed team rule.

Newton, who averages 10.9 points while coming off the bench, will be eligible to return for the ACC Tournament, Larrañaga said.

Jekiri's growth mirrors Hurricanes' basketball team

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Feb. 26, 2016

He's not the best player on the Hurricanes. That distinction belongs to Sheldon McClellan, their leading scorer and a potential NBA draft pick.

But Tonye Jekiri is the most important player on the roster, bar none. Everyone connected to the program will tell you that as the 12th-ranked Hurricanes (22-5, 11-4 ACC) prepare to host 11th-ranked Louisville (22-6, 11-4) on Saturday (2 p.m.) in a game for second place in the conference.

"I don't know where we would even be without him," coach Jim Larranaga said. "We wouldn't be one of those six teams vying for the regular-season title. We'd be at the bottom of this league."

Without Jekiri, Miami's 7-foot, 250-pound center, would they be thinking about the highest of highs? It's doubtful.

The Hurricanes have hopes of reaching the Final Four. That's something has never been done at UM.

In October, Jekiri confidently stated it was his team's goal.

Since then, his rim protection, rebounding, ever-improving offensive game has given Miami the advantage in the middle on most nights. He'll have a tough matchup against standout Louisville sophomore Chinanu Onuaku, but the Hurricanes will take Jekiri against anyone.

"If he's not the ACC defensive player of the year, I don't know who is," said Larranaga of the senior, who made the league's all-defensive team last year. He pointed to a play Monday in the second half of a win

over third-ranked Virginia where Jekiri left his man to prevent a lay-up attempt, then charged to the three-point line to prevent a shot there, all on the same possession.

Miami's Tonye Jekiri, top, shoots over Pittsburgh's Michael Young during the first half at the BankUnited Center in Coral Gables, Fla., on Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2016. Miami won, 65-63. (Hector Gabino/El Nuevo Herald/TNS)

Jekiri averages 9.3 rebounds, 8.1 points and 1.1 blocks per game, but that line doesn't show his total impact.

One point during the Miami-Virginia broadcast, Larranaga noted, ESPN's graphic showed the Hurricanes were plus-52 when Jekiri was on the court and a minus-12 when he was on the bench. The coach loves numbers — he can recite his team's analytical stats from the KenPom website on the fly — but he was just as excited while recalling a rebound Jekiri ripped away from Virginia power forward Anthony Gill, an NBA-caliber talent.

"They were fighting for a rebound and he jerked it out of his hand," Larranaga said. "That was so impressive. He could not have done that as a freshman. He wasn't strong enough. He wasn't experienced enough. He wasn't competitive enough in that area of rebounding. Now he makes it his mission to control the backboards."

Or how about this play: Virginia went on a 7-0 run to make it 60-59 with less than a minute left. Sliding his feet after a quick post-to-post pass, Jekiri stretched high to prevent Cavaliers center Mike Tobey from making the go-ahead bucket. Miami won by three points.

Another stat that crystallizes Jekiri's improvement: he fouled out of five games last year. He has yet to do so this year.

These little things have become big, and are helping Miami challenge for its second ACC regular-season title in four seasons. Jekiri is the last remaining player from that 2012-13 squad, which was ranked as high as No. 5 in the country and advanced to the Sweet 16. Back then, he was a gangly, 225-pound newcomer from Hialeah-Champangnat Catholic with just two years of basketball experience.

Since then, Jekiri, who grew up in the Southern Nigeria town of Port Harcourt and began playing basketball at 16, has absorbed all Miami can teach him. Per NCAA regulations, schools have a limited amount of time for basketball instruction. He's come this far. Imagine what an NBA team could do with him.

That's the idea Larranaga hopes some general manager will have.

Reed making his presence known during stretch run

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Feb. 26, 2016

Before they were set to take the floor against the third-ranked team in the nation on Monday night, Sheldon McClellan pulled his younger teammate Davon Reed aside and asked for help.

With McClellan still nursing a sprained ankle, he knew he'd need time to warm up and feel comfortable on the court, time when someone else would have to try to contain Virginia star Malcolm Brogdon.

And so, the Hurricanes' leading scorer and one of the team's savviest veterans turned to Reed.

McClellan's faith was not misplaced. Reed put together a solid effort when he was on Brogdon, a standout expected to be in the NBA sooner rather than later. Though the Virginia guard finished with a game-high 28 points, he was the lone Cavalier to finish in double figures. Reed, meanwhile, answered with a team-high 21 points for the 12th-ranked Hurricanes, who are set to host No. 11 Louisville on Saturday afternoon in their final regular-season home game at the BankUnited Center on campus.

His performance against Virginia was yet another reminder that while McClellan and fellow seniors Angel Rodriguez and Tonye Jekiri may garner most of the attention, Reed is a player that cannot be ignored and his performance this season has helped the Hurricanes raise their profile nationally.

"He's always been a great defensive player. But I think his offense has expanded now since his freshman year," McClellan said of Reed. "Next year, all the focus is going to be on him and he's picking it up right now when we need it. He was big for us

against Virginia. ... He felt the need to step up and he did."

Reed, a junior guard out of Ewing, New Jersey, concedes that there are times he's felt content to take a backseat to some of his more well-known teammates. For him, the ultimate goal is to help Miami win, so if that means letting McClellan and Rodriguez – the Hurricanes' two leading scorers – shine, so be it.

But in recent weeks, Reed has set out to do more. He's scored in double figures in 10 of the Hurricanes' 15 ACC games, culminating with a season-high 21 against the Cavaliers. He's established himself as a solid threat from beyond the arc connecting on 36 percent of his shots from 3-point range. He can guard multiple positions and he's Miami's leading scorer in the Hurricanes' last five games, averaging 12.6 points.

"I was so impressed with the way he played against Virginia because he was so calm," Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He was very much in control. He was very focused and very confident. When he made that first shot, it gave me a great deal of confidence. Not just that it went in, but how much control he seemed to have. He was not in a hurry. ... He seemed to have all the time in the world. That's the sign of a really good player."

Reed has also proven himself, Larrañaga said, as one of the Hurricanes' hardest workers.

Last season, after Reed was injured in practice and had to have knee surgery, the veteran coach figured he'd likely have to redshirt the guard. Instead, Reed began rehabilitation work immediately after his September surgery and was back in the Hurricanes' lineup eight games into the season.

"That was honestly one of the toughest times of my life, getting injured. I'd never missed a high school game. I don't think I'd ever missed an AAU game. My freshman year, I played in every game pretty much," Reed said. "I'd never missed any time in basketball and for me to suddenly have to do that, it sparked and motivated me. ... That's just another part of being a competitor. I wanted to get out there."

Reed went on to average 8.2 points last season and earned a spot on the NIT All-Tournament team.

Those were things he set out to build on as his junior year began and coaches and teammates say he hasn't disappointed. Now, they look to him to help the Hurricanes make their final regular-season push as they prepare for the ACC Tournament the NCAA Tournament that looms next month.

"First and foremost, the ACC championship is the number one thing," Reed said. "And the goal is to win the national championship. We haven't set our minds on that yet. We're focusing on one game at a time, but in the back of our minds, we're not settling for the Sweet 16 or the Final Four. We want to win it all."

UM knows Louisville will try to play spoiler

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Feb. 26, 2016

There is no question the University of Miami men's basketball team should be highly motivated for its Saturday afternoon game against Louisville.

The Hurricanes are ranked 12th; the Cardinals are 11th. The teams are in a mad scramble for the Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season title with identical 11-4 league records (and 22 wins overall).

And it's UM's final home game, the last game at BankUnited Center for seniors Tonye Jekiri, Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Ivan Cruz Uceda.

Louisville will be equally — if not more — driven than UM because it has no postseason to look forward to. This is, in essence, its Elite 8 game. If the Cardinals win their next three games, they capture the only crown they can this season.

On Feb. 5, Louisville president James Ramsey announced, to the surprise of the team and shock of the college basketball world, that the school would self-impose a ban on the 2015-16 postseason.

The program is under NCAA investigation after the publication of a book in which a woman claims she and other escorts were paid large sums and game tickets to entertain and have sex with Cardinals players and recruits from 2010-14.

The ban will end the streak of nine consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances for the Cardinals. So all they have to play for is the regular-season conference title.

"We're trying to win the ACC title; we don't have a whole lot except these

games," Cardinals coach Rick Pitino said. "This is our tournament."

UM coach Jim Larrañaga has warned his team that the Cardinals will be even hungrier than usual.

"I'm sure the kids are very highly motivated to try to win the regular season because that's the goal now," Larrañaga said. "It's not the ACC tournament. It's not postseason. Not the NCAA or national championship. They're not going to be given that opportunity. But they are able to compete for the regular-season title, and they've been playing like it."

Louisville has built a reputation for its tenacious defense, and this season has been no different. The Cardinals rank second in the ACC in blocks (5.1), steals (7.2) and scoring defense (60.8). Only Virginia has a stingier defense.

"They're always on attack mode, and like to make the game ugly and dirty," Rodriguez said.

Added Larrañaga: "They play a lot of pressure defense at full court and put a lot of pressure at the rim with great shot blockers."

Many members of Louisville's team were at the BankUnited Center on Thursday night, having fun in the stands as the 10th-ranked Cardinals women's team beat 17th-ranked UM by 28. The Canes men hope Saturday's visit won't be as enjoyable.

SATURDAY: NO. 11 LOUISVILLE AT NO. 12 UM MEN

When, where: 2 p.m., BankUnited Center, Coral Gables.

TV, radio: Channel 33; WHIM (1080), WVUM (90.5 FM).

Records: Louisville 22-6 (11-4 ACC); UM 22-5 (11-4).

Scouting report: Louisville's Chinanu Onuaku has 10 double-doubles this season. ... The Cardinals are led by graduate student Damion Lee, who averages 16.6 points per game and is within 13 points of 2,000 for his career — he played three seasons at Drexel. ... The Hurricanes are coming off a 64-61 win over No. 3 Virginia. ... Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan, Tonye Jekiri and Ivan Cruz Uceda will be honored on UM's Senior Day.

Can Miami earn a No. 1 NCAA tournament seed?

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Feb. 24, 2016

Unlike last year, the Hurricanes are in no danger of missing the NCAA tournament. The major question is, how high will they start?

Miami's big win over Virginia on Monday earned the 12th-ranked Hurricanes sole possession of second place in the ACC. It also made noise nationally, since Virginia was ranked No. 3 and was projected by ESPN to earn one of four No. 1 NCAA tournament seeds.

With three games left, here's where Miami stands:

Record: 22-5 (11-4 ACC)

Ranking: No. 12 AP, No. 11 coaches

RPI: No. 7 as of Tuesday, according to the NCAA.

Bracketology: Projected to make NCAA Tournament as No. 3 seed, according to Feb. 22 projection by ESPN's Joe Lunardi.

Resume highlights: Miami is 7-2 against teams currently in the RPI top 50, including a perfect 6-0 at home. UM's only losses came at Virginia (No. 5 RPI) and North Carolina (No. 8). In addition to holding the No. 2 spot in a top conference, the Canes also have three non-conference wins over teams in the RPI top 40 (No. 9 Utah on a neutral site, No. 32 Florida and No. 40 Princeton) and went 11-1 in non-ACC games.

Resume lowlights: A home loss to No. 126 Northeastern, the only mark on a so-so non-conference schedule (No. 121, per NCAA) and two road losses to average teams (No. 102 Clemson, No. 99 North Carolina State).

Last 12 games: The Hurricanes are 9-3, with three slipups away from Coral Gables.

After falling at Clemson 76-65 on Jan. 16, Miami whipped a moribund Boston College team on the road and handled Wake Forest and Duke at home.

The Canes couldn't handle Cat Barber (30 points) in a Jan. 30 loss at North Carolina State, but won five in a row including tough ones vs. Notre Dame, Pittsburgh and Florida State (in Tallahassee) before a 25-point shellacking at UNC.

Monday's win is a major resume piece, and puts Miami in the hunt for its second ACC regular-season title in four seasons

Final three games: A sweep here isn't out of the question, but it will be exceedingly difficult.

UM hosts Louisville, ranked No. 21 in RPI and No. 11 in the AP poll, at 2 p.m. Saturday. It's a team Miami hasn't seen this year, and is playing tenacious ball despite a self-imposed postseason ban that will keep them home for the ACC and NCAA tournaments. The Cardinals (21-6, 10-4 ACC) aren't quitting, led by senior Damion Lee (16.9 points) and Trey Lewis (12.1) and a defense that protects the rim (center Chinanu Onaku is becoming a force), forces a high number of turnovers and defends the ball well. Louisville ranks second nationally in defensive efficiency per KenPom.com.

After that, Miami has a road test 7 p.m. next Wednesday at Notre Dame. The Irish, currently No. 28 in RPI and No. 23 in the AP poll, lost to the Hurricanes 79-70 in Coral Gables on Feb. 3. Freshman swingman Anthony Lawrence Jr. put up a career-high 18 points off the bench on just six shot attempts. Notre Dame will be ready for him this time. Also, the Canes probably shouldn't bet on having a first half like the one they had on Feb. 3; they shot 63 percent to build a 12-point lead,

and early foul trouble limited Notre Dame big man Zach Auguste to six minutes.

The regular-season finale, 4 p.m. Sat., March 5 at Virginia Tech, doesn't appear difficult; the Hokies' record (14-13, 6-8 ACC) and RPI (No. 118) reflect a middling squad and the Canes stomped them last week; however, this is a group that was able to upset then-No. 4 Virginia in Blacksburg early in conference play (Jan. 4).

Final thoughts: If Miami wins out and North Carolina – which plays three of its final four on the road, at N.C. State, Virginia and Duke – duffs it, the Hurricanes could be in line for the regular-season title. A win in the ACC tournament (March 9-13 in Washington, D.C.) could vault the Canes to the top of the bracket on selection Sunday. Regular-season and tournament ACC championships could be the missing pieces for a top-seed resume.

What do you think?

Observations:

CBS Sports
Jon Rothstein
Feb. 23, 2016

Davon Reed is the X-factor for Miami

The Hurricanes have several known commodities on their roster, making them a team that could advance deep into the NCAA Tournament.

Miami's back court features a pair grizzled veterans in fifth-year seniors Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan, while senior big man Tonye Jekiri has emerged as a legitimate candidate for ACC Defensive Player of the Year in the pivot.

That trio, along with Jim Larranaga -- a proven head coach who led George Mason to the Final Four in 2006 -- makes the Hurricanes rock solid, steady, and consistent.

But the guy who can take this team to a different level might be junior Davon Reed.

The 6-foot-5 wing had a season-high 21 points in Monday night's 64-61 win over Virginia and opened up Miami's offense in the second half.

School officials told CBS Sports that Reed was in the gym at 11 a.m. on Monday shooting by himself and his hard work paid major dividends.

The Hurricanes are 11-4 this season in games where Reed scores in double-figures.

UNC, Miami atop ACC entering tough stretch run

NCAA.com
Alan Beard
Feb. 23, 2016

North Carolina sits atop the Atlantic Coast Conference standings, right where the Tar Heels were expected to be when they were the preseason No. 1 pick. Now, though, they've got plenty of company in the ACC.

The league is set for quite a finishing leg to the regular season.

With less than two weeks left, seven teams have at least nine ACC wins. And they're dotting one another's closing schedules in what amounts to a playoff before the ACC Tournament begins in Washington, D.C.

"It definitely feels different for me," UNC coach Roy Williams said Tuesday. "This time at the end of the year you hope you're involved and look to see who's playing who and which location. But you're doing for two or three. Now you're doing it for seven, eight or nine teams."

The seventh-ranked Tar Heels (22-5, 11-3 ACC) were picked to win the league ahead of Virginia and rival Duke. They hold the league lead behind player of the year candidate Brice Johnson, who has an ACC-best 16 double-doubles entering Wednesday's trip to nearby rival North Carolina State.

Right behind them is No. 12 Miami (22-5, 11-4), which beat No. 3 Virginia in a critical matchup Monday night. Then there's No. 11 Louisville (21-6, 10-4), which won't play in the league or NCAA tournaments due to a self-imposed postseason ban connected to an ongoing probe into escort allegations.

From there, Virginia (21-6, 10-5), No. 15 Duke (20-7, 9-5), No. 23 Notre Dame (18-

8, 9-5) and Clemson (16-11, 9-6) form the top half of the 15-team league.

The Cavaliers swept the regular-season and tournament titles in 2014, then won the regular season again last season while compiling a two-year record of 36-5 against ACC opponents. Their only two losses in the past month have come at Duke and at Miami by a combined four points.

Now they get a visit from the Tar Heels on Saturday, a big day that also includes Louisville's trip to Miami.

"It's nice that when you have a big game, you have another big game waiting for you in the next couple of days," Virginia's Malcolm Brogdon said after Monday's loss. "We can redeem ourselves."

And the big matchups keep coming in the final week. Miami visits Notre Dame next Wednesday, then the regular-season finale includes UNC at Duke and Louisville at Virginia on March 5.

Virginia has the toughest remaining schedule. Throw in a trip to Clemson, and its final three opponents have won 70 percent of their ACC games.

"For everybody, the top six teams, it's going to be crazy," Miami guard Angel Rodriguez said after a weekend loss at UNC. "We're all a game away from each other, so things can change quickly."

The top four seeds get a double-round bye at the ACC Tournament, though Louisville's postseason ban opens a potential slot. Rick Pitino's Cardinals play three of their final four on the road, starting Wednesday at Pittsburgh (19-7, 8-6).

"When you're not in the tournament, I think you're looking for silver linings and

challenges," Pitino said. "So this will prove to be a good one."

It's still unclear how many NCAA bids the league will get. Clemson, Pittsburgh and Syracuse (18-10, 8-7) probably represent the last of that group, while teams like reigning ACC Tournament champion Notre Dame are trying to bolster their resumes.

"I guess when you look at it," Fighting Irish coach Mike Brey said, "we're playing for seeding in two tournaments right now."

There's also some drama at the bottom of the league, too.

North Carolina State (14-13, 4-10) is all but certain to end a four-year streak of NCAA Tournament trips, but ACC-leading scorer Anthony "Cat" Barber (23.2 points) is a strong player of the year candidate despite the Wolfpack's record.

Then there's Boston College (7-20, 0-14), which is flirting with becoming only the sixth team in league history to go winless in league regular-season play and first since Maryland went 0-14 in 1986-87. The Eagles host Virginia Tech on Tuesday night.

"I knew coming in this was a long process," BC coach Jim Christian said. "This is not an instant turnaround process. That's all you can do is keep building and stay positive, and that's what we've tried to do."

Reed Stepping Up Down the Stretch

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Feb. 23, 2016

Before the season started, I wrote the following about Davon Reed:

“Davon Reed is the best player in the conference no one talks about. His statistics last season were modest (other than shooting a ridiculous 45.7% from three) but that was due in part to missing the start of the season with injury. The 6’6 Reed can handle, shoot, finish, and especially defend.”

For various reasons, Reed seems to always take a back seat to Sheldon McClellan, Angel Rodriguez, and more recently Ja’Quan Newton, in terms of acclaim when experts/pundits discuss Hurricanes Hoops.

But as we come down the stretch, and UM looks to make a run at an ACC Title as well as March Madness glory, the 6’6 junior from Ewing, N.J. is going to be harder and harder to overlook.

Last night Reed exploded for a career high 21 points, on an exceptionally efficient 6-8 from the floor, including 5-6 from deep.

More on Reed’s terrific night below:

And over his last 9 games, he has shown a lot more aggression, coming in at just over 13 ppg.

On the season, the smooth G/F averages 10.9 points, 4.1 rebounds, and 1.9 assists.

Coming in to last night, you could almost feel he was ready to explode.

Reed’s emerging confidence was not lost on UM Head Coach Jim Larranaga,

“As good as Malcolm Brogdon was, Davon

was sensational as well... Davon is such a terrific competitor. He’s such a great leader. He’s tough, he’s very intelligent, and he’s very skilled. What I liked so much about his game tonight is that he looked very calm.”

Reed is good enough to not only be a role player that occasionally explodes for games like last night, but a consistent force who regularly does so.

For the Hurricanes to go deep into March, they are going to need Reed to have nights like last.

Good thing for Miami, he looks like he is ready to do so.

Miami win keeps ACC title dream alive

ESPN.com

Myron Medcalf

Feb. 22, 2016

Miami's 64-61 victory over No. 3 Virginia, a win that thrust the Hurricanes into a second-place slot in the ACC, made sense because Miami's roster is full of second acts. Players out to prove something their past basketball lives or real lives never promised.

The No. 12 Hurricanes, who recovered from Saturday's 96-71 loss at North Carolina, could still win the ACC, an improbable position for a squad that squandered its shot at the NCAA tournament last season.

But they thrive on their shared obstacles and the unfavorable odds attached to them.

Tonye Jekiri (nine points, six rebounds, five assists on Monday) fetched water in buckets so he could take showers in his Nigerian hometown. Six years after moving to America, he's the key big man for an ACC contender. Davon Reed (21 points) missed eight games after offseason surgery in 2014-15 to repair a leg injury. He never attained the consistency he has displayed in recent weeks. Angel Rodriguez left Kansas State to play closer to his family in Puerto Rico, and the oft-erratic, sometimes brilliant point guard fits perfectly with this group. Sheldon McClellan, the team's leading scorer, admits he loved the nightlife more than the gym during his time at Texas, long before he matured into the most important player on this Miami roster.

This group did not look like an ACC contender, on paper or in person, late last season. But they're here. Again.

Few believed Jim Larrañaga could build a perennial contender backed by a fan

base that chooses the beach and the pool before it dries off and decides to attend a basketball game. You'd assume a program with Miami's extracurricular activities and heat would attract the best talent with ease. But the program had reached the NCAA tournament just six times prior to Larrañaga's arrival.

Here he is, however, surprising us again 10 years after he led 11-seed George Mason to the Final Four in 2006. Monday's win kept Miami alive in the ACC race and offered more proof Larrañaga continues to build a program with long-term aspirations. A top-15 incoming class anchored by forward Dewan Huell, 23rd in the 2016 class per RecruitingNation, will help Larrañaga reload next season.

But first, he'll push for his second ACC title after the Hurricanes won the championship in 2013. This run is just as improbable as the first.

The same players from last year's Miami team that finished 7-7 in its final 14 games prior to its NIT berth returned this season. But this Hurricanes squad will secure a high seed in the NCAA tournament after a strong campaign.

This is the same Miami squad that got slammed in a 25-point loss at North Carolina on Saturday, but the Hurricanes competed with a renewed vigor in a crucial game on Monday night. Virginia tore through its February slate before a road loss at Cameron Indoor on Feb. 13 ended its seven-game winning streak. Miami finished 10-for-19 from beyond the arc in Monday's win over one of the hottest teams in the country.

The Hurricanes don't control the ACC race. North Carolina does. The Tar Heels could win their next four games (at NC State, at Virginia, vs. Syracuse and at Duke).

But they could also lose two or three of those matchups. Miami's last chapter ain't easy like Sunday morning, either. The Hurricanes will face Louisville, Notre Dame in South Bend and Virginia Tech in Blacksburg before the ACC tourney.

But the Hurricanes had to forget about the North Carolina loss to even create this possibility.

Even if they don't win the ACC title, these Hurricanes can help the program move forward by advancing to the second weekend of the NCAA tournament for just the third time in school history.

And even if that doesn't happen, the Hurricanes might get another chance in the near future.

With Larrañaga, Miami could find itself in another fight for the ACC title. Soon.

The fans will leave the beach to see that.

Reed's shooting barrage keeps Miami in ACC title contention

Yahoo! Sports

Jeff Eisenberg

Feb. 22, 2016

A defacto elimination game in the ACC title race turned in Miami's favor Monday night thanks to a brilliant performance from an unheralded hero.

Wing Davon Reed lived up to his @ClutchREED_5 Twitter handle, erupting for a career-high 21 points to lead the 12th-ranked Hurricanes to a 64-61 victory over third-ranked Virginia.

With point guard Angel Rodriguez struggling and wings Sheldon McClellan and JaQuan Newton both fighting through injuries, Reed bailed out the Hurricanes. He sank five 3-pointers against the tightly packed Virginia defense, the last of which extended Miami's lead to eight with 3:20 to go and gave the Hurricanes just enough cushion to survive Virginia's last-gasp comeback bid.

Reed's outside shooting performance was somewhat unexpected considering Miami's fourth leading scorer entered play shooting 33 percent from behind the arc and he hadn't sank more than two threes in a game in more than a month. The 6-foot-6 wing picked a fine time for a break-out night considering the Virginia defense thrives on walling off the paint and forcing opponents to shoot contested jumpers.

As a result of Reed's torrid shooting, Miami remains within striking distance of a top-three NCAA tournament seed and a second ACC title in the past four seasons. The Hurricanes (22-5, 11-4) sit alone in second place in the ACC, one-half game behind the North Carolina team that bludgeoned them by 25 points in Chapel Hill on Saturday afternoon.

The advantage Miami has is a slightly more favorable remaining schedule. The Hurricanes host fellow ACC contender Louisville on Saturday before closing the regular season at Notre Dame and Virginia Tech. North Carolina still has road games left at NC State, Virginia and Duke in addition to a lone home game against Syracuse.

Virginia could have been the team alone in second place in the ACC had it defeated Miami on Monday night. Instead the Cavaliers allowed that chance to slip through their fingers despite an outstanding 28-point game from ACC player of the year favorite Malcolm Brogdon.

On a night when none of his teammates even scored in double figures, Brogdon nearly made up for it with his ability to create scoring chances moving without the ball in his hands. Time after time, he curled around screens for catch-and-shoot 3-pointers or to free himself in the lane.

The only shot Brogdon missed came at an inopportune time, a heavily contested 3-point attempt over McClellan that would have given Virginia the lead with 25 seconds to go. One possession before that, Brogdon whipped a pass to Mike Tobey for what appeared to be a go-ahead layup but the big man could not get the shot to drop over Tonye Jekiri's outstretched arms.

Virginia's frustration was Miami's elation. The Hurricanes are still in the thick of the ACC title race, and they have their fourth-leading scorer to thank.

McClellan stars in NCAA basketball 'video game'

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Feb. 19, 2016

Sort of.

Trying to get its standout shooting guard more National Player of the Year love, Miami produced a video that shows Sheldon McClellan as a video game character. Specifically, an NCAA version of the widely beloved NBA Jam franchise.

In the video, McClellan is "heating up," hitting "from long range" and throwing down "kaboom"-level dunks, just like the characters in the original Jam.

(Why no "he's on fire," though? Too cliché?)

McClellan, who enters Saturday's game at fifth-ranked North Carolina leading the 11th-ranked Hurricanes in scoring (16.1 points), is one of the most efficient guards in the country. He leads ACC guards and is 23rd nationally in true shooting percentage (67.5) and is ranked third among ACC guards in effective field goal percentage (60.1).

McClellan is one of 35 finalists for the Naismith Trophy for national player of the year. He's also one of 20 on the watch list for the Oscar Robertson Award (player of the year) and one of 10 finalists for the Jerry West Award (top shooting guard).

And now, a sharp turn as we ask the question Kirk Herbstreit and many others are asking: Will there ever be another NCAA hoops (and/or football) video game?

That's unclear.

There hasn't been an NCAA basketball video game since 2010, the last year EA Sports produced its annual NCAA March

Madness title. 2KSports discontinued its College Hoops series in 2008. The last college football video game (EA Sports' NCAA Football 14) was released in 2013.

Last July, 2K obtained licenses to use a handful of major college basketball teams in its games, leading to speculation it could be building toward another college hoops series. However, it simply included those teams in the create-a-player mode of its NBA 2K16 game.

At the same time last year, football and basketball players began earning money for past appearances in NCAA-branded video games as part of a \$60 million settlement that involved EA and the NCAA. That litigation was the reason video game companies stopped producing college sports games.

Analysts of the legal battle have commented that hypothetically, the games could be resurrected ... but as of now, they're still on the shelf.

As for McClellan, a fifth-year senior, he will almost certainly be a playable character in the next round of NBA video games.

Miami's showdown with UNC a product of Larranaga's detailed plan

Sun Sentinel
Dave Hyde
Feb. 19, 2016

m Larranaga is a coach who is organized about everything: statistics, goals, things to do that day, memorable lines to fit memorable occasions.

At each timeout, for instance, one assistant is in charge of telling him the points per possession Miami is yielding in its zone and man-to-man defenses. In Wednesday's win against Virginia Tech, it was a season-best 0.79 points per possession in the man-to-man defense and an awful 1.3 in zone.

Of course, no matter the game, Larranaga plays the zone with this particular team for only six straight opponent points in any half. It doesn't matter if "they score two quick [3-point shots] or it takes three, four or five minutes," he says.

Why? Because if 60 opponent points is the baseline score he operates off, six points per half equals 12 points per game. That's 20 percent of the game. He's strategized for this team to play zone 20 percent of the time and man-to-man 80 percent. Other years, the formula is different.

Organized? Larranaga, you see, is fascinatingly so.

And as No. 11 Miami (21-4, 10-3 ACC) plays at No. 5 North Carolina (21-5, 10-3) Saturday in a showdown for first place in the conference, it seems natural he can recall his first trip to Chapel Hill as a head coach, right down to George Mason playing them Dec. 7, 2003, and "we were leading 49-47 at half."

No. 11 Miami overcomes slow start against Virginia Tech
No. 11 Miami overcomes slow start against Virginia Tech

He smiled. "We had guys in the locker room thinking, 'We can win this.' But we had three starters hurt right before half and got blasted in the second half." They lost, 115-81.

Two years later, that team was all grown up into seniors and beat North Carolina in the NCAA tournament. Larranaga was 56. He had been a Division I head coach 20 years.

He said after that game, "There was a part of me that couldn't help thinking, 'Did we really just beat North Carolina?' I mean, really, North Carolina?"

That's as good as any backdrop to the view of Larranaga, a decade later at 66, before Saturday's visit to Chapel Hill. It explains why he left a comfortable position at George Mason for an unsettled one at Miami.

His Hurricanes program isn't as blue-blood rich or nationally recognized as the North Carolinas or Dukes. It never will be. But his program, the one he's built, keeps developing teams that can beat those blue-blood teams.

Miami can play with anyone in the country, as its national ranking and record in the ACC show. The Hurricanes don't have the high-end recruits like a North Carolina. In fact, one of the Tar Heels' top players, Joel Berry, was a three-time Florida player of the year from Apopka whom Miami started recruiting when he was in 10th grade.

"The good thing is he decided [on Carolina] early, as a junior, so we didn't spend even more time on him," Larranaga says.

That tells in some form how Miami trails the top schools. But Larranaga has developed a program that develops players and crystallizes teams. It's how he won

the ACC in 2013. It's why he is 4-3 against North Carolina in his time at Miami.

"I think some of it is we have experienced teams," he says. "The first time we won [at North Carolina], we had that [conference] championship team. The next year, we weren't, and it was kind of a surprise, but we played them a certain way."

This is a smart Miami team led by the smartest of coaches. He puts a lot on his assistants, saying his one rule is to surround himself with people smarter than he is.

But a Saturday like this explains how fortunate Miami was in this hire of Larranaga. He has battled North Carolina all his career, going back to his assistant days at Virginia when Roy Williams was a Carolina assistant.

Now they compete again as head coaches in a particularly tough stretch for Miami. Larranaga says if the Hurricanes win Saturday to take the outright ACC lead, they'll play for the conference lead again Monday against No. 7 Virginia. If they win that, they'll play for it again next weekend against Louisville.

"It's going to be like that to the finish," he says.

The only thing for sure: This would be an impressive win for Miami. But no one will be saying, least of all Larranaga, "I can't believe we just beat North Carolina."

Which coaches are doing it right and wrong?

Yahoo! Sports

Pat Forde

Feb. 16, 2016

Who Is Unexpectedly Killing It:

Jim Larranaga (5), Miami. Every few years, Larranaga unleashes a surprise power. In 2013, his Miami team went 29-7, won the ACC and earned a No. 2 NCAA seed. His current, senior-led squad is trying to do the same. Unranked before the season, the Hurricanes are 20-4 overall, 9-3 in the ACC and are undefeated in February. If they can win in Chapel Hill on Saturday against league-leading North Carolina, they could have a strong say in who wins the ACC.

James Johnson to face ex-team Virginia Tech

Roanoke Times

Mark Berman

Feb. 16, 2016

James Johnson spent seven years on Virginia Tech's bench. On Wednesday, he will be on the opponent's bench.

Johnson is in his first season as the director of men's basketball operations at 11th-ranked Miami (20-4, 9-3 ACC), which will host the Hokies at 9 p.m. Wednesday. Johnson was a Tech assistant under Seth Greenberg for five seasons before spending two seasons as the Hokies' head coach. He was 22-41 at the helm of the Hokies before being fired in March 2014. He was out of coaching last season.

The Tech roster has undergone an overhaul since Johnson was fired, but it still includes Devin Wilson, who played for Johnson, and Johnson signees Justin Bibbs and Jalen Hudson.

"It'll be good to see those guys," Johnson said this week. "When you're recruiting those guys, you develop a relationship with the kids and their families. With the situation of me being let go, and I wanted to [give] my respect with Buzz [Williams] being the new coach ... and respect Virginia Tech's decision, I haven't had any communication with those guys since. So it'll be good to see those guys."

The Hokies (13-12, 5-7) are in 11th place in the ACC.

"Their record doesn't indicate how good I think they are, watching them on tape," said Johnson, a Ferrum College graduate. "Buzz and his staff have done a very good job."

Miami will visit the Hokies in the March 5 regular-season finale.

"Maybe I'll walk in the wrong locker room and get some of Buzz's pointers," Johnson said with a laugh. "I'm sure Buzz has changed the code two or three times since he got there."

Johnson's new role does not permit him to coach players during practice or to go on

the road to recruit. But he sits on the bench during games, evaluates film, participates in staff meetings and is involved with on-campus recruiting visits.

The job reunites Johnson with Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga. Johnson was one of Larranaga's assistants at George Mason from 2005-07, helping the Patriots reach the Final Four.

"Being back with Coach L, ... that makes the transition smoother," Johnson said. "And just having the opportunity to ... be around coaches, to be around the kids, to be able to talk basketball, to be a part of a team again and part of a coaching staff again has really been rewarding."

How is Johnson, who has spent most of his life in the commonwealth, enjoying his free time in Miami?

"When there's a chance and you go out to nice restaurants and different shows, there's a lot to do here in Miami," he said. "But during the season, there's not a lot of time."

Miami Still in the Hunt for No. 1 Seed

Canes Warning

Austin Sapin

Feb. 15, 2016

Believe it or not, we now sit just 26 days away from Selection Sunday where the hopes of some teams are crushed in an instant and the dreams of others begin to take flight. For the Miami Hurricanes, this year's Selection Sunday will certainly be a bit more of a celebratory occasion as Jim Larranaga's squad has all but locked up their spot in the field of 68.

With around three weeks to go in the regular season and conference tournaments to follow, the top tier of teams are all jockeying for those top seeds which can make your path to Houston that much easier. While no one would likely see the Hurricanes as a No. 1 seed at the moment, they'll have plenty of opportunities down the stretch to possibly sneak up into that top line. It may seem unrealistic, but with the chaos in college basketball this season, it wouldn't surprise me to see the Canes make a run up the S-curve.

There is plenty of statistics and rankings for the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee to analyze and when looking at this data, it shows Miami isn't too far off from the nation's top teams. Below is not just Miami's resume, but the profiles of eight other teams that are in consideration for those prized four No. 1 seeds:

Miami Hurricanes (20-4, 9-3 ACC)

Rankings: RPI: 9, KenPom: 12, BPI: 11, SOS: 34

RPI Top 100 record: 12-2 (7-1 vs. RPI Top 50)

Quality wins: vs. Utah (neutral), vs. Duke, vs. Notre Dame

Bad losses: vs. Northeastern, at Clemson, at NC State

Their case for a No. 1 seed

As we discussed above, no one in the college basketball world would currently have the Miami Hurricanes as a No. 1 seed, but with opportunities to pick up quality wins down the stretch, I think the Canes still have a shot.

Right now, Miami's weaknesses lie with their three poor losses as well as their lack of a big-time win. Considering Miami still gets to play Virginia and Louisville at home as well as North Carolina and Notre Dame on the road, the Hurricanes strength of schedule will certainly skyrocket and those games will also give them chances for the huge win or wins they are looking for.

If Miami can find victories from three of those games (which I think is very possible), their resume will look like one of the best in the country. The Canes might not have that one big-time win as of now, but as we'll see throughout this post, the Hurricanes currently have more RPI Top 50 wins than Villanova, Iowa, North Carolina, Maryland and Michigan State each have. Miami isn't one of the blue bloods of college basketball, but their resume can match up with a lot of the teams considered as No. 1 seed contenders.

I mean considering Miami does have three poor losses, two of which are pretty bad, and the team hasn't picked up a win over a "top team" yet, they still are ranked No. 9 in the RPI, No. 11 in the BPI and No. 12 in the KenPom rankings. That tells you how easily the Canes good jump up with a solid run down the stretch.

All I'm trying to say is Miami's numbers are pretty good as it is, but now they'll

have an opportunity to get major wins that will boost their numbers and their profile. Up until now, the Hurricanes have played just one game against a Top 10 opponent, so they haven't had numerous chances at big-time wins.

Now, they may not win any of those four games or they could even lose in one of their matchups with Virginia Tech, but all I'm saying is that this team has a chance at winning the ACC Regular Season title. Then when you combine that with a few opportunities left to get quality victories and a chance at an ACC Tournament title, that is a formula to move up to a No. 1 seed.

Miami may need a few results to go their way, but I certainly believe that this team has a chance at getting in as a No. 1 seed come Selection Sunday.

McClellan putting together efficient season

Matt Porter
Palm Beach Post
Feb. 13, 2016

Fans and media are often consumed with a basketball player's points-per-game average. Miami coach Jim Larranaga suggests a different perspective.

"I value efficiency," Larranaga said. "If someone takes 20 shots and averages 20 points and someone else takes nine shots and averages 18 points, I want the guy that averages nine shots and 18 points because that means you have an additional 11 possessions to keep scoring."

Players who need a high quantity of shots to score points are often considered volume shooters. But Miami's Sheldon McClellan and Florida State's Malik Beasley are typically the opposite.

McClellan and Beasley are two of the Atlantic Coast Conference's most efficient players and they will go head to head on Sunday at 6:30 p.m. (ESPNU) as No. 12 Miami travels to FSU. They are the only players in the ACC who are 50-40-80 guys – averaging 50 percent from the floor, 40 percent from beyond the 3-point arc and 80 percent from the free-throw line this season.

A senior guard, McClellan is averaging a career-high 16.1 points per game for Miami (19-4, 8-3 ACC). But he's also enjoying career highs in shooting percentage (53.4 on field goals, 40.2 on three-pointers, and 86.7 from the line).

"He's great," Larranaga said. "People look at points; they don't look at efficiency. It's disappointing ... I love coaching him. He's a great kid. As long as he keeps playing the way he's playing, we're in good shape and he's in good shape."

Beasley, a freshman guard, leads FSU (16-8, 6-6) in scoring at 17.2 points per game. He has made 50 percent of his shots, 41.9 percent of his 3s and is 84.2 percent from the free-throw line.

And Beasley has been remarkably consistent, scoring in double figures in all 24 games this season. He is quickly approaching the freshman record of 26 set by former Georgia Tech star Stephon Marbury in 1996.

Bracket watch: The Miami-FSU game is a crucial one for both programs. For the Hurricanes, they are entering what Larranaga feels is the toughest stretch of the season as Miami will face North Carolina, Virginia and Louisville before Feb. 27. And FSU has work to do to improve its postseason resume. But the Seminoles also have a challenging schedule ahead as they must face Miami, Notre Dame and Syracuse at home along with Duke on the road.

Miami is considered a No. 2 seed and FSU a No. 9 seed by CBSSports.com bracket analyst Jerry Palm. The Seminoles likely will need to go 4-2 in their final six regular-season games to hit 20 wins going into the ACC tournament, which would put them in a good position to earn their first NCAA Tournament berth since 2012.

7-foot Jekiri a big reason for Hurricanes' success

Associated Press

Steven Wine

Feb. 12, 2016

In his most recent game, Miami Hurricanes senior Tonye Jekiri twice saved balls from going out of bounds under his basket, forced a turnover at midcourt and was the first player down the floor on a fast break.

For a seven-footer, Jekiri gets around.

The Nigerian is not a big scorer, averaging barely half a dozen shots and 8.1 points per game. But he's a big reason for the success of the No. 12-ranked Hurricanes (19-4, 8-3 Atlantic Coast Conference), who trail league leader North Carolina by one game heading into Sunday's game at Florida State.

"I'm a Dennis Rodman and Kevin Garnett fan," Jekiri said Thursday. "Those are guys who play with so much energy and passion. I've always tried to do that, and I think my team feeds off me sometimes."

Coach Jim Larranaga agreed. He said Jekiri deserves serious consideration for ACC defensive player of the year after finishing third last year.

"He has such a big impact on the defensive end," Larranaga said. "There are plays he makes that there is no statistical category for."

Jekiri's especially adept at helping guards defend ball screens, forcing the opposition to its second or third option.

His impact was evident in Tuesday's win over Pittsburgh. In the first half the Panthers made 10 free throws, all with Jekiri on the bench because of foul trouble. In the second half he played 19 minutes, and the Panthers made no free throws.

"When he's in there, we're not fouling," Larranaga said.

Jekiri said his fondness for defense dates to his days playing soccer in Nigeria, before he moved to Florida in 2010 to pursue a basketball career.

"I've always been on the defensive side playing soccer," he said. "That has always been my mindset - having to make stops."

The soccer background also helps explain Jekiri's uncommon agility for someone with size-16 shoes. He has developed a nice shooting touch inside, and his field goal percentage has improved from 46 percent as a sophomore to 50 percent as a junior and 55 percent this season.

Another area of progress has been choosing when to be aggressive on defense, which is why he has yet to foul out of a game this season. With a laugh, Larranaga recalled that when Jekiri was a freshman, he would commit a foul on virtually every possession in practice.

"The game fast for me," Jekiri said, "and I was asked to go against guys who weighed 10 times more than me. Sometimes you had to foul to slow them down."

No more. He's a muscular 245 pounds, which also comes in handy on the boards, where he ranks among the ACC leaders at 9.8 rebounds per game.

Jekiri concedes his defense is ahead of his offense, in part because the Hurricanes have other players to do the scoring. Four teammates are averaging in double figures.

"That's what a team is supposed to be," Jekiri said. "You have to have a guy who really scores, and guy who really plays defense. You put them together, and it's kind of like you're building a brick wall."

Jekiri is excited about his potential in the NBA, and because he became serious about basketball just five years ago, scouts figure he still has room for development.

But he's a late bloomer, which will likely prevent teams from considering him as a lottery pick.

"They're intrigued," Larranaga said. "They see his improvement. They like the way he plays team defense. They like his rebounding numbers. But he's a senior, and they don't like old guys - 22 is too old for them."

The Hurricanes like their senior center just fine.

The Sixth Man: Newton Out to Prove He is Best Player in His House

Sports Illustrated - Campus Rush

Lindsay Schnell

Feb. 12, 2016

After Miami's 65-63 win over Pittsburgh on Tuesday, Hurricanes assistant coach Jamal Brunt asked Joe Newton what was supposed to be an innocent question: Who is the best player in the Newton household?

The 1998 NABC Division II National Player of the Year answered without hesitating. "Me," Joe said. But the player ESPN analyst Dick Vitale likes to call the best sixth man in the country overheard the conversation, and disagreed. "Me," said Ja'Quan Newton.

"I almost asked him to play me one-on-one right there in Miami, in front of his teammates and coaches," said Joe, who starred at Central Oklahoma before playing professionally in countries including Mexico, Colombia, Croatia and Greece for nearly a decade. "But I decided since they got the big win, I'd let it go for now."

Ja'Quan isn't fazed. "Last time we played one-on-one," he says. "I was in the eighth grade. He stopped it, said he had to 'be somewhere.' We haven't played since." Ja'Quan laughed. "He's scared now!"

Joe, who works part-time at the Philadelphia Convention Center, insists that isn't the case. At 41, he works out "excessively" each day, honing his game because he loves hoops but also because, "I can't let my son beat me!" He estimates that by the time Ja'Quan finishes playing at Miami in two years, he might be able to beat Joe, but not before that. He isn't ready to deem his son the best player in the family. But he's good with calling him the best sixth man in the country.

Jim Larrañaga agrees. The fifth-year Hurricanes coach calls it "a luxury" to go to his bench and get a proven scorer. Newton, a 6' 2" sophomore, averages 11.6 points and 2.6 assists per game and is Miami's highest-usage player (28.7% possessions) when on the floor. "He comes in," Larrañaga said, "and we get better."

Like many freshmen, Newton initially recoiled at the idea of coming off the bench. An RSCI top-50 national recruit in the class of 2014, he was used to being the man, he says, at Neumann-Gorett High in his native Philadelphia. But Newton came to Miami at the same time Kansas State transfer Angel Rodriguez became eligible for the Hurricanes and emerged as one of the top point guards in the ACC. Ja'Quan had no choice but to be a backup. Instead of pouting, he remembered advice from his father and his mother, Lisa Brown.

From his dad: Never be selfish. Never look down on anyone or hate on anybody because they have

something you want. Wait your turn. From his mom: You get the respect you give—including to and from people in front of you in the rotation.

It's advice he still heeds. Through 23 games, Newton is second-leading scorer and assister for the 19-4 Hurricanes, who are ranked No. 12 in the AP poll. Years ago Joe told Ja'Quan that scoring early in games wasn't everything. Drawing from lessons he had learned watching Magic Johnson, Joe told Ja'Quan that involving teammates early usually meant they would go to battle with you late. Ja'Quan relishes his role as what Larrañaga likes to call a "multipurpose guard," increasing his scoring output (from 4.6 points as a freshman) and his shooting percentage (from 40.5% from the field last season to 48.6% now).

He just wishes Brown could see it.

During his senior year in high school, Ja'Quan traveled with his mother to Miami for an official visit. Brown had been diagnosed two years earlier with breast cancer and knew she would not live much longer. So she went to Liz Larrañaga, Jim's wife, and had a mom-to-mom conversation. "She basically asked my wife to take care of Ja'Quan," Larrañaga recalled. "She said, 'He needs a family—will you look after him?'"

Brown died months later, on March 20, 2014, at age 38, the day before Neumann-Gorett played for its fourth state championship game in Newton's career. He responded by scoring 33 points in a 64-57 overtime win, explaining afterward to local media that he knew his mom would be up in heaven "fussing" if he used her death as an excuse to quit. Ja'Quan says now that decommitting to stay closer to home, and his remaining family, never crossed his mind. In Coral Gables he found two things his parents had wanted for him: safety and sunshine. Joe says in the part of Philly where Ja'Quan grew up, "coming out of your house and walking to the corner store is dangerous." They all knew basketball was Ja'Quan's way out. Brown never had to tell Ja'Quan to leave. He always wanted to go.

"In Miami, I don't have to worry about anybody trying to hurt me," Ja'Quan says. "In Philly, I saw a lot. I saw one of my closest friends get killed in a drive-by shooting; he didn't do anything, just walking down the street. Growing up, all I thought about was, 'I don't want to keep watching the same thing over and over.' In my neighborhood, they're not going to let anything happen to me, I go somewhere and people always have my back. But people come in from other 'hoods, other towns, they're the ones who try to hurt you, because they're jealous. They don't want you to succeed."

Ja'Quan says that sometimes the attitude is, If I can't find a way out, then why should you be able

to?

Still, he credits his upbringing with molding him into a college basketball player. Known for some of the best pick-up basketball in America, Philadelphia has churned out some of the premier players in college and professional hoops. In South Philly, Ja'Quan played regularly against Samir Doughty, now at VCU, and Maurice Watson Jr., now at Clemson.

He isn't sure who placed a basketball in his hands first, but Ja'Quan's earliest memories are tagging along with Joe to pick-up and rec league games, bouncing a ball on the sideline as his dad "put on a show." Joe was always one of the best players on the court, Ja'Quan says, and he watched closely as his dad relentlessly attacked the rim, blowing past defenders with change-of-pace moves.

Ja'Quan started with Nerf hoops and kiddie balls, with Joe watching him and correcting his form. When Ja'Quan's turn came on the pick-up courts, Joe told the other adults—Joe says he never let Ja'Quan play with his age group—not to take it easy on his son. "They'd foul me, push me down. They never asked if I was O.K., just always yelled, 'Get up!'" Ja'Quan says. "At first, I'd get mad, because I couldn't score. I'd be like, 'Man, what the hell? What is going on?' But it made me tough."

Ja'Quan spent hours in the gym, dribbling around cones and chairs with Joe barking out instructions about when to cross over, when to hesitate and when to go between the legs. One screw-up sent Ja'Quan back to the start. In the eighth grade, dad would wake son at 5:30 a.m., drive to the gym for drills, bring him back in time to shower and then send him off to school. "A lot of people thought it was too much," says Joe, who split with Lisa when Ja'Quan was 14. "Now they see him, and they know it paid off."

As Ja'Quan readies for what he expects will be a deep postseason run, he keeps both his parents close. He prays to Lisa before each game, asking her "to help make the basketball go in the hole," he says. If he gets hot, he believes it's because she was listening closely that night. After every game, Ja'Quan heads to his locker to check his text messages, anxious to read Joe's takeaways. It's a mix of good and bad, praise and criticism. Sometimes it's trash talk, too. Because as good as his son is, Joe Newton can't relinquish the title of best player in the Newton house just yet.

Iowa, Miami lead five most surprising teams

Sports Illustrated

Michael Beller

Feb. 12, 2016

Last week, we looked at five of the most disappointing teams in the country this season. What do you say we move to a positive note this week? There have been plenty of teams on the other side of that coin, surprising the college basketball community with just how good they have been this season. For the sake of continuity, we limited ourselves to the five most surprising teams in the country. With apologies to the likes of West Virginia, which could win the Big 12, and Texas, which is just one game out of first place in the mighty Big 12, let's take a look at the teams that have opened the most eyes in the regular season, and loom as dangerous teams with Selection Sunday just one month away. They are presented in alphabetical order.

Miami Hurricanes (19-4, 8-3 ACC)

With a 21-12 overall record and a 10-8 mark in the ACC, the Hurricanes were one of the first teams out when last year's NCAA tournament field was revealed. They recovered from that disappointment to reach the NIT championship game before losing by two in overtime to Stanford. With all of last year's key contributors, most notably guards Sheldon McClellan, Ja'Quan Newton and Angel Rodriguez back this season, Miami is once again one of the best teams in the ACC. The Hurricanes first showed what they might be with consecutive wins over Utah and Butler—both of whom were ranked at the time—to win the Puerto Rico Tipoff in November, then entered the New Year at 13-1, with only a one-point loss to Northeastern marring their record. An easy win over Duke in late January convinced

folks that they will be a factor in the ACC race all year. They enter play this weekend just one game behind North Carolina in the standings, and will visit Chapel Hill on Feb. 20 with designs on winning their second regular-season title in the past four seasons.

Power, and poise, in Vermont Academy's Bruce Brown

ESPNBoston.com

Mike Scandra

Feb. 11, 2016

PROVIDENCE, R.I. -- If Vermont Academy hadn't dropped football after his sophomore year Bruce Brown still could be headed to the University of Miami next fall.

But, theoretically, it could have been on a football scholarship instead of a basketball scholarship.

The native of Wakefield, Mass., was THAT good in each sport.

Brown was a standout wide receiver at Wakefield High before transferring to Vermont Academy.

"It was very difficult," Brown said about the fact he had to relinquish football. "I even tried to play for the public school (Bellows Falls) in Vermont.

"I tried but they didn't let me. If Vermont had kept football, I definitely would have played."

In retrospect, the fact the school didn't was a plus for Wildcats basketball coach Alex Popp.

A 6-foot-4, 205-pound guard, Brown's ranked No. 30 by ESPN, No. 44 by Scout and No. 49 by Rivals. He's put up eye-popping numbers this season for the 19-4 Wildcats, averaging 26.9 points, 6.5 rebounds, 4.9 assists, 2.3 steals and 1.2 blocks per game.

He's competed nationally at the Nike Basketball Academy, the NBPA Top 100, the Nike Elite 100 and was a second team All-EYBL selection last July when he played for the Boston Amateur Basketball Club at the Peach Jam.

In 22 games last season for the BABC, Brown averaged 16.1 points, 5.8 rebounds and 3.0 assists.

As a result, he was recruited -- heavily -- by numerous Division 1 schools such as Miami, Xavier, Auburn, Boston College, UConn, Indiana and Purdue, to name a few. And he made official visits to Indiana, Xavier and Purdue before opting for the

Sunshine State.

Despite all the suffocating attention he's received, Brown hasn't asked Popp to be measured for a larger cap.

"He's been pretty good," Popp said Sunday after the Wildcats outlasted Cheshire (Conn.) Academy, 78-74, in double overtime at the National Prep School Invitational at Rhode Island College. "I think he puts winning over everything. He understands what it takes to win and he prepares for it. When the moment comes, he's ready for it.

"He practices like (he plays) games. He treats games like championships. He just battles and doesn't take off any plays. Because he has such a high motor, he's able to rise to that challenge of playing hard every, single time out."

That was evident during the second over against Cheshire when Brown scored five of his overall, team-high 19 points.

Two second-half plays, in particular, highlighted Brown's skills.

On one, he drove hard to the basket and displayed a soft touch when he scored on a jump hook off the glass.

On another, he whipped a behind-the-back pass to Tyrique Jones for a layup that capped a fast break.

Arguably the primary question that engulfs Brown is, what's his best position?

"He's evolved into a point guard with us," said Popp. "I think he has that Russell Westbrook mentality.

"Looking ahead, it's based on what position you can guard. He can guard one through four at the Division I level and I think he can guard one through three at the NBA level so I think he can play the point."

But that might not be the case when he steps on the BankUnited Center court.

"Right now, when I get to Miami, coach (Jim) Larranaga is going to work me into being a one," said Brown. "But, eventually, I'll play some one and perhaps more two."

In order to play the two, Brown realizes

he must improve his outside shooting.

Last summer when he played for the BABC, he shot a modest 43.8 percent from the floor and a less-than-modest 23.7 percent (9-for-38) from beyond the arc.

"Definitely, I need to improve," said Brown. "I'm not consistent right now."

Popp, however, is optimistic that Brown will morph into a much better shooter.

"The thing with shooting for us is you can get better at it," said Popp. "He shoots his free throws at about 80 percent so he has a good stroke. He's had a couple of games this season where he's hit four or five threes so he's very capable.

"It's going to come with more time in the gym. He's been working on it this year and his percentages have improved. We anticipate that momentum will carry over into his career at Miami. That coaching staff is going to develop him similar to the way we've developed him at Vermont Academy. He's been with us for three years and he's gotten better every year."

Popp then reached back into the past when analyzing what the future may hold for Brown if he raises his shooting percentages to acceptable Division 1 levels.

"You look at somebody like Michael Jordan, whose jump shot was a weakness, and they turned it into one of his strengths," said Popp. "I think Bruce Brown has the heart and willingness to put in the time to accomplish improving his one weakness."

One aspect of Brown's game that isn't weak is his defense which is aided by a 6-foot-9 wingspan.

"He's a tremendous defensive player," said Popp. "He gets a lot of his offense from his defense."

Brown seconded his coach's opinion.

"You have to play both ends of the floor," he said. "I take pride in defense. Steals and rebounds lead to transition offense (an area in which Brown excels) and we're great at that."

Toughness will be key during late-season stretch

Sun Sentinel
Christy Chirinos
Feb. 9, 2016

At the half of his team's win over Pittsburgh on Tuesday, men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga wasn't pleased.

The Panthers were outrebounding, outplaying, and plain outclassing his Miami Hurricanes, who couldn't bring life to their home court at a subdued, rather quiet BankUnited Center.

And so, the coach grabbed a basketball and challenged his team in his own unique style.

One by one, Larrañaga asked his players to try and wrestle the ball from his grip. His hope? That pushing their coach around in the locker room would translate to a tougher, more physical effort on the floor.

"He told us we were being soft, that we were letting guys take the ball from us, that we weren't being aggressive," guard Sheldon McClellan said. "He wanted to show us his way of being aggressive. ... It brought a lot of energy throughout the locker room and led us to a big second half."

The Hurricanes responded, starting the second half on a 15-4 run that brought the home crowd to their feet and helped put 12th-ranked Miami in position to close out a 65-63 win on the strength of Angel Rodriguez's tip-in with 1.4 seconds left.

Now, as Miami sets its sights on a Sunday rematch with in-state rival Florida State and the most brutal stretch of its schedule — a stretch that includes games on the road against the Seminoles and at ninth-ranked North Carolina before coming home to host seventh-ranked Virginia and 13th-

ranked Louisville — one of the questions the Hurricanes (19-4, 8-3) face is whether they can hang on to that toughness.

They know they'll need to as they try to navigate the last eight games of the regular season before the postseason arrives and the focus shifts to first the ACC Tournament and later, the NCAA tourney.

Still, Larrañaga wants to make sure no one — not his players, his coaches, or Miami's fans — think about all of that just yet. There's work to be done now, he and his players say.

"We're heading into the very toughest part of our ACC schedule. ... Four of our last seven are on the road and two of our three at home are against Virginia and Louisville, the teams directly in front of us in the standings," Larrañaga said. "I'm like, 'Are you serious?' Right now, it's Florida State. That's it."

Though the Hurricanes and Seminoles have already met once this season, with Miami dominating in a 72-59 win on Jan. 9, FSU has been playing improved ball of late, something Larrañaga and his players say they recognize.

Though the Seminoles are coming off an 85-72 loss to Syracuse, they've won four of their last five. Two of those wins came against the same Clemson and N.C. State teams that have handed the Hurricanes two of their three losses in conference play.

Then there's the matter of a rematch against a rival the Hurricanes know well.

To prepare, Larrañaga says he and his staff have been watching film not just of that January game against FSU (16-8, 6-6) but the Seminoles more recent

games, games in which they've played well. And the Hurricanes, as they look to close out the season, continue working on their own game, including some offensive adjustments Larrañaga believes will make a difference against FSU and beyond.

"That's what makes conference play so much more challenging than non-conference play," he said. "When you don't know the opponent very well, your plan is based on whatever information you have, but that information is limited. In conference, you have so much information ... we have a working knowledge of how the other one thinks."

Added McClellan: "I think we still have room for a lot of improvement. We're not playing our best basketball right now. ... We realize that we need to play better both offensively and defensively, mainly offensively right now. We normally make a lot of shots that we're missing right now. We just want to get back to how we were playing in Puerto Rico, honestly. We had a lot of energy throughout the bench, throughout the team. It was a fun trip and it set the tone for the year, I think."

Late basket helps No. 12 Miami edge Pittsburgh 65-63

Associated Press

Steven Wine

Feb. 9, 2016

Annoyed about his team's effort, Miami Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga grabbed a ball in the locker room at halftime and challenged his players one by one to wrestle it away from him.

The impromptu drill gave the Hurricanes some needed energy, which carried over to a decisive scramble. Point guard Angel Rodriguez scored on an offensive rebound with 1.4 seconds left, and No. 12 Miami edged Pittsburgh 65-63 on Tuesday night.

"That was a major league play for the smallest guy on the floor to go over everybody, time it right and just tip it in," Larranaga said.

The Hurricanes (19-4, 8-3 Atlantic Coast Conference) trailed by eight points in the first half but won for the sixth time in the past seven games.

Pittsburgh (17-6, 6-5) has lost two straight for the first time this season.

"They got the break at the end," coach Jamie Dixon said. "Just one of those things. Don't know what we could have done different."

With the game tied, the Hurricanes missed two shots in the final 6 seconds and Pitt's Ryan Luther batted the ball before the 5-foot-11 Rodriguez charged into the lane and slapped a rebound into the basket with his left — non-shooting — hand.

"It took a bit to sink in — 'Did I actually tip that in?'" Rodriguez said. "It was just shocking. Once I told myself, 'Yes you did — celebrate,' I started going crazy."

That was the only offensive rebound of the game for Rodriguez, who had 17 points and eight assists.

"I don't know why in the world Angel went to the offensive boards," Larranaga said. "Point guards are really not supposed to do that. But he didn't listen to me throughout the game anyway, so I'm glad he didn't listen at the end."

Larranaga was joking, but he wasn't so happy about the Hurricanes' early play. The Panthers led for most of the first half, and their largest margin was 27-19.

So the 66-year-old Larranaga had his players wrestle him for the ball, which sent the needed message.

"He really wanted us to be passionate and play with energy," Rodriguez said. "It ended up working. It got everybody going."

Miami outscored Pitt 15-4 to start the second half, but the Panthers rallied twice and tied it on James Robinson's 3-pointer with 31 seconds left.

"I was proud of how we responded," Dixon said. "We were in a very good position to win the game."

Larranaga decided against using a timeout on the Hurricanes' final possession, and they ran the clock down to 6 seconds. Sheldon McClellan missed a 3-pointer and Davon Reed missed a follow before Rodriguez scored. He then raised his right fist in triumph as the crowd erupted.

"He redeemed the whole team," center Tonye Jekiri said. "We don't want to lose at home. Just an amazing win."

Robinson missed a shot from midcourt at the final buzzer.

The Panthers' Jamel Artis shot 2 for 10 and scored a season-low five points, 10.5 below his average. Luther had 12 points and seven rebounds off the bench, and Michael Young scored 12 points.

Jekiri played only 6 minutes in the first half after picking up two fouls but finished with 10 points and 10 rebounds for the Hurricanes, who shot 52 percent in the second half.

"We were so sharp in the second half that normally good things happen," Larranaga said. "And they did."

TIP-INS

Pitt: The Panthers fell to 0-4 against ranked teams. ... They are 17-0 when scoring at least 70 points and 0-6 in other games.

Miami: The Hurricanes' 12 consecutive weeks in the rankings ties the school record set in 2001-02.

SITTING OUT

Hurricanes reserve Ivan Cruz Uceda didn't dress because he was ill.

UP NEXT

Pittsburgh: is at No. 9 North Carolina on Sunday, the Panthers' third consecutive game against a ranked team.

Miami: is at Florida State on Sunday.

Could 2016 Canes become best in program history?

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Feb. 8, 2016

Is this the best Hurricanes basketball team ever?

Woah, woah, woah. Pump the brakes. It's still early February.

But look: they do have a shot at earning that distinction — and this group has already done something the current title-holder never did.

The 2012-13 Hurricanes are unquestionably the best squad in program history, having won the ACC regular season and tournament championships and earned a No. 2 seed in the NCAA tournament. They reached the Sweet Sixteen for the second time in UM history (1999-2000 was the first).

A month before the ACC tournament begins in Washington, D.C., the 2015-16 Hurricanes have set a new mark for regular-season respect.

UM (18-4, 7-3 ACC) was ranked No. 12 in the latest Associated Press poll. It is the ninth week this season will spend in the top 15, the most in program history.

Entering Tuesday's game against Pittsburgh (7 p.m., ESPNU), the Hurricanes are fourth in the ACC. They are one game behind No. 13 Louisville and No. 9 North Carolina (both 19-4, 8-2) and a half-game behind No. 7 Virginia (19-4, 8-3). UM faces all three teams between Feb. 20-27, getting Virginia and Louisville at home.

As of Monday, UM is projected to be an NCAA tournament four-seed by ESPN's Joe Lunardi. This is the 24th week Miami has spent in the top 15, the 18th week under Jim Larranaga.

The '12-13 team spent eight weeks in the top 15, beginning the week after routing top-ranked Duke on Jan. 23, 2013. UM climbed as high as No. 2 that season.

The Hurricanes, which climbed to No. 8 last Jan. 11 before losing at Virginia and Clemson, have won five of six games since then. Leading scorer Sheldon McClellan has averaged 17.7 points in that stretch and put up 22 in Sunday's 75-68 win at Georgia Tech. McClellan has scored in double-figure in 19 of UM's 22 games this year. He ranks third among ACC guards in effective field goal percentage, which adds extra weight to three-point shooting.

Pittsburgh (17-5, 6-4) is tied with Duke (17-6, 6-4) for seventh in the conference. Between those teams and Miami: Notre Dame (16-7, 7-4) and Clemson (14-9, 7-4).

Miami will have a length advantage on Pitt — which has no one taller than 6-foot-9 — but 6-9 forward Michael Young (team-high 16.8 points and 6.9 rebounds) and 6-7 Jamel Artis (15.5 points, 4.5 rebounds) are plenty productive inside. Six-foot-3 point guard James Robinson (9.4 points, 5.3 assists) ranks sixth in Division I in assist-to-turnover ratio (3.11); Pitt (1.62) is fifth nationally in that category.

"It's very, very difficult," Larranaga said of playing Pittsburgh on a two-day turnaround. "They're like 17-0 when they score 70 points. They're 14-0 when they outrebound their opponent. They're one of the best passing teams in the country. ... You really have to rely on your defense and rebounding to keep you in the game."

Daily Word:

ESPN.com
Feb. 3, 2016

1. The numbers love Florida (21 in RPI, 20 in BPI, 22 in KenPom), yet the Gators remain unranked in both the AP and coaches' polls. Why is there a disconnect?

Andy Katz: Pretty simple. The Gators' first significant win against the field came this past weekend when they knocked off West Virginia. Beat Kentucky and the Gators will surely be ranked.

C.L. Brown: For starters, there aren't any seven-loss teams ranked in either poll. The Gators are 3-4 in games decided by six points (two possessions) or fewer. If Florida would have pulled out a win or two against Purdue, Miami, Michigan State or Texas A&M -- all of which are currently ranked -- then we wouldn't be having this discussion. If Saturday's win over West Virginia is any indication, the Gators are trending in the right direction.

John Gasaway: It's tough to crack the Top 25 when you're 14-7, but I don't suppose Mike White and his players are too concerned about that. The Gators have been playing outstanding defense against their SEC opponents, and Joe Lunardi is showing UF as a solid No. 8 seed. Plus, Florida still gets two cracks at Kentucky -- you haven't heard the last from the Gators.

2. Miami jumped from the ninth-most efficient defensive team in the ACC to third this season. How did the Canes up their D?

Katz: I'm assuming experience. This is a team that has as much experience as any team in the ACC, if not more than most. The attention to detail is clear -- at least in

games when the Hurricanes have needed to be more focused. But they have lost their way a bit in some games, such as last week against NC State.

Brown: I don't know if the players have just bought in more, but they're a lot more active. Their deflections and steals have gone up. They're getting out on 3-point shooters better too. ACC opponents are making just 29.9 percent from the 3-point range compared to 35.6 percent last year.

Gasaway: Jim Larranaga's guys have excelled at denying 3-pointers in ACC play, and the Hurricanes also have been fortunate that those opponents have hit just 30 percent of their tries. Put those two facts together and few teams have been hurt less by opponents' 3s than Miami. The Canes also have protected the rim fairly well, with Tonye Jekiri and Kamari Murphy getting most of the credit there.

3. Texas Tech is talked about in bubble conversations, but the Red Raiders are 2-6 in the Big 12. Do you see them as a tournament team?

Katz: No. The Red Raiders would need to completely switch their direction in the second half of the Big 12. Go 6-2 and beat NCAA-bound teams, then maybe they can start to think about a possible bid.

Brown: If the Red Raiders can get to .500 in the Big 12, then we can have a conversation about the NCAA tournament. They're close -- they lost to Baylor and West Virginia by a combined seven points. But as it stands, I'd say Texas Tech is a long shot. The nonconference schedule won't buy any added credibility. So a losing record, even in a loaded Big 12, won't get Texas Tech a bid.

Gasaway: If we're all agreed that this is a wide-open season and there are few truly great teams, the flip side of that will be teams like the Red Raiders having a shot at a bid. The NCAA has to get to 68 somehow, and Tech is a great example of a team that benefits from the strength of its league. Plenty of "good" losses, but Tubby Smith's guys need some W's at some point.

Hurricanes searching for consistency

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Feb. 1, 2016

In advance of another tough week, the inconsistent Hurricanes dipped slightly in the polls.

When Notre Dame comes to town Wednesday (7 p.m., ESPN2), Miami will be ranked No. 17 in the Associated Press poll. That's a two-spot drop from last week. The Hurricanes (16-4, 5-3 ACC) also dropped two spots in the coaches' poll, checking in at No. 15.

Last week Miami beat then-No. 24 Duke, looking as good as they have all year, playing a game that was never in doubt. They followed that by losing on the road at North Carolina State, in a game where they were outworked at every turn.

"Last week was an interesting week," coach Jim Larranaga said. Against Duke "we played very good defense," he said, and "got completely outplayed by North Carolina State in every category of the game." Miami shot 40 percent (31 percent from three) against the Wolfpack, both figures six or more points below its season average, was outrebounded 41-23.

Notre Dame (15-6, 6-3) is also looking for a bounce-back week. It dropped out of the AP poll after losing at Syracuse and beating Wake Forest at home. It received votes in the coaches poll.

Duke dropped out of the AP poll for the first time since 2007, a span of 168 weeks.

Notre Dame is ranked No. 2 nationally in KenPom.com's offensive efficiency ratings, better than any ACC team besides Duke. The Irish don't play fast, ranking 294th of 351 Division I teams in tempo. "Every one of their guys can shoot threes,

[are] terrific ballhandlers, very good straight-line drivers, they're very good at penetrating and pitching to teammates," Larranaga said. "They're good passers, good receivers, and they play great in the open court."

Guard Demetrius Jackson (16.5 points, 5.2 assists, 1.5 steals per game) is a handful anywhere on the floor, while forwards Zach Auguste (14 points, 10.1 rebounds) and Bonzie Colson (12 points, 7 rebounds, 1.1 blocks) control the front lines. The team ranks second in the conference in shooting (49.6 percent) and three-point shooting (38.6)

Like the Blue Devils, the Irish struggle defensively; they are ranked 225th in efficiency, which is by far the worst mark in the conference. Notre Dame's overall ranking is 31st. Miami is ranked 21st and 33rd, good for 17th overall. That is fourth in the ACC behind North Carolina (fourth), Virginia (fifth) and Louisville (eighth).

Noteworthy: As part of a college-pro cross-promotion, ESPN put NBA analyst Jeff Van Gundy in the booth with play-by-play man Dan Shulman and analyst Dick Vitale for Wednesday's game. ... The Hurricanes visit Georgia Tech on Saturday. After that, Pittsburgh comes to town Tuesday.

Larrañaga's vision coming true as Canes defeat Duke

Miami Herald
Greg Cote
Jan. 28, 2016

This is what Jim Larrañaga's imagination looked like and sounded like five years ago. Like an 80-69 victory over rival Duke, in a sold-out campus arena, with University of Miami fans making noise so joyous and sonic that it nearly drowned out the song that blasted over the PA system as Monday night's game ended.

Rock you like a Hurricane, indeed.

The mind casts back to when Pat Riley came to the Heat in 1995, a knight in Armani, not armor, and made a franchise matter. He spoke that first day about envisioning a championship parade down Biscayne Boulevard.

He has seen three of them. So far.

Larrañaga came to the Miami Hurricanes in 2011, as much a gift and savior. He didn't speak that first day of a national championship but of something just as important to the program and even more fundamentally necessary. He spoke of creating interest, of making people care about UM basketball.

The first thing he did as Canes coach was wander the campus and its dormitories, introducing himself to random students and pitching UM hoops at a grass-roots level. He wife used to discreetly give away free tickets to upcoming games.

"We're going to make it so everyone is going to be dying to get a ticket and a seat to watch us play," said Larrañaga that first day. "You may say, 'That ain't happening here.' But I love a challenge."

Well, it's happening.

Larrañaga's dream has come true just as Riley's did.

Canes men's basketball has become a tough ticket. On Monday night, a sellout crowd of nearly 8,000 jammed the team's cozy campus arena to watch No. 15-ranked Miami dominate 24th-ranked Duke.

"I think we have a good team," Larrañaga

said afterward. "I don't think tonight was some big upset."

Legendary Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski went further.

"That was the most physical game we've been involved in this season, by far," he said. "They're better than we are. They're one of the best teams. Jim is one of the best coaches in the country, and they're terrific."

This is an injury-depleted Duke team, granted. Krzyzewski kidded about signing three guys on NBA-style 10-day contracts and holding tryouts for the student body.

But he made no excuse and left no doubt; his Blue Devils got whipped. Miami was better all over the floor.

Tonye Jekiri's defense on Duke star Marshall Plumlee was massive. Sheldon McClellan poured in 21 points. Angel Rodriguez had 13 points and 11 assists. In all UM had 24 assists vs. only seven turnovers.

Gone are the days when the Canes beating Duke was a rarity. Miami is now 4-2 vs. the Blue Devils under Larrañaga.

Some in the Miami media were still pushing the David & Goliath angle after this game, and Coach K wasn't buying it.

"I don't know if you feel like neglected children here or what," he gently chided. "You got a damned good team."

That old mind-set is part of what drives these Hurricanes.

"We're taking pride in making people respect us," Rodriguez said. "A lot of people still don't give us enough credit."

As for the fan base growing commensurately?

This is the first season in any UM sport ever in which the maximum season tickets have been sold and every game is sold out — a far cry from 2011 when Larrañaga was, in effect, going door to door to sell his program.

Of course, not every game sees every seat actually filled. This one did, and it mattered.

"A lot of credit to the crowd," Rodriguez said.

UM's men have made the NCAA Tournament eight times in program history, advancing as far as the Sweet 16 only twice, in 2000 under Leonard Hamilton and 2013 under Larrañaga.

Now, that is expected. This is the new standard that Larrañaga has created.

Still, don't be jaded about what Monday night meant or take for granted that sound as the game ended.

This was still Duke, depleted or not. This was Coach K. Those were ESPN's cameras in the house, and that was iconic Dick Vitale calling the game.

This was an occasion.

And the Hurricanes rose to it and owned it.

Hoop It Up: Miami impresses

The News-Gazette

Bob Asmussen

Jan. 28, 2016

Team of the Week

MIAMI

So, the Hurricanes defeated Duke on Monday. Doesn't everybody? Lately, yes. But Miami earns the honor because of its style. Hope you have seen video of point guard Angel Rodriguez after one of his 11 assists, spreading his arms as if to fly. The celebration followed an alley-oop pass to Sheldon McClellan, who finished with 21 points. Rodriguez scored 13 points, hitting three three-pointers against the defending national champions. Miami coach Jim Larranaga, who looks like a presidential candidate, wasn't into celebrating the win against Duke. "Every game counts as one," the coach said. But beating Duke gives fans across the country another reason to notice Miami outside of football season. The Hurricanes are 16-3 going into Saturday's game at North Carolina State. They have shaken off a two-game losing streak and seem ready for a long run in March.

Assessing Sheldon McClellan's NBA draft stock

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Jan. 27, 2016

Sheldon McClellan, who ranks 10th among Division I guards in shooting percentage (52.9) and ninth among ACC guards in scoring (16.3), has become a legitimate NBA draft prospect in his time at UM.

The 6-foot-5, 205-pound redshirt senior is ranked as an early second-round pick by NBADraft.net, which has him going 36th overall to the Milwaukee Bucks. In its mock selection, DraftExpress.com rates McClellan 52nd overall and sends him to the Boston Celtics.

McClellan was one of 20 players named to the midseason watch list for the national player of the year, the Oscar Robertson Trophy, the U.S. Basketball Writers Association announced Monday (full list below).

A Western Conference scout who watched Miami recently said McClellan profiles as a high second-rounder, with potential to move up (McClellan shining during a deep NCAA tournament run would help his stock, obviously). The scout also said center Tonye Jekiri has a chance to be drafted if he keeps progressing.

With the caveat that pro teams draft players based on projection, not college stats, McClellan has outplayed several other peers in head-to-head competition. He faced five shooting guards ranked on NBADraft's mock. He outscored all.

McClellan scored 21 points and grabbed five rebounds against Florida State's pair of highly-touted freshmen. Dwayne Bacon (17th overall) put up 10 points and five boards and Malik Beasley (21st) had 13 and nine. He put up 21 and two against Duke, while Grayson Allen (18th) posted 17

and four. He scored 18 points and chipped in four assists and two steals in Miami's blowout victory of Mississippi State, while Malik Newman (27th) had 15 points. He had 22 points and five rebounds against Syracuse, while Michael Gbinije (39th) put up 10 and six in the same 38-minute span.

Aside from Bacon, Beasley, Allen and Newman, other projected first-round shooting guards on NBADraft's mock: Cal freshman Jaylen Brown (No. 3 overall), Oklahoma senior Buddy Hield (No. 7), Kentucky freshman Jamal Murray (No. 11), Turkish prospect Furkan Korkmaz (No. 13) and Michigan senior Caris LeVert (No. 15), Michigan State senior Denzel Valentine (No. 23), Arizona freshman Allonzo Trier (No. 25) and French prospect Timothe Luwawu (No. 29). Wichita State senior Ron Baker is 33rd.

Right behind McClellan are Kansas junior Wayne Selden (No. 37). Gbinije (No. 39) and Cal senior Tyrone Wallace (No. 42).

DraftExpress' mock has many of the same players, and ranks two that were not on NBADraft's board: Kansas sophomore Sviatoslav Mykhailiuk (No. 25) and LSU junior Tim Quarterman (No. 43).

The list of Oscar Robertson candidates includes McClellan, Allen, Hield, Valentine, Notre Dame's Demetrius Jackson and North Carolina's Brice Johnson.

The others:

Kris Dunn, Providence

Kahlil Felder, Oakland

Yogi Ferrell, Indiana

Jalen Jones, Texas A&M

Monte Morris, Iowa State

Georges Niang, Iowa State

Gary Payton II, Oregon State

Ben Simmons, LSU

Melo Trimble, Maryland

Tyler Ulis, Kentucky

Jarrod Uthoff, Iowa

Fred VanVleet, Wichita State

Kyle Wiltjer, Gonzaga

Observations: Miami capable of earning high NCAA seed

CBS Sports
Jon Rothstein
Jan. 26, 2016

Guard play? Check.

Experience? Check.

A proven head coach that's won big in the NCAA Tournament? Absolutely.

Miami's 11-point win over Duke on Monday night in Coral Gables' reiterated their defensive ability and penchant for unselfishness. Just two days after the Blue Devils scored 87 points in a road win at NC State, the Hurricanes held them to just 69.

Jim Larranaga's interior combination of Kamari Murphy and Tonye Jekiri spearheaded a defensive effort that held Duke to just 41.7 percent from the field and the Hurricanes also had 24 assists to just seven turnovers.

Miami (16-3) starts four different players -- Murphy, Jekiri, Angel Rodriguez, and Sheldon McClellan -- who are in their minimum fourth year of college basketball and that type of savvy can't be taken lightly.

This squad has all the requisites to challenge for a high seed in the NCAA Tournament.

Coach L intent on pushing Canes farther than ever

Palm Beach Post

Dave George

Jan. 26, 2016

Can't really think about marching anywhere near an NCAA title until March gets here. Heck, Miami hasn't even made it to February yet, no matter how quickly that win over Duke's defending national champions on Monday night will tend to accelerate the madness.

Still, there is reason to trust in Jim Larranaga pushing the Hurricanes farther than they have even been. In this 10th-anniversary season of Coach L's run to the Final Four, it's beginning to feel almost inevitable.

He got there with George Mason in 2006. Even now that amazes. Larranaga worked in the CAA, not the ACC, back then. Doesn't matter if you know that CAA stands for Colonial Athletic Association because everybody recognizes, at a glance, that those two are utterly different in terms of reputation and championship history.

So George Mason, unranked all season in the AP poll and stuck with a No. 11 seed in the NCAA tournament, rolled through Michigan State, North Carolina and Connecticut to earn a national semifinal shot at Florida.

"Did you see the movie 'Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid?' " Coach L asked during one of his Final Four media sessions. "Butch and Sundance were being chased by these detectives. They kept trying to lose them but they couldn't, so they just kept asking themselves, 'Who are these guys?' Well, we're those guys."

The end came suddenly, of course, with a 73-58 loss to the first of Billy Donovan's two national title teams at Florida. Everybody figured that Coach L, then 56,

had reached his career peak. He went home, sure enough, but he never went away.

That old quote – "We're those guys" – would have worked all over again in the 2012-13 season, Larranaga's second as Miami coach, when the Hurricanes made it all the way to No. 2 in the mid-February AP poll. Then came an ACC regular-season championship, and the conference tournament title, too, both of them school firsts.

Maybe all of those things won't happen this year, but in the bigger picture it need not matter.

That 2013 Miami team lost in the NCAA Sweet 16 round, matching the Hurricanes' deepest run under coach Leonard Hamilton back in the old Big East days.

This Miami team, 16-3 so far, is better.

"They're terrific," five-time NCAA champion Mike Krzyzewski said after Miami beat his Dukies 80-69 the other night. "They're as respected as anybody in the league, and throughout the country, because they're that good. People respect talent and certainly they respect Jim. He knows what to do with the talent."

Must be true. Miami has no one listed among the ACC's top-10 scorers, but the Hurricanes are scoring nearly 80 points per game all the same. On the defensive side, Coach L has a highly-disciplined unit knitted together by seniors and the biggest of those, 7-foot shotblocker Tonye Jekiri, grabs 10 rebounds per game. There's depth to spare, too, including a 6-foot-10 Spaniard named Ivan Cruz Uceda who is hitting nearly half of his three-point tries.

With all this experience, it feels like the Hurricanes should do some serious

business, and it's well past time.

Jacksonville wrote the first major March Madness headlines in this state, reaching the national championship game in 1970. Florida State did the same in 1972. Florida has a pair of NCAA titles and five trips to the Final Four. Florida Gulf Coast reached the Sweet 16 three years ago in the program's first-ever NCAA appearance.

Coach L has sufficient momentum to take the Hurricanes up that same mountain.

He did it at George Mason. Why should it shock anyone if he did it at Miami?

Five Observations from Miami's Win Over Duke

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Jan. 26, 2016

It was a late night for yours truly.

I have watched last night's sensational performance by the 'Canes no less than 3 times.

And although the 80-69 win over the Blue Devils was far from perfect, it displayed how talented and tough this Hurricanes group is.

Before we get started on what made it such a complete performance, a little dancing.

These kids deserved to have some fun after that victory. Beating Duke, even a Coach K squad that is struggling a bit at 4-4 in the conference, is always a big deal.

Some Thoughts:

#1 Was this the best performance of Angel Rodriguez' career? Yes we went for 25 points, 5 assists, and 5 steals last season at Cameron. And he was the MVP of the Puerto Rico Tip Off earlier this year. But I love how confidently he shot the ball early on, and his career high 11 assists were the big difference in the game. When Angel looks to be a passer first and get his talented teammates the ball in positions to score, this team takes it to another level. But it was all set up by the fact he made enough shots early to be a threat. UM needs more of this kind of play from Rodriguez going forward. Easy choice for player of the game last night.

#2 Speaking of assists....In his pregame speech, Coach L told his team the names on the back of the jerseys did not matter and it was all about team ball. Boy did they listen. Miami had 24 helpers on 30

made buckets. That is impressive. Sheldon McClellan, Ja'Quan Newton, and even Tonye Jekiri all had strong games passing the ball.

#3 If I have one small complaint about McClellan, it is that he is often too unselfish and laid back. Well he too was aggressive last night (particularly in the second half) and played an emotional game. Almost too much so as he was nearly called for a T on two occasions last night. But I loved seeing the senior play the game with lots of passion. McClellan is the Hurricanes' best overall player. If he can raise his game another level, Miami has a shot to win the ACC and go deep into March Madness.

#4 Dickie V called Newton, "the best 6th man in America" last night. The sophomore from Philly (15 points, 5 rebounds, 5 assists in 23 minutes) is not making a liar of Vitale. Another spectacular performance off the bench.

#5 Last but but not least, props to the fans and the especially the student section at the BUC last night. Duke played their hearts out. But every time they got close, UM fed off the sold out crowd to find the energy to stretch the lead. This team loves playing in front of boisterous spectators. Let's hope last night was something we see for the rest of the home schedule.

Enjoy this one 'Canes fans. And enjoy your day!

Jekiri's passing, defense crucial as UM turns back Duke

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 25, 2016

In the aftermath of the University of Miami's 80-69 win over Duke, coach Jim Larrañaga remained calm and measured when discussing the importance of Monday's victory.

But Larrañaga couldn't help but light up and gasp when asked about two late assists from senior center Tonye Jekiri.

"Ask these guys," said Larrañaga, pointing to Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan. "How cool were his assists?"

"Who?" asked Rodriguez, busy attending to the ice wrapped around his leg.

"Who? Our playmaker," Larrañaga said.

The passes came on consecutive possessions from the top of the arc. With Duke cutting into Miami's single-digit lead, Jekiri stood and delivered a pair of perfect assists. The first, a give-and-go pass that sliced between two Duke defenders, found Ja'Quan Newton. Next, he found a wide-open Davon Reed for a reverse lay-in.

Those assists, plus a first-half pass around Brandon Ingram that led to a McClellan three-pointer, were perhaps the most apparent signs of Jekiri's strong performance Monday night. His ability to make Duke center Marshall Plumlee uncomfortable, however, was far more important.

"Marshall Plumlee gets so many dunks in games, because when you help up, they throw it to him," Larrañaga said. "Bam, he bangs it. Tonye did not let them get that kind of basket. He is such a smart defender. In my mind he's the most fundamentally sound big man, both guarding ball screens,

down screens, playing big men in the low post. He doesn't foul. He rebounds."

Jekiri's ability to stay out of foul trouble has taken years to develop. Last year, he averaged 3.1 fouls and fouled out of five games. In 12 others, he picked up at least four personals. This season, his average has dropped a few ticks to 2.8 per game, but he has yet to foul out of a game.

After Saturday's win against Wake Forest, Larrañaga called Jekiri a smart, fundamentally sound defender. When a 7-foot center can play almost 30 minutes per game, that's a nice luxury. That hasn't always been the case, though.

"Freshman year," Larrañaga said Saturday, "he fouled [former UM players] Kenny Kadji, Reggie Johnson and Julian Gamble [in practice] every time they caught the ball. I mean every time. I said, 'You do know you're fouling?' 'No, I'm not.' 'You are.'"

On Monday, Jekiri finished with three personals in 34 minutes, but the first came with 7:27 to go and the third was a ticky-tack call in the final minute. At no point was he in any foul trouble.

In Miami's attempt to contain Plumlee, who finished with seven points and nine rebounds, Jekiri's availability can't be overstated. Plumlee lost the ball out of bounds on several occasions and didn't record his first field goal until 5:13 to go in the contest.

Jekiri made his own presence felt on offense. In addition to his three assists, the senior finished with seven points, and six of his 10 rebounds came on the offensive glass.

Miami's physicality was mentioned multiple times by Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski,

who said his team hadn't played a game like that all season. Jekiri's play near the basket was one of the best examples of that physicality.

Over and over, especially in the first half, either Plumlee or Grayson Allen were forced to either take contested shots or kick the ball out to shooters. Two of Duke's second-half field goals were tipped or partially blocked by Jekiri, who finished with two blocks.

"He's such a great rim protector," Krzyzewski said, "and so that allows your perimeter to be even more aggressive because he can erase mistakes. All the really good defensive teams have that combination."

After Monday's passing display, Miami might want to test him out at point guard, too.

7 players 6-feet and under who are making waves

NCAA.com
Austin Vaughn
Jan. 24, 2016

You don't have to be a giant to make your presence known on the college basketball court. Here are seven players 6-feet and under who are making waves in the DI ranks.

Angel Rodriguez (5-11) Sr., Miami (Fla.)

The guard makes 40 percent of his field goals, averages 11 points per game and keeps teams honest with his 78.1 free throw percentage. Rodriguez may not tower over you, but he can rock you like a Hurricane.

Tyler Ulis (5-foot-9) So., Kentucky

Not only does this diminutive Wildcat contribute just south of 15 points per game for Coach Cal and Co. But, Ulis also boasts an impressive 83.3 percent free-throw percentage.

J.J Frazier (5-10) Jr., Georgia

This upperclassman makes a big impact when he's on the court. The junior averages 15 points per game, shooting in the 40s from both inside the perimeter and from 3-point land. And that's not all. Frazier averages four assists and five rebounds -- yes, rebounds -- per game.

Lester Medford (5-10) Sr., Baylor

Medford's contributions to the Bears' offense is threefold. The senior averages nine points per game, seven assists and shoots 70.7 percent from the foul line.

Frank Mason III (5-11) Jr., Kansas

Mason averages 13 points per game but his scoring ability isn't all that this Jayhawk has going for him. He also averages just south of five rebounds and five assists per game.

Jordan Woodard (6-0) Jr., Oklahoma

The Sooners' have so many weapons. But, averaging 14.6 points a game is clutch even for a taller player. Woodard is also hitting more than 50 percent of his 3's.

Joel Berry II (6-0) So., North Carolina

Berry's 12.5 points and 4.3 assists per game make him a small but strong contribution to the Tar Heel offense, but his accuracy is just as impressive. The sophomore shoots 39.5 percent from 3-point land and 79.6 percent from the foul line.

UM hopes to continue momentum as Wake Forest visits

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 22, 2016

Known for his innovative motivational tactics, University of Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga turned to reggae singer Bobby McFerrin's Don't Worry, Be Happy song to help prepare the 15th-ranked Hurricanes for Saturday's home game against Wake Forest.

The honorary captain for the game is Boca Raton 16-year-old Kyle Soto, who is battling lymphoma. Larrañaga said he would use the moment to give his players a dose of life perspective that he hopes translates onto the court.

"I think our guys need to appreciate life more," he said. "In fact, we're going to be playing a very specific song that has a lot of meaning, and I hope that meaning will come through."

The Canes (14-3, 3-2 Atlantic Coast Conference) are coming off a road win over Boston College after losing back-to-back games at Virginia and Clemson. Miami looked like it was on its way to losing a third in a row in the first half against Boston College, but it managed to pick things up in the second half and came away with a 67-53 victory.

Angel Rodriguez had been in a bit of a funk and was scoreless in the first half, but he finished with 12 points. Tonye Jekiri had 17 rebounds, and Sheldon McClellan led UM with 19 points.

"It was very important to get that win," McClellan said. "Any time you have a two-game losing streak, you need to win no matter how ugly or how pretty."

On Saturday, UM plays a Wake Forest team that is 1-5 in the ACC. But Larrañaga

insists his team will not take the Demon Deacons lightly and will not look past them to Monday's home game against Duke.

"A team that beat Indiana, which is undefeated in the Big 10; beat LSU with the No. 1 prospect in the country, Ben Simmons, beat UCLA, N.C. State ... does that sound like a team you should look past? I don't think so. Our guys know how good these guys are," Larrañaga said.

He pointed out that Wake Forest ranks third in the conference in tempo.

He called Devin Thomas "a dynamic inside guy ... perhaps the best low-post skilled player" in the league. He said Codi Miller-McIntyre "is the premier layup maker in this league and maybe in the country."

Of freshman Doral Moore, he said: "When he walks on the floor, you think, 'Oh that guy's an NBA player. 7-1, 240, longest arms, biggest hands, runs and jumps like an NBA player. He looks like DeAndre Jordan [of the Los Angeles Clippers]."

SATURDAY: NO. 15 UM MEN VS. WAKE FOREST

When, where: Noon; BankUnited Center.

TV, radio: Channel 33; WOAM 560, WVUM 90.5 FM.

Records: Wake Forest 10-8, 1-5 ACC; UM 14-3, 3-2.

Scouting report: Wake Forest has lost three games in a row and five of its past six. ... The Hurricanes are coming off a road victory over Boston College, following a pair of road losses against Virginia and Clemson. ... Players to watch for Wake Forest include Codi Miller-McIntyre, Devin Thomas and Doral Moore.

Hurricanes drop in polls, but Huell a McDonald's All-American

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Jan. 18, 2016

Despite a pair of tough losses last week, the Hurricanes are enjoying a fine season – one that continues to offer plenty of hope for the future.

Miami (13-3, 2-2 ACC) fell five spots to No. 14 in the coaches poll after losing twice on the road. Miami, which dropped games at then-No. 13 Virginia and at red-hot Clemson, looked even worse in the Associated Press poll. It dropped seven spots to No. 15.

Some good news: incoming Hurricane Dewan Huell, the 6-foot-9, 220-pound power forward from Miami Norland High, was named a McDonald's All-American late Sunday.

He is the fourth UM recruit to achieve that honor, which was first bestowed in 1977. The others: Tito Horford (1985, the year Miami restarted its basketball program after a 14-year hiatus), Steve Edwards (1992) and Darius Rice (2000).

According to Scout.com, Huell is UM's third five-star recruit since 2002 and first since Durand Scott (2009) and Dequan Jones (2008). Huell is rated 20th nationally by 247, 21st by ESPN, 23rd by Rivals and 25th by Scout.

UM describes him as "a fluid player who finishes around the rim ... runs the floor and can beat his man off the dribble. He can hit the open 15-footer, as well as play with his back to the basket, scoring with a jump hook. ... has the ability to elevate quickly, giving him the ability to block shots and grab offensive rebounds."

He isn't the only blue-chipper on the way to Coral Gables. The Hurricanes signed

combo guard Bruce Brown (6-4, 200) who was bumped up to a five-star rating by 247Sports yesterday. He is a consensus four-star prospect on all other websites. His national rankings: 22nd (247), 30th (ESPN), 44th (Scout) and 49th (Rivals).

Miami, which is still recruiting other players, also signed four-star center Rodney Miller (6-11, 245). He is rated 91st overall by Scout, 100th by 247 and 114th by Rivals. He is not in ESPN's top 100.

UM's signing class appears to be the first consensus top-10 class in program history. It is rated eighth nationally by Scout and 247 and ninth by ESPN and 247Sports.

As for the current squad, it improved in the NCAA's official RPI (No. 17, up two spots from last week. In another important NCAA tournament selection metric, strength of schedule, the Hurricanes are rated No. 34 (KenPom.com), No. 41 (CBS), No. 42 (TeamRankings.com, Warren Nolan) and No. 44 (RealTimeRPI).

UM visits Boston College (7-10, 0-4) at 9 p.m. Wednesday and hosts Wake Forest at noon Saturday before Monday's home game against No. 20 Duke (7 p.m., ESPN).

"I think you have to understand the league and the nature of it. Everybody's got good players. Everybody's capable of beating you," coach Jim Larranaga said. "I don't think you can really figure out who's good until the end of the season."

Rodriguez' revival may hold key to Miami's fortunes

Examiner

Paul Borden

Jan. 15, 2016

The line in the box score for Miami's loss to Virginia would seem to indicate somewhat of a revival for Hurricanes' Angel Rodriguez.

After going just 3-of-17 from the field in Miami's first two Atlantic Coast Conference games and missing all of his 13 attempts from behind the 3-point arc, the senior point guard was 6-of-13 against the Cavaliers and led the Hurricanes in scoring with 17 points in the 66-58 setback. He was 2-of-6 from 3-point range.

But delving a little deeper, Rodriguez also blew a couple of layups and also missed a couple of free throws, including the first of a one-and-one, that could have turned things more in Miami's favor. He still has some work to do to get to the level of play the Hurricanes will need when they take on Clemson Saturday (2 p.m. ACC Network stations) as well as on down the line in ACC play.

"Angel's just got to be Angel," coach Jim Larranaga said at his weekly briefing the day before the team departed for Greenville, South Carolina, where the Tigers are playing their home games while their home arena, Littlejohn Coliseum, is being renovated. "He's got to play his game."

Larranaga's concerns — though not many; after all, even with the loss to the Cavaliers, the Hurricanes are 13-2 overall and 2-1 in conference play — go beyond Rodriguez.

"My concern right now more is volume of 3s we're taking, settling for 3-point shots," he said. "They're not bad shots, but when you're not shooting a great percentage

from 3, then go inside and make some 2s."

For the season, the Hurricanes are averaging 20 3-point attempts a game and hitting on 36.5 percent of them.

But in their last three games — all conference outings — they have averaged nearly 24 a game and hit only 15 for 21.1 percent. They were 3-of-25 and 6-of-24 in wins over Syracuse and Florida State, respectively, and 6-of-22 against Virginia.

"We really need to be around 17-18 3-point attempts," he said.

In non-conference play, they averaged 19 attempts a game from long range.

"So if we become more selective, turn down some of those and drive it and get to the rim, maybe we'll get fouled a little more, which is really what we need to do," he said.

In 12 non-conference games, the Hurricanes got to the free-throw line an average of 25 times a game. They have fallen to 22 attempts a game in three league affairs, but more than half their 67 attempts (34) came in the win over Syracuse. They had only 16 free throw attempts against Florida State and only 17 against Virginia.

The game at Clemson is the second of a three-game road stretch for the Hurricanes and promises to be a much stiffer challenge than it might have appeared in December. The Tigers were only 7-5 in non-conference play but have won four in a row, including a win over Duke, since sustaining their annual loss at North Carolina to open ACC play to improve to 11-6 overall.

Miami is on the road again Wednesday at Boston College before getting back home on Jan. 23 to host Wake Forest.

Three Things You Need to Know Before Miami Takes on Clemson

Canes Warning
Austin Sapin
Jan. 14, 2016

Losses are never easy to take, but in the ACC if you don't get right up off the mat, those defeats might just start to pile up. For the No. 8 Miami Hurricanes, they better hope they aren't getting a ten-count come Saturday afternoon.

After a tough loss at No. 13 Virginia on Tuesday night, Miami and Coach Jim Larranaga will have their hands full once again as they head to South Carolina to take on a resurgent Clemson fresh off of wins over Duke and Louisville.

While it's still early on in conference play, Miami will surely want to get back to their winning ways and climb back to the top of the ACC heap.

With the game just two days away, here are the three things you need to know before 13-2 Miami takes on 11-6 Clemson:

The Tigers have some bad losses on the resume, but it doesn't matter, they're on fire right now.

There might not be a team in the country playing better basketball over the last four games than the Clemson Tigers. Consecutive wins over Florida St., Syracuse, No. 16 Louisville and No. 9 Duke have Brad Brownell's squad near the top of the ACC even though they were picked to finish 12th in the ACC Media Preseason Poll.

Their recent rise is a bit unexpected though, especially because of how they started. Through the first 13 games, Clemson went 7-6, including poor losses to Minnesota, UMass and a home defeat to Alabama. In their last loss of that 13-game stretch though, the Tigers kept it close with North Carolina for most of the game, but fell just a bit short. That's when things changed.

Led by stingy defense and some impressive performances by Jaron Blossomgame, the Tigers pulled off those four straight victories to move to third in the ACC at the time of writing.

Blossomgame has been Clemson's star all year averaging 15.4 points and 7.1 rebounds a game. The 6-7 forward could pose an interesting matchup decision for the Miami

staff who could put either Davon Reed or Kamari Murphy on the junior.

Besides Blossomgame, the Tigers don't have too many stars, but they do have a solid cast around him that includes four other players with a points per game average above 8.5. One of those players is 6-8 forward Donte Grantham who had 12 points against Louisville and 16 points vs. Duke. The sophomore has a big frame, but is a more of a three-point threat, which is why I'll be interested to see what defensive matchups Miami prefers.

One last player that is in that bunch but won't get much attention is 6-10 Landry Nnoko. The center has been a bit inconsistent this season, but the Cameroonian had his best game of the season vs. Duke with 12 points and 13 rebounds. We saw Miami get dominated on the interior against Virginia and if the Canes want to come away from Clemson with a victory, Tonye Jekiri's battle with Nnoko will be a huge factor.

These players have been crucial to the Tigers' hot run and if Miami wants to end that stretch, it'll be important to shutdown that Clemson trio. If not Coach Brownell's squad might add another scalp to their already impressive resume.

Clemson haven't been friendly hosts to the Canes of late.

Miami's last trip to Clemson wasn't a pleasant one as they fell 58-54 to the Tigers in March of 2014. "That team was rebuilding though" people might argue. Well, the best team in Miami's recent history in 2012-13 narrowly escaped defeat against Clemson in February of 2013 with a 45-43 victory. Trust me, this is a hard place to play.

Luckily for the Hurricanes, this season's team will avoid having to play at the raucous Littlejohn Coliseum as Clemson's permanent arena is undergoing a renovation. But even at the Bon Secours Wellness Arena, other opponents like Louisville and Duke haven't fared much better.

If the Hurricanes can get out to an early lead and dash any hopes of another upset in the first half, they may be able to take the Clemson crowd out of the game. Against Virginia, Miami's slow start allowed the Cavalier faithful to stay in the game when an early run could have planted a seed early

that they would likely drop their third straight game.

The Tigers are 9-2 at home this season and besides their loss to Alabama, the only other defeat came from undefeated South Carolina. This may not be a place like Cameron Indoor or the Dean Smith Center, but Miami will certainly have to be prepared for a tough and electric atmosphere come Saturday afternoon.

Miami has had some offensive struggles, but Clemson won't be the best place to solve those.

In the first 11 games the season, the Miami Hurricanes scored at least 85 points eight times. In the next four games though, they've scored over 75 just once. The Canes are in a bit of an offensive drought, let's face it.

While they have won three of those four games, Miami has averaged just 24.7 points in the first half and have needed Sheldon McClellan or Ja'Quan Newton to bail the team out with unreal second half performances. As we saw against Virginia, when you come against better teams, that formula just isn't sustainable.

Now going into their game against Clemson, things won't get any easier. The Tigers have allowed just 62.2 points a game this season and currently come in at No. 16 in total scoring defense in the country.

Miami has to figure out a way to get someone on their bench going besides Ja'Quan Newton because the only production coming from the reserves recently has been a few threes from Ivan Cruz Uceda.

If the Canes are only getting reliable scoring from two players, that is an issue and if they don't figure it out before Saturday, Miami may find themselves back on the mat and in the midst of a two-game losing streak.

Ranking Top 100 college hoops players for first 2 months

CBS Sports
Sam Vecenie
Jan. 13, 2016

99. Tonye Jekiri | C | Miami (Fla.) (PR: 66)

24. Sheldon McClellan | G | Miami (Fla.) (PR: 70): We're just at the point where McClellan's terrific shooting numbers are what they are, and deserve to be recognized. He's the only power conference player shooting 55 percent from the field, making 40 percent of his 3s, making 87 percent of his free throws, and scoring at least 16 per game. Plus, defensively he's been pretty good this season, taking on a lot of the toughest assignments each night. Also, he can really sky jump off of two feet.

The Floor Is Yours: There's no substitute for a strong bench

ESPN

Myron Medcalf

Jan. 11, 2016

The funny thing about the Monmouth Bench Mob is that the Hawks' reserves had to dance and re-enact movie scenes to get noticed.

"Look! Over there on the bench! They're doing the bull-matador thing! They're hilarious!"

But Monmouth's instant fame also reminded us that most reserves enjoy a limited spotlight, so it seemed appropriate to grant the Hawks their 15 minutes.

We're fascinated because the bench doesn't really matter until it really matters.

That's the life of most players whose names you never hear over the public address system during intros or see on the cover of game programs. They're the kids who often receive their greatest receptions on senior night. Until then, they're just that "tall dude who plays a few minutes for Vanderbilt sometimes" or that skinny point guard who rarely removes his warm-ups for pick a school unless there's a blowout.

Everyone knows Ben Simmons. But if the LSU Tigers released an album, you'd only find the name Josh Gray (7.5 PPG, 18.1 MPG) in small print on the back of the vinyl's cover.

Yet, the bench matters. In a season that features a brand of equity within the projected field of 68 that tends to produce our most memorable conclusions in March, the programs that can count on reserves to offer significant contributions maintain an edge.

The weekend's action centered on that concept.

As Arizona trudged through a four-overtime loss at USC, the second consecutive loss for Arizona, Trojans reserve Elijah Stewart (27 points) scored more than any other player on the floor and his late free throws

sealed the win.

Baylor defeated Iowa State in Ames for the second consecutive season as the Cyclones' bench recorded five points combined and Bears standout Johnathan Motley collected 27 points, more than any player on Iowa State's roster.

Melo Trimble's game winner in Madison lit the Twittersphere aflame, but don't underestimate the impact of "reserve" and likely one-and-done Diamond Stone (11 points in 23 minutes). And if only Jim Boeheim could have brokered a midgame trade for Isaiah Hicks (21 points, eight rebounds) in Syracuse's loss to North Carolina.

Kansas escaped Lubbock with a good road win over Texas Tech even though Cheick Diallo, a McDonald's All-American, logged just three minutes. How many teams could keep an NBA prospect off the floor and still win a tough road game against a dangerous opponent like Texas Tech?

One of Virginia's issues in its upset loss at Georgia Tech: The Cavaliers couldn't corral reserve Nick Jacobs, who scored 16 points in 22 minutes of action off the bench.

And their reserves stayed quiet. The team with 10 guys isn't deep if five of them can't acquit themselves well against top competition.

Virginia inserts 11 players most nights.

But its bench scored 16 points combined in the team's back-to-back losses to unranked opponents. Tony Bennett needs more from that group.

Larry Brown understands.

SMU finished off Cincinnati with just six scholarship players after officials ejected Sterling Brown in the Bearcats' win last week. Will future foul trouble affect SMU's shot at the American championship?

Can Iowa State contend for the Big 12 championship if the Cyclones can't count on their bench for consistent production? How will Boeheim's turbulent season end if his six-man rotation keeps running marathons every game?

Shaka Smart's squad defeated North Carolina in Austin and Stanford on the road. Then Cam Ridley fractured his foot. The Longhorns, who lack a reliable backup in the paint, are 1-3 without Ridley after Saturday's 58-57 loss at TCU -- the Horned Frogs' first victory over the Longhorns in more than 20 years.

This isn't a new idea. Bench production. Depth.

In a chaotic, balanced season like this one, however, teams with contributing sixth or seventh men will fight through the final months of the season with confidence.

An impressive performance on the court, when and if given an opportunity in this crucial stretch, is the only way for a reserve to become a headliner.

Nine all-star reserves

Ja'Quan Newton (Miami): The current group Jim Larranaga guides resembles the Miami team that won the ACC title in 2013 via its depth. Larranaga can employ four of five guys on his bench and feel confident that his squad will not experience a significant reduction in production. And Newton's success this season is central to that notion. The sophomore is averaging 12.1 PPG in 21.6 MPG for the Hurricanes.

Two years after VT, Johnson comes back to Virginia

Richmond Times Dispatch

Mike Barber

Jan. 11, 2016

With one of his former assistants coming off a one-year hiatus from college basketball, Jim Larranaga knew right away the person he wanted to hire when a spot on his Miami staff opened up this offseason.

And James Johnson was happy to rejoin the coach he enjoyed his greatest success alongside.

"He always knew I wanted to get back in it," Johnson, a former Virginia Tech coach, said this week. "I wasn't done with basketball. That's my life, that's my passion."

Johnson, unceremoniously dumped after just two seasons with the Hokies, said he had job offers to stay in the game in 2014-15, but needed time away to digest his experience at Tech and recharge.

But when Larranaga called him about becoming his director of basketball operations at Miami, even though it was a noncoaching position, Johnson jumped.

Johnson was an assistant for Larranaga at George Mason, helping guide the Patriots to the Final Four in 2006.

"He's a great mentor to our players," Larranaga said. "He talks to them individually about their academics. He's an older guy who's been through it. He's not old by any means, but he has a lot of experience under his belt. He's worked in several different college basketball programs. He coached in the CAA, he coached in the Big Ten, he coached in the ACC. He's recruited some outstanding players throughout his career. He really understands what the business is like."

All aspects of the business, including the often cold and unforgiving side.

Johnson, who returns to the commonwealth tonight when No. 8 Miami visits No. 13 Virginia, was hired as Tech's coach a month after leaving Blacksburg for

an assistant's job at Clemson.

When former athletics director Jim Weaver unexpectedly fired combative-but-successful coach Seth Greenberg, now an ESPN analyst, Tech brought Johnson back to the Hokies, who were coming off a last-place finish in the ACC.

Two more last-place finishes followed with Johnson, who went 22-41. But what ultimately did in Johnson was something far beyond his control. Weaver, who had been battling Parkinson's disease, retired because of health concerns at the end of 2013.

His successor, Whit Babcock, made the decision to replace Johnson just a month after taking over as AD.

"This is a business. This is what we're in. This is what I got into. And I knew that going into it," Johnson said. "Do I wish I would have gotten more of an opportunity, more time? Yeah. But I understand that circumstances with a new president, a new athletic director, that was not in the fold there. I don't regret anything."

Both Johnson and Larranaga said future employers should look at Johnson's brief head coaching tenure as a positive.

"I think it's just part of his résumé," Larranaga said. "He has head coaching experience now at the ACC level. He was not given a lot of time to build his own program. I don't think you can judge him based on those two years."

Larranaga, in his fifth year with the Hurricanes, said just now, this year, he feels the Miami program is truly his, with his players on the roster and his principles instilled in what they do. It's showing.

Miami is 13-1 overall and 2-0 in the ACC going into today's game against the Cavaliers (12-3, 1-2), who have lost back-to-back games for the first time since December 2013.

"There are a lot of steps to building a program," Larranaga said. "And I think JJ only was in the infant stages of building his own program when he was let go. It's

very unfortunate for him that he's kind of got to start over. But he's a great addition to my staff and I think he'll be a great head coach one day when he gets another opportunity."

That's Johnson's plan, though for now he said he's enjoying his job at Miami.

"That's the goal again," Johnson said. "You would hope that's the goal of all assistant coaches, to one day run their own program. But right now, that hasn't crossed my mind too much. I'm trying to do the best job I can in this role I have with the University of Miami and Coach Larranaga."

And Larranaga, 57-384 in 32 years as a coach, is enjoying having Johnson around. When he took over the Hokies, the biggest adjustment Johnson said he had was getting used to all the ancillary commitments that came with being a head coach.

At Miami, he tries to make Larranaga's life a bit easier by tackling some of those tasks.

"He knows what I'm going through," Larranaga said. "He knows all the responsibilities I have and he's able to take some of those things off of my plate."

Johnson insisted there's no extra emotion for him being back in the state for Tuesday's game. Moreover, he said there won't be anything extra to Miami's two games against Virginia Tech.

"I had hoped Whit would have given me more time," Johnson said. "But as I go through this business and see what I have seen, you can't say what definitely will happen and won't happen. ... Even realizing the ending, I would do the same thing. I don't have any regrets."

McClellan ignites Miami to rout of Florida State

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 9, 2016

A packed arena on the University of Miami campus. Dick Vitale courtside, screaming superlatives into his microphone. And the 12th-ranked University of Miami Hurricanes, igniting the crowd with rim-shaking dunks and timely three-pointers as they pull away from the Florida State Seminoles.

It was exactly the kind of night coach Leonard Hamilton dreamed about when he toiled in relative obscurity as UM coach at Miami Arena two decades ago. On Saturday, he coached from the visiting bench as the Canes led wire-to-wire and defeated the Noles 72-59 at BankUnited Center.

UM senior guard Sheldon McClellan broke the game open in the second half with slick moves to the rim, perfect 7-for-7 shooting and tenacious defense. He scored 20 of his game-high 21 points after intermission.

"Once he got going in the second half, we just tried to keep getting the ball to him," UM coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He had 20 in the second half, and he did it all kinds of ways — jump shots, he hit a couple of threes, layups, steals. He was outstanding.

"He was 0 for 4 in the first half, but every one of those was a good shot. He just missed a couple. In the second half, he made his first, had a beautiful driving layup, and then once he got it going, it was nonstop. He was red-hot the whole half."

McClellan said it was "all about confidence," and he got a boost when he made a few layups.

"I felt like it was my time to take over the game and have a bigger impact than I did

the first half," he said. "It was just more of an aggressive mind-set in the second half."

Ja'Quan Newton came off the bench and scored 13 points with four assists. Davon Reed added 12, and 7-foot senior center Tonye Jekiri had eight points, 10 rebounds, and a rare coast-to-coast dunk and Eurostep move that drew a loud roar from the crowd of 7,972. The only other time the building got that loud was when new UM football coach Mark Richt was shown courtside, throwing up the "U" and pumping his fist.

"I've never seen Tonye do that, not even in practice," Larrañaga said. "Normally, he gives it up right away. But when he saw the open court, he just kept going. Once he got by [Devon Bookert], it was clear sailing to the basket, and the crowd went crazy. That was very, very exciting."

Hamilton was equally impressed

"[Jekiri's] made as much improvement from freshman to now as anybody in America," Hamilton said. "If there was award for Most Improved Basketball Player over four years, he gets my vote. He's grown tremendously. To be able to go from where he started to a guy who takes the ball the length of the floor and makes a finishing play, you've got to congratulate him. It tells you the type of job they've done here developing him and how much work he's put in."

Last season, FSU lost by four after mounting a heroic comeback, as Xavier Rathan-Mayes scored 30 points in the final 4:38 of the game. This time there was no late-game drama.

FSU closed to within three early in the second half, but Miami responded with a 15-1 run fueled by 10 McClellan points. The Seminoles, who scored 90 points in

a loss to North Carolina five days earlier, were held to 10 percent three-point shooting and 35 percent shooting overall.

"Our kids played hard, but we got beat by a team that's a little more mature and made better decisions," Hamilton said. "They have a great combination of players that give you different looks — great penetrators, guys who are great standing jump shooters, and they attack the basket very well."

Despite the loss, Hamilton took time to praise the progress UM basketball has made under Larrañaga.

"I'm glad to see the community embrace this team and create an atmosphere that's typical of all other ACC venues," he said. "The ACC is the best conference in history, and Miami has developed a team as competitive as any other team and now they have the atmosphere here. It's a credit to the university and the great job Larrañaga's doing."

The Hurricanes play Tuesday at No. 4 Virginia, which lost Saturday. FSU is at N.C. State on Wednesday.

Newton emerging as spark for 12th-ranked 'Canes

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Jan. 8, 2016

Like parents everywhere, Joe Newton wanted better for his son than he had.

So when Ja'Quan Newton started developing into a promising basketball player, his father – a former NABC Division II National Player of the Year who once dreamed of an NBA career for himself – got to work.

He made basketball courts in their home, sometimes even using trash cans to help Ja'Quan improve his shooting. As Ja'Quan got older, there were early-morning workouts before school to help him get stronger. And finally, determined to make sure his son's college basketball dreams weren't derailed by poor grades like his were, Joe Newton enrolled his son at Philadelphia's Neumann-Goretti High School where the point guard went on to become one of the top players in the nation, coveted by traditional college basketball powers like Syracuse and UCLA.

It turned out the Hurricanes wanted him too, saw him as their point guard of the future and so, Ja'Quan Newton, the leading scorer in Philadelphia Catholic School League history landed in Miami.

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Now, a sophomore, Newton has emerged as one of the breakout players for the 12th-ranked Hurricanes, who host rival Florida State (10-4, 0-2) in a key ACC matchup

Saturday at the BankUnited Center.

Newton, the team's backup point guard behind Angel Rodriguez, has become a spark for Miami off the bench and the hope is things will continue getting better for both the 6-foot-2 guard and the Hurricanes (12-1,1-0) as Miami eyes another run at a conference title and the NCAA Tournament.

"Basketball is in my genes from my dad. I was always around it. But he always told me not to make the same mistakes he made," said Newton, who is averaging 12 points per game and is the Hurricanes' second leading scorer. "That's why I'm here now. He wanted me to be around different things. My dad, my brother, my sister and my mom, who passed away, are my support. They're my motivation."

Newton has found plenty of support in Coral Gables too, where Rodriguez, a veteran who has played in both the ACC and Big 12, has tried to mentor Newton, especially after the transfers of former Hurricane guards Manu Lecomte and Deandre Burnett.

Their departures meant a bigger role for the sophomore and this offseason, Newton dedicated plenty of time to improving his game.

He worked in the weight room to get bigger and stronger. He took countless shots from the free throw line and tried to better his jump shot and his defense. And he spent extra time putting up shots from 3-point range, an effort that paid off in Miami's ACC opener last week when two of his second-half treys keyed a run that helped the Hurricanes pull away and later earned him praise from interim Orange coach Mike Hopkins, who couldn't help but note Syracuse wanted Newton in New York.

The Hurricanes, who also aggressively recruited Newton and made themselves a presence at as many of his high school and AAU games as possible—are grateful things went differently.

"He positioned himself to do what he's doing now and we're very confident in his abilities," Miami coach Jim Larrañaga said. "What's great is his attitude. He's our [second] leading scorer, yet he comes in off the bench. He handles that role and is our sixth man, to be our catalyst off the bench."

For Newton, the Syracuse game and the praise from Hopkins were highlights. So, too, was the chance to return home in December and play in front of family and friends when the Hurricanes dominated La Salle at the Palestra, the same gym where Newton won four Catholic League championships in high school.

Joe Newton figures there were dozens of people there sporting Miami's orange and green and cheering on his son, who has made it a point to try and set an example for many from his neighborhood.

"Philadelphia is really crazy up here and kids get in trouble left and right," Joe Newton said. "When he comes home, he plays with the kids and they look up to him. We just don't see that many success stories. Sometimes I think I'm dreaming. I always pictured something like this happening for him, but now it's real and I can't express how proud we are of him and what he's doing now."

Most Important Bench Players in Basketball

Bleacher Report

Brian Pedersen

Jan. 8, 2016

Even the best college basketball players need a break from time to time, which is why having a dependable bench becomes so important. The ability to have reserves who can step in and maintain the same level of play as starters is often what separates the good teams from the great ones.

Several of the country's top teams this season are getting key contributions from bench players—ones who are good enough to start but either can't break the starting five or are more valuable as a backup.

We've ranked the eight most important reserves in college basketball based on their production, the role they play and their impact on the 2015-16 season to this point.

No. 8 Ja'Quan Newton

Seniors Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez and junior Davon Reed are firmly entrenched in Miami's backcourt as starters, but the trio only play about 70 percent of the available minutes each game. That's because the Hurricanes have a very capable backup in sophomore Ja'Quan Newton—one of the country's most improved players this season.

The 6'1" Newton has tripled his scoring from 4.0 points per game as a freshman to 12.0, which is second-best on the team. In 21.7 minutes per game, he's shooting 51.6 percent from the field including 61.3 percent over his last four games.

Newton has also shown a knack for playing hard defense, and his comfort on the court has prevented Miami from having to overwork Rodriguez at the point,

so he's fresh later in the season. In 2014-15 Rodriguez wore down and eventually missed time because of injuries that could have been prevented had he had someone to spell him.

Jay Larranaga Steps in for Brad Stevens with Celtics

Boston Globe
Gary Washburn
Jan. 8, 2016

It didn't matter that the Celtics players wanted to do everything possible to give coach Brad Stevens something to smile about. He was in Indiana at the bedside of former Butler player Andrew Smith, who is battling cancer.

Stevens left the team Thursday afternoon, handing the coaching responsibilities to assistant Jay Larranaga, but the Celtics' problems remained impossible to overcome. They turned in another putrid shooting night and wasted numerous chances to steal a road win, dropping a 101-92 decision to the Chicago Bulls at United Center.

"We got a little anxious," Larranaga said. "We can't get distracted with things we can't control. I thought a couple of times we started worrying about the referees instead of playing our game and we let some of their guys get open for a couple of open shots."

Father knows best

When he found out he would be coaching his first NBA regular season game, Larranaga reached out to his father, Jim Larranaga, the head coach at the University of Miami.

Through text message, dad offered some instruction, "Don't talk to the refs," he relayed to his son.

Most improved sophomores

Rivals.com

Eric Bossi

Jan. 5, 2016

Often times, the biggest leap in a college player's career comes between his freshman and sophomore seasons. Providence may have a player of the year candidate in senior Kris Dunn, but one of the biggest reasons they are a top 10 team is because of the leap sophomore power forward Ben Bentil has taken. Bentil is one of 10 making big strides.

Here is our list of top 10 most-improved sophomores, listed alphabetically.

JaQuan Newton, PG, Miami

This season: 12.0 points, 2.9 assists and 2.5 rebounds per game.

High school: Four-star, No. 37 overall in 2014.

Analysis: With some veterans in the Miami backcourt, Newton has had to grind for his time, but he has really come on in year number two. He can still be a bit turnover prone at times, but that's a result of his hard-charging style. Newton is also developing into a tough defensive player and should be a two-way star in the ACC as an upperclassman.

Miami's Mr. Intangible: Kamari Murphy

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Jan. 4, 2016

Everyone knows what a superb scorer Sheldon McClellan is.

When his game is on, Angel Rodriguez is the floor general.

And Ja'Quan Newton's emerging play is easily one of the top stories of the season thus far.

But of late, another player is quietly emerging as one of the most important and irreplaceable pieces to the Miami puzzle.

Athletic PF Kamari Murphy and his ability to guard just about any position on the floor has helped the Hurricanes sparkle defensively in rallies over the past two contests Vs Princeton and Syracuse.

His stat line may not make you look twice.

On the season Murphy is averaging just 6.6 ppg, 5.8 rpg, and 1.3 bpg.

However over his last two contests, he is an exceptionally efficient 9-12 from the floor and has collected 13 boards and 4 blocks, all while playing the stout defense that helped UM twice come from behind to record double digit victories.

Any scoring he provides is a bonus, and he even had a pretty assist that led to a McClellan fast break dunk in the second half Vs the Orange.

Not to mention his abilities above the rim are very aesthetically pleasing.

But this is a player who's value can not be measured in numbers. Even if his production is slowly catching up to his intangibles.

Miami takes on FSU this Saturday at the BUC, 5PM EST on ESPN2.

Murphy will once again be a key cog Vs a long, athletic Seminoles team.

As UM makes its' way though the rigors of the ACC schedule, the junior transfer from Oklahoma State by way of Brooklyn, will continue to be extremely important.

Keep an eye on #21 this weekend, and going forward.

A Conversation with CanesHoops Coach Caputo

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Jan. 1, 2016

With a team in the top 15 of both voter polls as well as objective mathematical rankings like the RPI and KenPom.com, it's obvious that the Miami Hurricanes are on track for success even in the gauntlet that is ACC play. But the coaches see their success in the non-conference as something other than building a resume for Selection Sunday.

"Obviously, we have a very good non-conference record. Short of a jump shot at the buzzer (against Northeastern), we'd be undefeated," said Caputo. "More than that, we did some good things in terms of improvement during the non-conference that will help us in league play. We got better as we went along, showed some resiliency, and had big wins where we needed to come together and show some maturity, growth and toughness."

After Northeastern hit 12 three-pointers in the upset and Nebraska hit nine in pushing the Hurricanes to overtime, the staff pressed for a renewed emphasis in taking away the opponents' three-point shot. Caputo cites the constant improvement on defense as the biggest key to the season, and the reason why the Hurricanes have had five consecutive double-digit wins in the last month since those two games.

"I actually thought we were getting better as the season started...we were moving in the right direction but without [Kamari] Murphy," Caputo said, referring to the transfer forward who is known for his defensive versatility. "Even though he came back against Butler and Utah, he really wasn't comfortable having sat out a full year and a couple of games (to start this year). I knew when he came back and got into rhythm on defense, he

was going to be a lot better. I really think we've improved (since then). Going into the Princeton game, we were 33 in the KenPom (defensive rating), and despite dropping a few points (now 39), we played a good game. Now, we did turn the ball over enough that they got 'pick-six' plays (easy points off of turnovers) and so if you take those out, they were like at 1.0 points per possession, had we not turned it over we would have been under 1, which was a very good defensive game."

In spite of those turnovers and moments of carelessness in the Princeton game, UM is still running one of the country's most efficient offenses. KenPom has the team as the seventh-best adjusted offense nationally, and a big reason for that has been taking and making higher-percentage shots. The team is eighth nationally shooting at 51.0 percent, 17th in three-point percentage at 41.2 percent, and sixth in free throw shooting at 77.4 percent. At 85.3 points per game, the team is 16th nationally, an improvement of nearly 18 points from both last year's season average and its average during the five NIT games played with the new 30-second shot clock.

This has truly been a team effort. Every scholarship player on the team has an offensive rating above "100", meaning that their efforts are estimated to contribute more than a point per possession. Senior guard Sheldon McClellan is an obvious standout, but has been even better than that, leading all qualified-ACC players in effective shooting percentage (63.8 percent), true shooting percentage (69.2 percent), and offensive rating (141.1), hitting shots from all over the floor. The mercurial point guard Angel Rodriguez has improved both of those advanced shooting percentages by over 11 percent year-to-year. Caputo also cited key improvements from two returnees off the bench -

sophomore guard Ja'Quan Newton, whose improved attack and free throw shooting have him averaging 11.8 points per game in just over 21 minutes of action, and senior forward Ivan Cruz Uceda, whose lauded physical improvements have led to obvious defensive improvement, but also to him shooting a vastly improved 56.1 percent from deep.

And even with the already improved offense, the Hurricanes aren't done. "We've got some things we're going to use within what we're doing...that as we get into league play, people haven't seen," Caputo said. "Even as you get into the second half of league play you try to have some of those things in your repertoire. Some of those things happen organically because of the way we play, so you take a snapshot of something that happened and say 'Okay, that was good for us, let's use this.'"

With fan expectations sky-high and comparisons to the 2013 ACC double winners being thrown around, Caputo cautions that the league is deeper this time around. "I think we're in a good place, but the league is so good that you almost have to put the non-conference behind you and take what you've learned and apply that to what is a very difficult league," Caputo said.

Still, the Miami Hurricanes know that their non-conference reputation precedes them, and while the lofty rankings and laudatory plaudits are well-deserved as they head into the ACC, it also makes them a marked team in a conference where every game is a dogfight. They intend to prove that starting Saturday against Syracuse, and right through March where they hope to cut down souvenirs to bring back to Coral Gables.

Johnson on the Joys and Challenges of Playing in ABL

Asean Basketball League
Dec. 30, 2015

Reggie Johnson's wife and kids sat courtside at the MABA Stadium in Kuala Lumpur about an hour before the Westports Malaysia Dragons faced off against the Mono Vampire Basketball Club.

It was early in December and it also happened to be the first time that Johnson's wife Ciara and kids Cayden and Cameron would watch him play in the ABL.

"This is our first time here, we're very excited," Ciara said.

The ABL was well into the season at this point where the Dragons were already among the top teams in the league. Johnson had been an integral part of their success but today was different and extra special because his family was with him.

Johnson has fervently pursued his basketball career and his family has been supporting him ever since he started playing. He has played in the NBA-D League, Netherlands, and Hong Kong before becoming the starting center for Malaysia in the ABL.

Johnson and his wife have actually just been married for roughly three months before he put on the fiery red and white jersey of the Dragons. He went to Malaysia ahead of his family and his wife followed the success of the Dragons with the use of the team's website and Facebook page. Throughout Johnson's young career, Ciara has been at his side.

"We've been together for 11 years now – high school sweet hearts," beamed Ciara.

The young couple are no strangers to the life of travel and basketball. Johnson is a man that has never seen himself doing a regular job nor does he wishes for one.

"I don't see myself wanting to work a 9-5 job. I don't wanna see that," he said, almost chuckling to the idea. "I'm doing something I love, my family can have fun, [and] we can travel the world, it's a blessing."

Personally for Johnson, the ABL has been an absolute thrill going around the different parts of Asia. Being the only professional basketball league in the Southeast Asia region that spans across five countries, the ABL offers a one-of-a-kind basketball experience to both its fans and players. ABL games are spread out in Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand.

"Honestly the best part of traveling is just going to different countries. I'm a guy that loves to travel," he said. "Outside of sports I just love to travel. I never in a million years

think that I would go to Vietnam, Singapore. I didn't see the world as a kid so [it's special that] my kids can get to see the world."

While Johnson travels around Asia to play in different countries, Ciara is working on her master's degree on English and Creative Writing. "While he's traveling I go to school online," she explained.

"I'm happy that he gets to pursue his career," she continued. "And as far as traveling the world, given the opportunity for our children, [it's] a big plus. They get to explore and there's no limit for them. That's two wins for me – my husband is doing what he loves to do and my children are exploring the world so I love it."

But it isn't all sunshine and rainbows for Johnson and his family. The daily cycle of constantly traveling and pursuing a basketball career has had their difficulties.

Johnson hasn't been home to the United States since last September and he first went to Malaysia alone, leaving his wife and two kids. In a span of just a couple of months, he had to adjust not only playing basketball with a brand new set of teammates, but to the culture and lifestyle of a foreign country.

He went to Kuala Lumpur not knowing how to speak Chinese or Bahasa Malaysia. He lives in an apartment he doesn't know where because he's not sure how to pronounce it. He would often also ask his teammates what to eat and what not to eat in the busy streets of the city.

For Ciara and their two children, Cayden and Cameron, there have also been trying times. Ciara expressed that Johnson being away from their kids has been the most challenging part of their unique lifestyle. Their daughter is two years old while their son is only eight months old.

"I have my eldest and she's like 'Where's daddy? I wanna go to Daddy's house. Daddy! Daddy!' For me that's kind of heartbreaking."

The mother of two does her best to try to make her kids understand the concept of their dad playing overseas.

"I tell them of course which country he's in," she explained. "For a two-year old she doesn't understand much but she does know basketball. [I tell her] 'Daddy's working – he's playing basketball.' She kinda gets it, but she still [says] 'Where's Daddy?'"

The ABL season started late October and would continue until February of next year when the elimination round will end. Afterwards, the playoffs will take place and a champion will be crowned by March. Ciara and her kids plan to stay till April once the season

is over. For now, the Johnson family is once again complete.

"I wanted to make sure my family was here with me for Christmas and birthdays (Johnson celebrated his birthday last December 16), that's what one thing that affects me – affects my play, affects my thinking," Johnson pointed out.

What's next for them is another story.

It remains unclear if Johnson will play for the Dragons till next season. He can play for another ABL team, go back to playing in Europe or even try the NBA D-League again. In the meantime he's just letting things run their course. Fortunately, wherever he goes, his family is right there to support him.

a "My goal is just to continue to play ball. Obviously you want to play the best basketball possible. Just keep working and let the chips fall where they may," he said.

"I'm all for it. My long term goal is to go in and make sure that I'm supporting what he has to do as he is the breadwinner for our family and make sure I continue my schooling," Ciara said in agreement. "Once we get stable in the States I can focus on my career field but right now [we're] just taking it really one day at a time."

The main priority right now for Johnson is to play his heart out and try to win a championship for Malaysia.

"I talked to Coach Ariel and he said, 'I wanna win a championship,'" Johnson shared. "I wanted to win a championship [too]. I played in Europe, in high school, and everywhere I've been I've won a championship."

And the Dragons are on that road to a title as being one of the top contenders this ABL season. The Dragons would go on to win their game against Mono Vampire decisively by 38 points highlighted by Johnson's thunderous dunk that broke the rim.

As officials scrambled to get a replacement rim, Ciara took out her phone and took pictures of the basketball spectacle her husband made. She could only smile as Johnson made his way to courtside to meet her and their two kids. They laughed and cherished the moment as a family. It was truly a memorable first ABL game for Ciara and her kids.

"I love it – every moment," Ciara said smiling.

They may be in a foreign country, more than nine thousand miles away from the United States, but it definitely looks like they're home now.

ACC Reset:

Sports Illustrated

Brian Hamilton

Dec. 29, 2015

As conference play begins across the country, SI is resetting the races in the top nine leagues. Next up is the ACC:

Top contenders

Virginia

Even if the defense isn't quite as smothering as it has been, it still is 18th in the country in efficiency. But the offense is eye-opening: Virginia is No. 2 in adjusted efficiency on that end this year, a sizeable jump from finishing at No. 24 a year ago. It's startling because no one has been a revelation after the departure of Justin Anderson; it's still well-known characters like Malcolm Brogdon, Anthony Gill and London Perrantes leading the way. The Cavaliers won't run and gun their way to wins, of course. But if they can be relatively stingy defensively and score with anyone, watch out.

North Carolina

Imperfections abound in college basketball this year, so it makes little sense to focus on the Tar Heels' two road losses by a combined six points, one of which came as without Marcus Paige. Better to note instead that North Carolina has the nation's most efficient offense and five players averaging double figures. And forward Brice Johnson (team-best 16.2 points, 9.7 rebounds per game on 66.2% shooting) has finally emerged as the marquee name on this club. That's good news for a team that didn't want to rely solely on Paige anyway. Defense is a question (61st nationally in efficiency), but the scoring balance and depth suggest the Heels will be there to the end.

Miami

It's a close call here for third, with Duke and Louisville also rating as strong candidates. But the Blue Devils suffer from the indefinite absence of Amile Jefferson (foot), and the Cardinals still haven't beaten anyone of note, the close shave with Kentucky notwithstanding. Meanwhile, the Hurricanes hum along with the No. 6 most efficient offense, a balanced attack that has Sheldon McClellan (16.3 ppg) leading four players averaging double-digit production. And Miami also has very solid wins over Butler and Utah to its credit thus far. This is the team some figured Jim Larrañaga would field last year, once McClellan and guard Angel Rodriguez were eligible after transfers. Better late than never.

Must-see January game

Miami at Virginia (Jan. 12). The Hurricanes have a couple games in January that will serve as barometers for just how good they are, but this is the first, with a visit from Duke coming later. Even threatening a championship-caliber team on the road will be an auspicious sign for Miami.

ACC RESET: UNC, UVa favorites, but what about Miami?

NBC Sports

Rob Dauster

Dec. 28, 2015

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Miami looks like they're better: I've said it a thousand times by now: this Miami group reminds me so much of the team that won the 2013 ACC title. They're loaded with veterans, they have a talented back court full of playmakers (Sheldon McClellan, Angel Rodriguez, Ja'Quan Newton), they have a front line that's chock full of big, athletic, old guys that play hard and understand what they're going to be asked to do, and they have a head coach that knows how to fit all of those pieces together. This is a really, really good basketball team.

POWER RANKINGS, POSTSEASON PREDICTIONS

Tourney teams

1. North Carolina (10-2): Health is the key for the Tar Heels. Kennedy Meeks has missed three games and Marcus Paige, already coming off of a broken hand, is dealing with an ankle injury. When healthy, this is still my pick to win the national title.
2. Virginia (10-1): As I wrote earlier, my concern with the 'Hoos is their early-game slumps. Get those figured out, and they'll be right there at the end of the season.
3. Miami (10-1): I love Miami. Talented, veteran guards that can make plays. A big, athletic front court that plays hard and knows their roles. And a coach that knows how to make the most out of what he has.
4. Louisville (11-2): I love the duo of Damion Lee and Trey Lewis, and Donovan Mitchell's emergence on Saturday was promising, but I still have doubts about their front line. Louisville would be fifth on

this list if Amile Jefferson were healthy.

5. Duke (9-2): Amile Jefferson was their most valuable player because he's the only guy that didn't really have a backup. Until we know details regarding his injury, it's hard to picture the Blue Devils competing for the league title.

6. Syracuse (10-3): The Orange have a couple of nice non-conference wins — UConn, Texas A&M — and a pair of total head scratchers — Wisconsin at home, St. John's. I think they iron out some of those inconsistencies come ACC play, and their shooting ability will win them some games they have no business winning.

7. N.C. State (9-3): Cat Barber has been playing like one of college basketball's best point guards. If Abdul-Malik Abu continues to do what he's been doing the last two weeks, the Wolfpack will surprise some people once they get Terry Henderson healthy.

8. Wake Forest (8-3): I'm going to roll the dice on this one. I think Wake is better than they get credit for now that Codi Miller-McIntyre is back in the lineup, and with a non-conference win over Indiana already on their résumé, the Demon Deacons have a real chance to sneak into the NCAA tournament.

Observations:

CBS Sports

Jon Rothstein

Dec. 29, 2015

Miami's Ivan Cruz Uceda has already made as many 3-point shots (21) as he did during all of last season. The 6-10 big man completely changed his body during the off season and is shooting 53.8 percent from long distance this year after shooting 33.9 percent a season ago. Cruz Uceda is averaging 7.9 points and 3.8 rebounds for the 10-1 Hurricanes, who host Princeton on Tuesday in Coral Gables, Florida.

Miami is finally getting what it envisioned out of Oklahoma State transfer Kamari Murphy. The 6-foot-8 power forward is averaging 8.0 points and 7.3 rebounds over his last three games all while providing a physical presence on the interior next to Tonye Jekiri. The Hurricanes are 12-1 overall after Saturday's victory against Syracuse.

The top 10 teams ahead of conference play

Washington Post

Matthew Giles

Dec. 28, 2015

The 2016 college basketball season is only two months old, but soon, the conference wins and losses will begin to rack up and it'll be time to begin discussing whether the differences between the strength of schedules of Team A and Team B, and which deserves that No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament.

To set the table for the start of conference play, we examined which teams deserve to be ranked as the 10 best to start the new year.

10) Miami (Fla.): The Hurricanes were thought to be a top-10 team at this time last year too, but then Miami stumbled in ACC play. What is different about this squad that returns a majority of minutes played? Sheldon McClellan. The 6-5 wing struggled throughout 2015 with his consistency, but his offensive ranking is now fourth nationally (1.42), and he has transformed into an offensive force (or at least a player who can be counted to take a game over) — he is connecting on 62 percent of his twos and 51 percent of his threes on a slim usage rate of just over 20 percent. McClellan is that option coach Jim Larranaga sorely lacked, and he complements the slashing game of Angel Rodriguez and Ja'Quan Newton.

Pressing reset on the season before conference play

Sports Illustrated

Seth Davis

Dec. 28, 2015

After all the cacophony of the first two months, college basketball enjoyed a quiet week and especially a quiet weekend. Which is good because it gave your resident Hoop Thinker a few minutes to put up his feet, sip on a warm liquid, watch his favorite old-school Christmas movie (Atta boy, Clarence!), and apply some order to what has become quite the disorderly sport.

Don't worry, Hoopheads, I've done all the work for you. All you have to do is read and enjoy. So here is my Five-Minute Guide to the start of the college basketball season. And remember, every time a Glue Guy takes a charge, an angel gets his wings.

COACH OF THE FIRST TWO MONTHS

1. Tom Izzo, Michigan State: Who says we're in the era of the one-and-done? Izzo is winning with play-and-stay. And he's heading to the Hall of Fame.

2. Tony Bennett, Virginia: I'll say it again: He is the new Brad Stevens.

3. Chris Mack, Xavier: Much like Butler, Xavier is a wonderful program with a winning culture. Mack is keeping that tradition going.

4. Chris Holtmann, Butler: He took over the team in very trying circumstances last season, but his Bulldogs are thriving. This team's whole adds up to a lot more than the sum of its parts.

5. Jim Larranaga, Miami: The Hurricanes, who were unranked in each of the national preseason polls, are a one-point loss at home to Northeastern from being undefeated.

BREAKING OUT

1. Wayne Selden Jr., Kansas: The 6'5" junior guard has always shown flashes, but now he is finally putting everything together. He leads the team in scoring at 15.5 PPG while converting 56.3% of his shots (55.4% from three).

2. Grayson Allen, Duke: In case you were wondering, that championship-game performance against Wisconsin was no fluke.

3. Ben Bentil, Providence: The 6'9" sophomore is playing a worthy Robin to Kris Dunn's Batman. Bentil is averaging 18.8 points and 8.0 rebounds per game after posting 6.4 and 4.9 as a freshman.

4. Brice Johnson, North Carolina: Maybe this is overreacting to a recent hot stretch, but in the three games UNC has played without Kennedy Meeks, Johnson has averaged 24.7 PPG on 76% shooting. He won't be able to keep up that pace, but he won't fall off by much.

5. Sheldon McClellan, Miami: McClellan, a 6'5" senior guard, is scoring about the same number of points as he did last season (16.3), but he is doing it much more efficiently. He has a chance to be a 50-40-90 guy (field goal percentage, three-point percentage, free throw percentage), and he also has a 2.1 assist-to-turnover ratio.

Cruz Uceda brings shooting, defense to Miami

City of Love Basketball

Stephen Pianovich

Dec. 24, 2015

Ivan Cruz Uceda was back in the Philadelphia area on Tuesday night, but the Spanish forward did not look exactly like the player who was an honorable mention JuCo All-American at Harcum College two seasons ago.

No, the 6-foot-10 senior was thinner, quicker, more athletic and, for the night, the best scorer for the nation's 13th-ranked team. Cruz Uceda scored a career-high 20 points in just 18 minutes as the Hurricanes handed La Salle its worst loss in program history at the Palestra.

Since arriving in Miami, Cruz Uceda has turned into a reliable shooter and defender for the Canes. In his second season, he is averaging 7.9 points and 19 minutes per game while shooting 57.4 percent from the field. All his numbers are up from his first Division-I season – well, all except his weight.

"If you saw a picture before and after from when he arrived at Miami, a year ago he was 24 percent body fat and weighed 237 (pounds). Now he's nine percent body fat and he weighs 217," said Miami coach Jim Larranaga. "His defensive abilities, when he was overweight, he struggled to keep people in front of him. Now he's one of the best help defenders we have. He's always been a good 3-point shooter, now he's a little quicker and his teammates have a great deal of confidence in him."

That confidence shined through on Tuesday as Cruz Uceda hit seven of his eight field goal attempts, including a 4-for-5 showing from beyond the arc. Larranaga called it "not an unusual night" and so far this season, Cruz Uceda is shooting 53.8 percent from distance – a mark that ties

him for the 23rd-best mark in the nation.

It took the Madrid native a bit of time to find his 3-point stroke once he started playing collegiately in America, though. In his freshman season at Harcum College in Bryn Mawr, Cruz Uceda shot just 26.5 percent (13-for-49), but still managed to score 16 points per game.

When he was named an honorable mention All-American, Cruz Uceda hit 45.5 percent of his treys, shooting 40-for-88. This, along with his size and ability to rebound (he had 9.6 per game in his sophomore year), caught the attention of a lot of high major Division-I teams looking for a two-year player.

Cruz Uceda had interest from Marquette, Penn State, Ohio State and Villanova before deciding on Miami. Once he got there he got his South Beach body ready.

"I really changed my lifestyle, I had some really bad habits," he recalled Tuesday. "So what I did was change my food habits, the way I was eating – more whole wheat stuff, no donuts, stuff like that. That really helped."

At this time a year ago, Cruz Uceda was still waiting to get on the floor as he was ineligible for the team's first 16 games due to transfer rules. Once he did, he made an impact for Miami, averaging 5.2 points and 3.5 rebounds in 21 games. He has an even larger role on this Hurricanes team, which should make some noise in the ACC and a potential run come March.

Cruz Uceda got the chance to see some former coaches and friends from Harcum at the Palestra on Tuesday, and was pleased to play so well in front of them. And on the other side, they got to see a transformed player that is contributing at a high level on one of the better teams in

the nation.

"There's a big difference between junior college and Miami – everybody is more athletic," Cruz Uceda said. "So I knew I needed to improve my athleticism, jump higher, move faster. And that's what I did."

Newton gets emotional in return to the Palestra

City of Love Basketball

Christy Selagy

Dec. 22, 2015

As a graduate of Saints John Neumann and Maria Goretti Catholic High School in Philadelphia, Pa., Ja'Quan Newton is no stranger to the Palestra. In fact, Newton started the Catholic League Championship game all four years he attended Neumann-Goretti, where he left the all-time leading scorer in the PCL's illustrious history.

His senior year, Newton helped lead the Saints to a 22-4 record, and their sixth Catholic League Championship title in a row, a game in which he scored 23 points.

In his return to the Palestra, Newton, a sophomore guard at the University of Miami, scored 10 points and had two rebounds in 19 minutes of play--not the normal for those used to seeing him drop 1,972 points in his stellar prep career--in a 95-49 win over the Explorers of La Salle.

Newton had friends and family at the game, though he wasn't sure exactly how many came to see him play.

"I don't think I could count them," he said. "There were a lot."

There were a fair amount of Hurricanes fans at the game, including friends and family of Newton, junior guard and Ewing, N.J. native Davon Reed, and Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga, according to Larrañaga.

Newton was cheered on with every play he made. And there were a few familiar moments--a tough right-handed drive where he drew a foul, a floater in the lane, things he did all the time wearing the Saints uniform. Except this time, instead of the white and gold uniforms of the Saints, he was in the orange and black of the Hurricanes.

"Emotional" is the one word Newton said he would use to describe his return to a building that's been home to some of his most impressive performances.

"I have a lot of memories in here," Newton said. "When I walked in here for shootaround and practice, I just looked around and went 'I remember playing in this building.'"

Though Newton didn't see the kind of playing time he had in past games at the Palestra, he was still glad to be back. He'll spend the next few days in Philly with his family before heading back to Miami on Dec. 26 to prepare for a game against Princeton on Dec. 29.

Larrañaga has seen much improvement from Newton since last season, when the 6-foot-2 guard averaged 4.0 ppg in 13.5 mpg; entering play on Tuesday, he was averaging 11.9 ppg in 21.5 mpg. Larrañaga noted that Newton's game has improved primarily because of the high amount of effort he's put into practicing.

"I just think he worked on his game," Larrañaga said. "He's very, very aggressive. I think he's always in attack mode, which is good. He's defending better."

In a little over half the amount of minutes he played last season, Newton has scored almost as many points this season. In 459 minutes in the 2014-15 season, he scored 135 points; after tonight's game, he has scored 129 points in 236 minutes.

Larrañaga also cited Newton's improvement in free throw percentage as an indication of his hard work paying off.

Last season, Newton had a free throw percentage of 64.1. This season, his percentage has improved to 76.7 percent.

"Last year, his free throw shooting percentage was not nearly as good as it needed to be," Larrañaga said. "He worked on it all summer, like he did his three-point shot, and both of them now are much improved."

Larrañaga, who was coaching at the Palestra for the first time in his career, understood the importance of the Cathedral of College Basketball--not just for Newton, but also for the City of Philadelphia and basketball in general.

Larrañaga wanted his team to understand the significance as well as familiarize them with Philly. He had one of the team's graduate assistants put together a three-minute video that highlighted the history of the Palestra.

"We told him, 'The Palestra is a very special place... Let's kind of give the players an idea of what the City of Philadelphia is like and the arena that we're going to play in,'" Larrañaga said. "A lot of our players have heard of Madison Square Garden, but they've never really heard of the Palestra."

Appropriately, the final highlight of the video featured Newton. The video showed Kobe Bryant dunking the ball, followed by Newton dunking the ball.

The team loved it, and told Newton that it was a great play. Newton, however, didn't suspect that he would be featured in the video.

"I was surprised," Newton said. "I didn't think they were going to pick that to show the team. I just was excited."

With a little under two minutes left to play against La Salle, Newton's night ended. As he walked off the court, the Palestra erupted in applause.

It wasn't the first time he'd gotten such a reaction in the same gym. But this one felt a little different.

"When I came out of the game at the end, and everybody was cheering and standing up for me," he said, "that was really emotional."

Welcome to the year of the senior

ESPN

Myron Medcalf

Dec. 21, 2015

For a moment, he froze. Most would in that situation.

Duke Blue Devils forward Brandon Ingram, a freshman savant, found himself with the rock in his hands and the moment on his shoulders and every eye on his next steps at Madison Square Garden on Saturday afternoon. After he bumped Utah's Dakarai Tucker in the post, he stood five feet from the bucket in overtime, alone with a chance to seal a Duke comeback in the final seconds.

He stumbled toward the rim, and then the game-tying shot veered awkwardly off his fingertips and smacked the back of the rim.

Senior Amile Jefferson, Duke's best rebounder and a key interior presence, could only watch -- the victim of a fractured foot that could sideline him for a chunk of the season. Jefferson's absence -- its impact most apparent in Duke's inability to slow Utah's Jakob Poeltl (19 points, 14 rebounds, 3 blocks) -- played a role in the loss and emphasized, again, that seniors matter, especially this season.

This could be the "Year of the Senior."

On Saturday, senior Denzel Valentine finished with 17 points, 5 rebounds and 6 assists in Michigan State's 20-point win at Northeastern, an effort that will keep him at or near the top of the Wooden Award favorites list. Creighton tried to upset Oklahoma on the road, but Buddy Hield's 33 points squashed those dreams. Northern Iowa guard Wes Washpun collected 28 points, 11 assists and 7 rebounds in his team's 81-79 upset of No. 5 Iowa State in Des Moines, Iowa.

Virginia's Malcolm Brogdon and Anthony Gill combined to record 42 points in the No. 8 Cavs' masterful effort in Saturday's 86-75 win over No. 12 Villanova. Roosevelt Jones led Butler to a neutral-site win over Purdue. Brice Johnson did the same for North Carolina in a dominant victory over UCLA. Danuel House's 17 points and eight rebounds powered Texas A&M's lopsided win over Baylor.

But where's the love for seniors?

"It's exciting for people when they see new faces," said Kansas star Perry Ellis, who collected 18 points and nine rebounds in KU's lopsided win over Montana on Saturday. "When people have been around, I guess they don't think much of it. They've been around a lot."

In New York City, we expected Ingram to hit that shot in the final seconds of the 77-75 overtime loss to Utah. And that's the problem. The one-and-done craze elevates expectations each season and turns 18-year-olds into superstars before they pick a college. As a result, we send the Amile Jeffersons, the seniors who've grown over four seasons, to sing backup in the perennial buildup to each college basketball season.

This season, Ben Simmons is Springsteen. Jefferson, Buddy Hield, Denzel Valentine and the rest of the game's elite seniors? They're the E Street Band, respected but not revered like the headliner.

"I don't think that's what's exciting to people," said Brogdon, who scored 20 points in Virginia's win. "I don't think that's exciting to people for a guy to stay all four years and slowly mature."

The NBA is the main culprit for that reaction. The best players rarely reach senior status. So we talk about Tim Duncan nearly 20 years after he earned every meaningful award as a senior at Wake Forest because he completed the era that once rewarded extended stays at the collegiate level. A four-year stint is no longer the stuff of praise, though. It raises concerns: Shouldn't you be in the NBA by now?

Miami point guard Angel Rodriguez said those assessments of seniors in today's game motivate him whenever he faces a freshman star. When he was a freshman, he couldn't wait to play some of the game's top seniors. Now that he's a senior, he's after the youngsters.

"I look at it as you're very, very talented, but I've been doing this a long time," said Rodriguez, "and I'm here to prove a point."

Rodriguez and his colleagues continue to provide significant contributions to some of the country's best teams. The one-and-done era has not altered that. Yes, Anthony Davis led Kentucky to a national title in 2012 and Duke won last season with three elite freshmen. But they're largely anomalies because it's not easy to reach the final stages of the game or win conference titles with a squad that relies on freshmen.

"The teams that don't have senior leadership, they're not as together," Xavier senior James Farr said.

Miami is led by a quartet of seniors. And Hurricanes star Sheldon McClellan said senior leadership grants the Hurricanes a sturdiness that's difficult to construct with an abundance

of new faces.

McClellan, who began his collegiate career at Texas, never thought he'd become a role model for a Miami squad that's now an ACC contender. He's one of the nation's top players, a position he has maintained with a work ethic he lacked as a freshman. He preferred the nightlife over the grind earlier in his career. This season, he's in the gym two times per week at 6:30 a.m. Alone. If someone had asked McClellan to rise before dawn for a workout during his freshman season? Well

"I would say, 'You're crazy,'" McClellan said. "Are we going out tonight?"

But now he encourages the younger players on Miami's roster to learn from his failures, especially as ACC play approaches. Those locker-room contributions often go unnoticed, but they're impactful. The freshmen might grace the covers now, but the seniors still bind the game together and provide a critical foundation that helps young players evolve.

Whenever Ellis spots Kansas freshman Cheick Diallo with his head down after he makes a mistake, the senior counsels him. Ellis has been there. He knows the difficulties young bigs often encounter as they transition from high school to top-tier college basketball.

"Sometimes he gets down on himself, which I did as a freshman too, and I tell him I've been through that," Ellis said. "But you really have to keep on going when something does not go right."

To the general public, college basketball still acts as a six-month movie trailer for the next group of lottery picks. But the game's investors -- fans, coaches, players, assistants and media -- all know better. Saturday provided a reminder.

Those final seconds at Madison Square Garden featured a stranded Duke freshman, one who might secure a top-three slot in next summer's NBA draft, flummoxed in a moment that gets easier with time -- time these youngsters don't have at this level.

Ingram would have tied the game if he'd made that shot. And perhaps Duke would have won the game in a second overtime.

If Jefferson had been available, however, the Blue Devils might have avoided that dicey situation altogether.

"It takes experience," Brogdon said of his time at Virginia, "to get through your lows."

Dewan Huell soars in City of Palms Classic

USA Today
David Dorsey
Dec. 18, 2015

Dewan Huell, born and raised about 10 minutes from where the Miami Dolphins play, takes pride in being an elite basketball star surrounded by football factories.

"It feels great to be an elite player in Miami," Huell said. "It's a pretty cool feeling."

Huell, a 6-foot-10 forward at Miami Norland High School and considered a consensus top 25 player in the nation, backed up the labels with his play as the 43rd annual City of Palms Classic began at Bishop Verot High School's John Nevins Gymnasium.

Huell, who signed a letter of intent with the University of Miami, scored a game-high 24 points and grabbed seven rebounds as the four-time defending state champion Norland Vikings defeated three-time defending state champion West Linn (Oregon) 50-39 in the first round.

At 6 p.m. Saturday, Huell hopes to continue displaying his talents as Norland takes on No. 2-seeded Elizabeth (New Jersey) Patrick School in the tournament quarterfinals.

Choosing Miami took a "huge weight off my shoulders," said Huell, who recalled the recruiting process as a "long, stressful process."

The process began his freshman season, when Huell received overtures from former Georgia Southern coach Charlton Young, who moved on as an assistant to Florida State, where he continued recruiting Huell.

"It was the hardest decision of my life," Huell said of choosing Miami over Florida

State and other schools. "I got comfortable with so many coaches. They felt like family."

In the end, the Miami Hurricanes felt like family the most.

Norland coach Lawton Williams III said he enjoyed talking about Huell the person as much as Huell the player.

"He's a very loyal kid," Williams said. "He could have gone to one of those basketball factories. But he wanted to stick with us. It has made him well-rounded."

Huell has a 3.2 grade point average and scored a solid 26 on his ACT, a college entrance exam.

On the court, Huell often gets double-teamed and fouled, which was the case against West Linn, when he made 8 of 12 free throw attempts.

"He's tough-minded like that," Williams said. "That's what I like about him."

Williams has coached Norland for 13 seasons and won six state championships during that span. He has yet to coach a future NBA player.

"He could be the first," Williams said of Huell. "It's hard to get to the NBA. But he could be."

Tom Konchalski, a longtime talent evaluator for the HSBI Report, called Huell a significant recruit for Miami coach Jim Larranaga.

"The first time I saw him was two years ago in a Sunshine Series game," Konchalski said of Huell. "He has really improved. He's got to get stronger physically. But that's the only limiting factor with him right now."

"He's a very quick jumper who has a very quick second jump, which is important."

Huell celebrated his 19th birthday Dec. 9. For now, he's focused on enjoying his senior season and his third Classic appearance. He also has the goal of completing his high school career with four state championships. He said he hoped to play in the NBA someday, but first things first.

"I want to keep working on my strength," Huell said. "These teams are tough and bigger and stronger than our state competition. This prepares us."

Hurricanes hit finals break with ranking in top 20

Sports Xchange

Paul Borden

Dec. 10, 2015

The University of Miami's men's basketball team has arrived at its semester break with an 8-1 record and rankings of No. 17 (Associated Press media poll) and No. 20 (USA Today/ESPN coaches), but coach Jim Larranaga sees plenty of work ahead before the Hurricanes dive into Atlantic Coast Conference play.

The Hurricanes will have three nonconference games after final exams before their league opener at home against Syracuse on Jan. 2.

Their first game back after final exams will be at home against College of Charleston on Dec. 19. After a trip to Philadelphia to play La Salle at the Palestra on Dec. 22, they finish up non-league play by hosting Princeton on Dec. 29.

"We know as a staff we still have some things to implement," Larranaga said after the Hurricanes had disposed of Florida 66-55 last Tuesday night. "Like right now, we really have only two out-of-bounds plays. So we've to add some nuts and bolts to the foundation.

"We've only played one defense, although we did play zone tonight for I think three possessions. We need to work on that as well.

"So, we've got some things to work on, but the most important thing is for our players to concentrate on their school work and do a good job on their exams and get well-rested, because we're going to have a very busy schedule for the remainder of the month and then for the ACC race."

The Hurricanes seemed to have corrected one issue that cropped up in the loss to Northeastern and the overtime win at Nebraska. After seeing those two teams combined to go 21-of-40 from 3-point range, the Hurricanes have held their last two opponents, Charlotte and Florida, to just 10-of-35 from beyond the arc.

Larranaga said he was concerned about these last two games because it was at this point a year ago that the Hurricanes, who had gotten off to an 8-0 start, stumbled a bit. After moving up to Nos. 18/19 in the two polls, they lost three of their last four games before Christmas, including two at home and all by double digits, to Green Bay, Eastern Kentucky, and Providence.

This, however, is a different team, more mature and deeper with experienced players.

"I think we just know each other better," Larranaga said. "We've got a little more experience under our belt, guys are really comfortable in their roles, and tonight we were at home. It's a little bit different when you're on the road at Louisville in front of 20,000 screaming fans and one turnover and all of a sudden the place goes crazy.

"But tonight our mistakes were not magnified. I thought our players really recovered."

Against Florida, the Hurricanes scored the last eight points of the first half and went up by 12 points, 37-25, early in the second. After the Gators responded and cut the difference down to five points at 45-40, guard Sheldon McClellan drilled a cold-blooded 3-pointer to get it back to eight points and a couple of minutes later he hit another 3-pointer to make it a 12-point game again.

The Gators never recovered after that, the Hurricanes enjoyed several 15-point leads down the stretch. McClellan scored a season-high 24 points and his backcourt made Angel Rodriguez added 17.

"Coach L has been pretty hard on us because he knows we can do a lot better," Rodriguez said. "And it's been proven the last two games. We've made a lot of improvement, especially guarding the 3-point line.

"That's what we're supposed to do. He's not asking us to do something that we can't do, but it happens. I guess it happens early in the year. The good thing is we've realized it and we've been working on it. First of all, we've got to finish the non-conference schedule, and you know how it goes when we get in the ACC. We're going to play a lot of great teams."

Ranking top 100 college basketball players

CBS Sports.com

Sam Vecenie

Dec. 9, 2015

This is a new feature at CBS Sports this year.

Since 2011, we've been ranking the top 100 players in college basketball before the season. However, there has never really been any follow-through on what we got right and what we got wrong. I'm here to change that.

Welcome to The CBSSports.com Top 100, a monthly ranking of the top players in college basketball.

What I hope to do here is discuss the players that have performed well so far in college hoops, that will continue to perform, and who will perform well in the future. It's likely not going to line up perfectly with what you, the reader, think. That's fine. But it's a well-informed opinion on who the best and most valuable college basketball players in America are, and one that will continually be updated.

How do I go about this ranking? It's a combination of factors.

Pure production versus competition level is involved. If you're scoring 20 points per game and doing it against a pretty tough schedule, you probably deserve to be ranked. If you're piling stats against only average competition, I'll take that into account.

Talent matters as well. If you're a freshman that's still figuring things out, that's something that I take into account. If you have a relatively high upside as an older player still for some reason, that's also something I take into account. Potential future value matters. Otherwise, Skal Labissiere might not be on the list.

Value matters to me. If you're playing on a good team and acting as one of the most important pieces, that's something that's worth taking into account. If your team crumples without you in the lineup, that's also pretty important to note.

Defense. It's 50 percent of the game. It's why guys like Kris Dunn, Tyrone Wallace, Gary Payton II, Tonye Jekiri, and others might be slightly higher here than you'd see them elsewhere.

There's no magic formula here or anything. Just a person who watches a lot of college basketball and feels compelled to rank a lot of players. Limiting it to 100 made it a very difficult exercise obviously, and the initial list I came up with had about 160 guys.

It's also worth noting that 76 of the 102 players listed here appeared on the top 100 (and one) that Gary Parrish, Matt Norlander and I did in the preseason. I'd say that feels about right. We nailed most of them, but there are always guys who really step up.

So without further ado...

66. Tonye Jekiri, Miami (Fla.)

A small run of seniors here from 74 through 66, but let's chat about the last three big men. Auguste ends up falling just a bit behind Ochefu and Jekiri because of what the other two can bring on the defensive end. Ochefu is second in the Big East in PER at 29.7 due to terrific rebounding and block percentages. He's the anchor for what's been a great Villanova defense thus far, ranking seventh in defensive efficiency nationally. It's been a strong, strong year for him.

But the guy who has shown as much improvement as any big man in the country is Jekiri, who has been just much better on the offensive end in 2015. Last year, there were times where Jekiri struggled to hang on to the basketball when thrown tough passes. This year, Miami can not only trust him to catch the difficult dump-offs, but they can even throw him the ball down in the paint and get a nice post move from him. The defense, both in the way he alters shots at the rim and can move in the pick-and-roll, has always been there. The

rebounding has also always been terrific. But with the added offense, he's been much more complete.

70. Sheldon McClellan, Miami (Fla.)

95. Angel Rodriguez, Miami (Fla.)

Look, I've been about as hard on Rodriguez as anyone. His inconsistency last season was a major reason the Hurricanes didn't go dancing, as his penchant for chucking bad jumpers and forcing inefficient passes made him among the more harmful basketball players to his team in the sport.

But he's been genuinely good this year and deserves a lot of recognition for that. He's played well within himself, gotten his entire team of talented players involved, and looked excellent with pestering defense. To be honest, he's probably performed above the No. 93 spot that I've placed him on this list. But given the uncertainty of his past and future performances, I'm going to be a bit conservative. Still though, great start that I hope for his sake continues.

Daily Word:

ESPN.com
Dec. 1, 2015

3. Which Miami should we expect to see more of this season: The version that beat Utah and Butler or the version that lost at home against Northeastern?

Katz: Northeastern beat Miami on a last-second play. The Huskies are a solid squad that will compete for a top spot in the CAA. I don't think Miami should panic. Expect the Hurricanes to win in Lincoln. Miami has too much length, experience and physical toughness for the Huskers.

Goodman: The 'Canes will likely be up and down this season, much like they were a year ago. However, that will depend largely on whether Angel Rodriguez can display more consistency than he showed a year ago. I think it's a team that finished somewhere in the 4-6 range in the ACC at the end of the day.

Gasaway: We should definitely expect to see more of the Utah/Butler version of Miami. The Northeastern game was a shocker (kind of like the Canes' lopsided loss at home last season to Eastern Kentucky), but Sheldon McClellan's off to an incredible start and Miami's very hard to stop on offense.

Canes Look to Rebound in Matchup With Nebraska

Canes Warning

Austin Sapin

Dec. 1, 2015

R-E-L-A-X. Relax.

The great Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers once spelled out that very word after his team had struggled to a 1-2 start at the opening of the 2014 season.

After the Miami Hurricanes fell to Northeastern this past Friday, every fan of the Miami Hurricanes basketball program needs to heed Mr. Rodgers's advice.

While it did come on a buzzer-beater, losing to Northeastern at home may not look like a very good loss for those unfamiliar with their team. The Huskies though brought back four starters from a team that made the NCAA Tournament last season and nearly took out Notre Dame. Just as we were excited, but didn't overreact after Miami's performance in Puerto Rico, we can't overreact in a tight loss to a solid team who had an excellent night shooting from the floor.

The Canes will have certainly gained a big learning experience though from Friday night, especially after dominating the opposition in the first five games of the season. Unfortunately for Coach Jim Larranaga and his Canes, their next opponent won't be a cupcake to get them back on track.

In a tough matchup, the Hurricanes will travel to Lincoln, Nebraska to take on the Cornhuskers as the Miami basketball program looks for their first road win in the 11 years of the ACC/Big Ten Challenge. The two schools met up in the exact same scenario two seasons ago and Nebraska handled the Hurricanes with a 60-49 home

victory. With Miami not only looking to exact revenge, but also bounce back from the loss in their last game, I'd expect this year's game to be a bit different.

The Cornhuskers won't roll over by any means as Coach Tim Miles brings his team into Tuesday night's game with a 5-2 record. Their two losses thus far have come against two undefeated teams in No. 11 Villanova and an underrated No. 24 Cincinnati squad.

In the first seven games of the season, the Big Ten team has been led by junior small forward Andrew White and senior forward Shavon Shields. The Kansas transfer, White, leads the team in scoring with 14.9 points per game and had a strong game against Villanova as he finished with 18 points. Against a much bigger and more physical Cincinnati squad however, the junior struggled with just eight points on the night. The Hurricanes will have to find a way to slow White down from outside too as the 6'7" small forward has shot 47.4% from three-point range to start the year.

For Shavon Shields, he not only averages 13.7 points per game, but also leads the team in rebounding with 5.3 a night even as just a 6'7" forward. The senior should be an interesting matchup against both Ivan Cruz Uceda and Kamari Murphy, who I feel might be better suited for this matchup.

If the Hurricanes can find a way to shut those two down, they might find themselves coming out of Lincoln with an easy victory.

Miami played decent defense in their loss on Friday, but Northeastern just shot the lights out. I think we'll see an improved defensive performance on Tuesday night in Lincoln and see more of that swarming

pressure that we saw in Puerto Rico.

On the other end of the court, Miami will look to keep up the balanced scoring attack that has resulted in five players averaging 8.8 points a game so far. I think a big key to the Nebraska game though is getting a solid scoring performance from the bench. In their loss to Northeastern, the reserves had just 17 points and 13 of those came from one source in Ja'Quan Newton.

It certainly isn't time to panic after just one loss to a solid Northeastern team and while the Hurricanes ranking may drop Monday afternoon, just remember one thing, R-E-L-A-X.

Newton starting to grow at Miami

CSNPhilly.com

Walter Villa

Nov. 30, 2015

Ja'Quan Newton admits he was frustrated by the rumors he heard when he returned home to Philadelphia this past summer.

"I was hearing, 'Oh, he's going to leave.' ... I'm like, 'What? I'm not going anywhere,'" said Newton, a 6-foot-2 sophomore point guard for the Miami Hurricanes.

"Why would I leave? I play for a great coach (Jim Larranaga). We've got a great coaching staff. ... I was hearing things that weren't coming from my mouth. It was kind of frustrating."

Newton, who graduated from Neumann-Goretti High School as the leading scorer in Catholic League history, averaged 4.0 points as a Miami freshman but has improved greatly as a sophomore.

He is fourth on the team in scoring (12.0) and second in assists (2.7) despite getting just 21.4 minutes per game for the Hurricanes, who won their first five games before falling to Northeastern at the buzzer on Friday.

"Ja'Quan's been very consistent," Larranaga said of the 20-year-old Newton. "He's not a surprise to the coaches or his teammates. We knew his progression was going to come."

Newton, who plays behind senior Angel Rodriguez, seems destined to be the Hurricanes' starting point guard next season.

However, Larranaga, who has two scholarships available for next season, had a revealing comment about how he views Newton.

"We have four guards, four forwards and two centers," Larranaga said of next season's projected roster. "That's great balance.

"But we don't have a prototypical point guard. Even Ja'Quan is not just a pure point guard. He is a scorer as well. It would also

be nice to have an Angel Rodriguez or a Shane Larkin (former Hurricane now in the NBA) in the program."

There's no question Newton is a scorer — few high school basketball fans in Philadelphia will forget the 33-point performance he put up in leading Neumann-Goretti to the state title as a senior. But there's also a growing confidence in Newton that he can be a leader at point guard, running a high-level college team.

Rodriguez, who turns 23 next month and is one of Miami's savvy veterans, has seen the growth in Newton.

"I knew the talent was there, but I didn't know when it was going to show," Rodriguez said. "For some people, it may take two years. For him, it took just that one year. The improvement has been mental and a year of experience."

Newton views Rodriguez as a big brother, and there is mutual respect between the two, but that doesn't stop them from going at each other in practice.

"We always go head to head, and it's very physical," Newton said. "If we had refs, we'd probably both foul out. [But] we make each other better. When we get into a game, it's kind of easy."

Rodriguez said Newton was probably taken aback last year when he found out how he was being guarded in practice.

"I don't know if he didn't appreciate it or he didn't like it because he was probably not used to that in high school," Rodriguez said. "But now he knows what it takes.

"There's no free lunch with me. There are times when he will [penetrate the lane], but even if he makes it, he's going to get fouled. ... We make each other work."

Rodriguez said last season was "devastating" to him and his teammates. The Hurricanes won 25 games, had a winning record (10-8) in the rugged ACC, beat Duke at Cameron Indoor Stadium and advanced to the NIT championship game.

Even so, getting bypassed for the NCAA Tournament stung the Hurricanes.

This season, Miami got off to a fast

start, knocking off No. 16 Utah and No. 22 Butler to win the Puerto Rico Tipoff championship. Rodriguez, who was named the tournament MVP, scored 19 points in the title game against Butler, and Newton added a career-high 17.

Including the Mississippi State matchup in the opener, Miami won all three of its games in Puerto Rico by at least 10 points. The combined margin of victory for the Hurricanes was 60 points.

Still, the 'Canes are wary of their fast start because it is very similar to what happened last season before things went south.

The Hurricanes won an early-season tournament — last year it was the Gildan Charleston Classic in South Carolina — and came home undefeated and ranked No. 15, just like this season.

But rather than running with that momentum, Miami slipped, losing at home to a pair of relative lightweights — Green Bay on Dec. 6 and Eastern Kentucky on Dec. 19. The latter loss was especially humiliating — Eastern Kentucky won by 28 points — and the NCAA selection committee no doubt took those defeats into consideration when passing on the 'Canes.

Rodriguez and Newton are determined to not slip up again, but they did just that Friday losing at home by one point on a buzzer-beating shot by Northeastern.

"This is a different team [than last season]," Rodriguez insists.

Newton believes that, too, and after winning the title in Puerto Rico, he told his teammates that there is much more left to accomplish.

"I just wanted everybody to know that we're not done," Newton said. "We're celebrating right now, but we still have work to do. As soon I said it, Angel looked at me and said, 'You're learning.' And I said: 'I get it from you.'"

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ACC BASKETBALL: THE HURRICANES' HOT START

ACC.com
Patrick O'Brien
Nov. 27, 2015

There hasn't been a more impressive team early on in the ACC this season than the Miami Hurricanes. The Canes are off to a 5-0 start and are now ranked No. 15 in the nation after being unranked at the start of the season.

Not only has Miami won its first five games, but the Hurricanes have also taken out two Top 25 teams in then No. 16 Utah and No. 22 Butler. Let's take a closer look at what Head Coach Jim Larrañaga and the Hurricanes have done so far this season and what has them ticking on all cylinders.

Miami is averaging 91.8 points per game this season, which ranks them No. 15 in the nation. They are also shooting 52 percent from the floor and 45 percent from beyond the arc as a team. That ranks them No. 2 in the conference in field goal percentage, just behind Florida State.

The Hurricanes have six players that are averaging double figures early on in the season, with Sheldon McClellan leading the way with 17.4 points per game.

Miami ranks No. 4 in the conference in turnovers per game, averaging only 9.4 per game, while also having a 1.66 assist/turnover ratio on the season.

Other Notable Stats

Miami ranks 7th in the nation in total field goals made with 149.

Miami ranks No. 4 in the nation with 49 three pointers made.

The Hurricanes are shooting over 45 percent from behind the arc, ranking them No. 6 in the nation in that category.

With 112 made free throws made this season, Miami ranks No.1 in the nation in that category.

Last season, Miami missed the NCAA Tournament, going 25-13 overall and was considered a "snub" from the Big Dance. The good news for Canes fans is that Miami already has two impressive résumé victories. Against No. 16 Utah, in which the Hurricanes won 90-66, McClellan scored 27 points and Tonye Jekiri dominated down low with 20 points and 12 rebounds.

Miami then took down No. 22 Butler 85-75 behind 19 points from Angel Rodriguez and 17 points from Ja'Quan Newton, taking home the Puerto Rico Tip-off Championship.

It might be too early to buy all-in on the Hurricanes, but Miami has already passed the eye test early on in the season. With the three teams that were picked to compete for the ACC already taking a loss on the season in North Carolina, Virginia and Duke, Miami could be a strong competitor in the ACC conference.

Miami was picked to finish 5th in the ACC Preseason Polls, but with a favorable schedule ahead of them, the Hurricanes could be looking at a possible perfect record or an early season surprise team heading into ACC play, starting on January 2nd against Syracuse.

With a veteran-led team and a balanced attack on the offensive side, Miami could certainly compete for another ACC title under Coach Larrañaga.

Thank You, Jim Larrañaga

CanesWarning

Juan Toribio

Nov. 26, 2015

About a decade ago, the University of Miami was known for its beautiful campus, their fantastic medical school and of course, their football team.

Not once did you hear about the Miami Hurricanes basketball team, at least not while I was growing up. The football team was starting to go into decline, and the Hurricanes basketball team had the one bright spot in Jack McClinton.

Other than McClinton, an average person couldn't name you another player on those Miami basketball teams.

Now, the Miami football team is still on the decline, but one thing has changed from a decade ago: Miami basketball matters — and it matters a lot.

The reason that Miami Hurricanes basketball means something now? Jim Larrañaga and his staff.

On Wednesday, Miami announced that the remainder of the Hurricanes basketball season was sold out. The only way to get Canes Hoops tickets for the rest of the season is to either go through StubHub or hope that the visiting team doesn't need tickets and then Miami can sell them.

A couple days before that, Miami landed two top-50 recruits for the 2016 class and currently has a top-10 class in the country. In basketball.

Being Thanksgiving, I personally wanted to tell Coach L how appreciative and how thankful Miami basketball fans were of him, his family, his players and his staff.

Coach Larrañaga always talks about how

his friends and colleagues told him that he would never win games at Miami and that nobody will care about the program because it's a football school. Now, you can make the argument that the University of Miami is a basketball school. For that, we are thankful.

We're thankful for the excitement that the ACC regular season and tournament championship team gave us in 2012-2013.

We thank you coach, for leading this program with a great deal of pride and joy, and for making us enjoy every single second of it.

We (and the students that day), thank you for bringing out doughnuts to the people camping out before Miami played number 1 ranked Duke. And we thank you for beating Duke, and slapping the hell out of the floor against them.

Thank you for caring so much that you go dorm-to-dorm serving pizza to students just so that they know that you want them at the games.

We thank you for letting us enjoy success while the football team continues to struggle. I'll never forget being at the BUC that day that Miami beat Clemson and became ACC regular-season champions.

Thank you for being the coolest 66-year old dude that we could possible know: The Whip / Nae Nae video.

The form on that whip is Odell-esque, if you ask me.

Oh, and thank you for this: The Ali Shuffle.

Thank you for being as open to the media as anyone I've been able to be around thus far.

Thank you for being a great coach and an even better leader.

We also want to thank you for being one hell of a man: Jim Larranaga dedicates Duke win to dying alumnus.

But most importantly, thank you for taking a chance on Miami basketball when nobody else wanted to.

Newton urges team to stay 'hungry' despite hot start

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 26, 2015

They had just won the Puerto Rico Tipoff championship last Sunday night, just knocked off their second Top 25 team in a row, and the University of Miami Hurricanes were jumping up and down in a circle, their arms wrapped around each other's shoulders.

Sophomore guard Ja'Quan Newton stopped the celebration for a moment to give teammates a little lecture. He reminded them that they started last season undefeated, won a November tournament in Charleston, South Carolina, got to No. 15 in the AP poll and then lost home games by 13 to Green Bay and by 28 to Eastern Kentucky.

Those two losses cost them on Selection Sunday in March. The Canes were passed over for the NCAA Tournament and had to settle for the NIT. They wound up making the NIT final and used that as a springboard for this season.

UM is off to another hot start heading into Friday's 4 p.m. home game against Northeastern. The Hurricanes are undefeated at 5-0, ranked 15th and expectations are high. They insist they won't let up like they did last season.

"I knew this was a different team because right after we won the Puerto Rico tournament, we're celebrating on the court, before we get the trophy and Ja'Quan said: 'We were in this position last year, won a tournament, we came back home but didn't take care of business. Let's make sure we don't do that this year. We stay hungry,'" Angel Rodriguez said. "When I heard it from him, a sophomore, I knew that we have a chance to be special.

I knew that the team is truly headed the right way."

Newton has taken on a more prominent role this season. He is averaging 21.4 minutes per game, compared to 13.5 minutes last season. He is scoring an average of 11.8 points, nearly triple the four points he averaged last season.

And he isn't afraid to speak out.

"I just wanted everybody to know that we're not done," Newton said of his pep talk. "We're celebrating right now, but we're not done. We still have work to do."

After the Puerto Rico on-court celebration, Newton posed for a photo with the trophy and posted it on Twitter with the caption: "Mom, this is for you!!!! Love you."

Newton's mother, Lisa Brown, died of breast cancer during his senior year of high school, a day before he scored 33 points in the Pennsylvania state championship game. He has her name tattooed on his left shoulder, with the inscription: A Mother's Love is Priceless.

"Every time I go on the floor and play, it's always for her," Newton said. "She was my biggest fan, biggest supporter. She went to every game. She would be the first to tell me what I did wrong, too. She was very blunt.

"My mom is like an angel up there carrying the ball into the goal for me. That's what I think before each game, that my mom has the basketball every time I shoot and puts it in the goal for me."

UM Season Tickets Sold Out for Rest of Season

Sun Sentinel
Christy Cabrera Chirinos
Nov. 25, 2015

Getting tickets to see one of the hottest teams in college hoops just got harder.

On Wednesday morning, Miami announced that for the first time in program history, men's basketball season tickets are sold out. It's the first time any Miami Hurricanes team has sold out their entire season and now, fans hoping to catch the likes of Florida, Duke, and Syracuse at the BankUnited Center, which seats 7,972 will have to turn to the secondary market to get tickets.

There's also the option of joining the season-ticket wait list for next year.

"It's the greatest feeling for every coach and player to now be in a position that every one of our games is a sellout," Larrañaga said in a statement. It's exciting and a tremendous accomplishment."

According to Miami, 5,600 season tickets have been sold, the last being purchased Wednesday morning. That's a jump from the school's previous high of 3,674 season tickets sold for the 2013-14 season which came after Miami won the ACC title and made a Sweet 16 run during a record-breaking 2013 campaign.

Expectations are high for this year's team, which likely fueled the rush for tickets.

Earlier this week, the Hurricanes – who are coming off a 25-win season and a run to the NIT championship game—debuted in the AP Top 25 after upsetting two ranked teams en route to winning the Puerto Rico Tip-Off tournament this weekend.

A day after that, Tonye Jekiri was named the ACC Player of the Week and Miami

earned its spot in college basketball's two major polls, with that No. 15 ranking the highest the school has ever been ranked in the month of November.

According to Miami, fans still looking for tickets to individual games are encouraged to use StubHub, which is the school's official secondary ticket market. The school said there are still tickets available through all-inclusive Legends Suites packages, which include four tickets, food, beer, wine, water and soft drinks.

Rodriguez, Miami worthy of recognition after 5-0 start

CBS Sports
Gary Parrish
Nov. 24, 2015

I spend part of the first Monday in April each year -- which is to say, the day of the title game of the NCAA Tournament -- finalizing the Ridiculously Early Preseason Top 25 (and one), and I usually do it in a restaurant at or near my hotel while picking at some food.

It's an annual tradition.

Or something.

Either way, I was doing exactly that this past April, a few hours before Duke beat Wisconsin to win the national championship, and I was sitting at a table with a solid group of about 18 teams because, every year, there are about 17 or 18 teams that, on paper, seem like no-brainers for the Top 25 (and one). Then, there are usually about another 15 schools worth considering for the final eight or nine spots. And so that's what I was doing, just sitting there and sorting through those teams and trying to finalize the bottom of the rankings, when, randomly, Miami assistant Chris Caputo walked by.

He asked what I was doing. I told him.

Then, I asked Caputo if his team should be ranked.

Honestly, I don't remember exactly what he said. But I do remember leaving that conversation under the impression that Miami's staff believed Miami would be good.

So I ranked Miami 21st.

And now look.

"It's only November," Miami coach Jim

Larranaga said after his Hurricanes beat Butler this past weekend to improve to 5-0 with five double-digit wins, including two double-digit wins over schools that were ranked in the preseason Associated Press Top 25 poll.

In fairness, Larranaga is right. It is only November. But nobody has accomplished more than Miami in these first two weeks of this season. And the Hurricanes look capable of competing with North Carolina, Virginia, Duke and anybody else at the top of the ACC.

"I think the Canes are a top-10 team," ESPN's LaPhonso Ellis said during Sunday's broadcast while Miami was taking a 19-point lead over Butler, and I completely agree.

That's why I have Miami ranked ninth in the Top 25 (and one).

There are numerous reasons why the Hurricanes are playing at a high level -- the most obvious being that the top four scorers from last season's team are all back and more developed. Also: Miami is barely turning the ball over and shooting 45.4 percent from 3-point range, which is, needless to say, a good combination. And Tonye Jekari, the senior big, is averaging a double-double. He's the reigning ACC Player of the Week.

All great stuff.

But the most interesting thing is probably the play of Angel Rodriguez.

A transfer from Kansas State, Rodriguez has forever shown glimpses of greatness -- like when he scored 24 and led Miami to a win over Duke at Cameron Indoor Stadium last season. Problem is, he's also forever been wildly inconsistent and inefficient -- proof being how he followed that 24-point

effort in a win at Duke with a 1-of-10 shooting performance four days later in a loss at Notre Dame. Rodriguez has never shot better than 36.1 percent from the field, or 34.4 percent from 3-point range, in a season of college basketball.

But he's been better so far this season.

Rodriguez is shooting a career-high 42.2 percent from the field and a career-high 36.0 percent from 3-point range, and he's averaging more points per game (12.8) on fewer shots. His free throw percentage (77.3), assists (4.6) and rebounding numbers (2.6) are all up. He's also not turning it over as often despite playing the same amount of minutes.

Simply put, Angel Rodriguez has been good.

Consequently, Miami has been really, really good.

"They're well-coached, extremely talented and unbelievably experienced," said Mississippi State's Ben Howland, whose Bulldogs lost 105-79 to Miami last week. "Just a veteran club."

And one that figures to be a factor this season.

Bottom line, it's past time to start taking the Hurricanes seriously. Miami won its first ACC title in history in 2013. Two weeks into this season, a second doesn't seem far-fetched.

Rodriguez Looks Up To Puerto Rican NBA Point Guards

AP
Aaron Beard
Nov. 24, 2015

The Miami Hurricanes are off to a great start this season and the play of their starting point guard is a big reason for it.

Miami's Angel Rodriguez left Puerto Rico at 15 for the U.S. mainland to play high school basketball and chase a college scholarship.

Now he's the point guard for a team looking like a potential force in the Atlantic Coast Conference after beating No. 22 Butler 85-75 in the championship game of the Puerto Rico Tipoff. And he's the latest in a recent run of successful floor generals — Dallas Mavericks veteran J.J. Barea and former NBA player Carlos Arroyo — from the island best known for churning out baseball talent.

Just getting the chance to follow their lead is a big deal for Rodriguez.

"It comes with just being born here," said Rodriguez, who was born in San Juan and lists the barrio of Cupey as his hometown. "People who are born here are very, very proud, very feisty and very confident in a way.

"I think with all of the great guards that have been in Puerto Rico — because you know about those two guys, but you don't know about other guys that are legendary (here) — it's an honor and it motivates me."

The Tipoff was a homecoming for Rodriguez, who left here to play high school ball in Miami and first played at Kansas State before transferring to play for the Hurricanes (5-0) to be closer to friends and family.

He had plenty of them in the stands in the past week at Coliseo Roberto Clemente, the same venue where he watched Arroyo and Barea play for the local Cangrejeros team growing up.

They're some of the most recent examples of successful NBA players from the U.S. territory located about 1,000 miles southeast of Florida in the Caribbean.

Arroyo, a native of Fajardo on Puerto Rico's eastern coast, played at Florida International in college from 1997-01. He then spent nine seasons in the NBA with stops in Toronto, Denver, Utah, Detroit, Orlando, Miami and lastly in Boston in 2011.

Barea is a native of Mayaguez on the western coast. He spent four college seasons at Northeastern and has spent 10 seasons in the NBA with Dallas and Minnesota, winning a championship ring with the Mavericks in 2011.

"It's easy to say Steph Curry, Kyrie (Irving), those guys, but the reality is I don't play the same as those guys," Rodriguez said. "Arroyo's from here. I could do the same thing he's doing if I keep working hard. So Arroyo has always been somebody I look up to as far as the game, and Barea because he's doing it so recent in the NBA.

"It gives me that motivation because I feel like he's opening doors for us."

Barea remembers looking up to Arroyo. Now he's conscious of offering that inspiration for Rodriguez and others from Puerto Rico.

"No question," Barea said. "I try to do my best every night out, do my best to stay in the NBA as long as I can and set a great example and have a good name so Angel and other kids that are playing basketball

in Puerto Rico in other leagues have a chance in the future."

Miami coach Jim Larranaga sees plenty of similarities between the 5-foot-11 Rodriguez and the 6-foot Barea. He coached against Barea in college when he was at George Mason, saying Barea was a threat both as a shooter and a passer any time he had the ball.

That also explains why Larranaga sees Puerto Rico as an untapped recruiting area.

"In a meeting back in September, I told the coaches: We have to think more outside the box," Larranaga said. "We have to go to Spanish-speaking countries, we need to go to Puerto Rico, we need to go to South America, because there's a lot of good players there. And Miami's a great destination for them."

Rodriguez noted there's a wall outside Coliseo Roberto Clemente featuring the island's basketball greats, including Arroyo and Barea. During a past visit here, he came to a game and snapped a photo of the wall with the goal of one day making it there himself.

"I know it'll take a lot of hard work and a lot of years," Rodriguez said. "But that's how everything starts, by dreaming."

10 Years After Cinderella Run

Bleacher Report

Kerry Miller

Nov. 24, 2015

“Close your eyes and dream the biggest dream about what the upcoming season could be like.”

Months before arguably the greatest Cinderella story in NCAA tournament history, a no-name team full of anonymous players huddled together in a classroom at George Mason’s old gymnasium to receive those instructions from world-renowned sports psychologist Dr. Bob Rotella.

It was late October 2005, and head coach Jim Larranaga knew he had something special brewing. The Patriots went just 16-13 the previous year, but they were getting everybody back from a young, homegrown squad. The complete antithesis of a conventional championship roster, eight players—including the entire starting five—from that history-making 2005-06 team were recruited from within an hour and a half of GMU’s campus in Fairfax, Virginia.

After several minutes of silence, Dr. Rotella asked if someone would be willing to volunteer his dream.

“Lamar Butler raised his hand and said, ‘I dreamed we made it to the Final Four,’” Larranaga recounted to Bleacher Report. “Dr. Rotella asked the team, ‘How many of you can buy into Lamar’s dream and believe it’s possible for you guys to reach the Final Four?’ Every hand in the room went up.”

This season, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of George Mason achieving Butler’s dream.

Within the first two weeks of that season, though, it certainly seemed they had

dreamed beyond their means.

The Patriots lost two of their first three games, one of which was a 20-point home blowout at the hand of Creighton. But they bounced back to win 22 of their next 26 games, including an absolutely crucial road win over Wichita State as part of the now-defunct BracketBusters weekend. Without that win, there’s no way George Mason sneaks into the NCAA tournament as a No. 11 seed.

“From now on, you are no longer college basketball fans,” Rotella told them. “When you’re watching a game on TV, you do not listen to Dick Vitale say, ‘He’s awesome, baby!’ You look at it as they’re your first-round opponent in the NCAA and how you’re going to beat them and how you’re going to defend them. If you do that throughout the year, you’ll be mentally prepared to not only play but to defeat them.”

The rest, as they say, is history.

The Patriots toppled college basketball titans Michigan State, North Carolina and Connecticut en route to the most improbable Final Four appearance of all time. In just one of the prior 19 tournaments had a team seeded lower than No. 6 advanced to the Final Four, but George Mason flipped that script to the point where we’ve seen six such teams reach the national semifinals in the past five years.

George Mason proved that it is possible for David to beat the Goliaths of the world, arguably inspiring non-major programs like Butler, Davidson, VCU and Wichita State to make deep tournament runs of their own.

So, why is it that those four schools won a combined 103 games last season and were

each invited to the NCAA tournament, while the Patriots lost at least 20 games for a second straight year? Every other Cinderella team from the past decade is still wearing its glass slipper, but George Mason has been scrubbing the Atlantic 10’s basement.

“George Mason has the potential to compete both in the A-10 and on the national scene,” said Larranaga, now entering his fifth season as the head coach at Miami. “It’s in a great geographical location for recruiting, and during my time there, the people were just absolutely wonderful and very supportive of our program.”

It’s a nice sales pitch, but it hasn’t amounted to anything more than that.

One Big Thought: Say hello to Miami

ESPN.com
Eamonn Brennan
Nov. 23, 2015

On Friday, after the first round of the Puerto Rico Tip-Off, we previewed the remainder of the weekend's action in San Juan with these timeless words of wisdom:

The deepest and best field of the weekend belongs to the Puerto Rico Tip Off. Which, with all due respect, is thanks primarily to its potential Butler-Utah finale. That remains a possibility after Thursday, when the Bulldogs crushed Missouri State, and Utah handled partners in plane travel Texas Tech. Then again, we might also be deeply disrespecting Miami, which pounced on Mississippi State early and never looked back en route to Friday's semifinal matchup with the Utes.

So, yeah: We were deeply disrespecting Miami. We're sorry, Miami. It won't happen again.

As it turns out, a 105-79 blitzkrieg of Mississippi State -- in 77 possessions -- had less to do with the Bulldogs being totally overmatched than with the Hurricanes being awesome at basketball. Twenty-four hours later, Miami did the same thing to Utah, winning a 67-possession game 90-66. Once again, the Hurricanes held an opponent close to the one-point-per-trip mark; once again, they scored by the truckload (1.34 ppp). The only difference was the understood quality of the opponent. Thrashing a rebuilding program with a first-year coach is one thing; doing the same thing to a No. 16-ranked, senior-laden, Pac-12 title contender with a future lottery-pick center is another.

Then on Sunday, for good measure, the Hurricanes made Sunday night's Puerto Rico Tip-Off title game -- another matchup with a top-25 team -- look nearly as easy in an 85-75 win over No. 21 Butler.

Again: We're sorry, Miami. Seriously. Our bad.

Now, that apology can only extend so far. On the one hand, yes, it was fair to expect Jim Larranaga's team to improve this summer, as a 2014-15 team that relied primarily on new faces became a 2015-16 group with more experience and cohesion at nearly every position. On the other hand, the Hurricanes were deeply unreliable a season ago, capable of both winning at eventual national champion Duke (Jan. 13) and losing at home to Georgia Tech by 20 points 15 days later. Miami failed to make the NCAA tournament for valid reasons, and even the most bullish offseason assessments of the Canes topped out at the low reaches of the Top 25. No one could have seen this coming.

Not that it matters now. Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan are providing extremely sharp, experienced, efficient guard play. (McClellan scored 27 points on 10-of-12 shooting -- including 7-for-7 inside the arc! -- against Utah). Center Tonye Jekiri has added more effective post work to his already impressive rebounding acumen. The Hurricanes, 5-0 with neutral-court wins over Utah and Butler, are an ACC title contender through and through. And now we know.

Miami makes statement with two Top-25 wins in PR

CBS Sports

Jon Rothstein

Nov. 23, 2015

Jim Larranaga has another shot at an ACC title. Who thought we'd be saying that four and a half years ago when Larranaga was hired by Miami?

The veteran head coach who led George Mason to the Final Four in 2006 was named national coach of the year in 2013 when he led the Hurricanes to both the ACC regular season and tournament titles as well as a two-seed in the NCAA Tournament. Now two and a half years later Larranaga has another chance to legitimately challenge North Carolina, Virginia, and Duke for a spot atop the perch of college basketball's elite conference.

Miami ran through the Puerto Rico Shootout this past weekend like a chainsaw through butter all while displaying the same type of balance, unselfishness, and teamwork that allowed guys like Shane Larkin, Durand Scott, and Kenny Kadji to have a memorable season in 2013. Just like that group of Hurricanes, this squad possesses similar attributes.

Miami is two-deep at every position, boasts two perimeter starters in Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan who are both in their fifth year of college basketball, and has a backup point guard in Ja'Quan Newton that could start for most programs in America.

There isn't the type of one-and-done talent that you're going to potentially see in Chapel Hill or Durham, but that shouldn't dissuade people from believing in this team moving forward. Another reason to be bullish on the Hurricanes? Larranaga has a combined 7-5 record against Duke and North Carolina over the past four seasons.

Miami emerging as an ACC Contender

Sports Illustrated
Chris Johnson
Nov. 23, 2015

In the days after the 2015 NCAA tournament field was revealed, Jim Larrañaga probably wished his team had performed better in November and December. It would have been hard to fault the Miami coach for wondering whether even one more nonconference win could have changed the selection committee's mind. The Hurricanes had a massive win at Duke to their name, but not much else to distinguish their résumé. Accordingly, Miami was left on the outside looking in, and bracketologists dubbed it one of the biggest "snubs."

It doesn't seem Larrañaga will need to sweat out selection Sunday in 2016, because Miami already looks like a safe bet to make the field. The Hurricanes beat No. 22 Butler on Sunday night, 85–75, to win the Puerto Rico Tip-Off, continuing an impressive run in the first month of the season. A day after ACC frontrunner North Carolina was stunned at Northern Iowa and less than a week after conference rival Duke lost to Kentucky in the Champions Classic, another ACC program, Miami is building its case as a legit contender.

The Hurricanes are now 5–0 with wins over two teams ranked in the top 40 of SI.com's projections. How is Miami doing it? Well, it's making shots. In their two most recent wins, over Utah and Butler, the Hurricanes knocked down 18 of their 37 (48.6%) three-point attempts and rung up 1.34 and 1.27 points per possession, respectively. Redshirt senior guards Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez totaled 65 points in the two wins, and senior big man Tonye Jekiri has complemented them by scoring in the paint (32 points combined) and crashing the boards (24).

On Sunday, Miami overwhelmed the Bulldogs by preventing easy looks in the half court, pressuring the ball and scoring off turnovers. The Hurricanes jumped on Butler early and held a 13-point lead at half time after limiting the Bulldogs to 0.84 points per possession. Star Butler guard Kellen Dunham made some timely shots and scored 20 points in the second half to keep the Bulldogs in it down the stretch, but Miami ultimately made enough free throws to hang on for a victory that could pay huge dividends in March.

by Ryan Krasnoo The Hurricanes should keep winning, too. Ken Pomeroy gives them at least a 79% chance of taking each of their next nine games, and if it can survive a Dec. 1 trip to Nebraska, Miami could open ACC play against Syracuse on Jan. 2 with a perfect record. The Hurricanes already have cleared their biggest hurdles in nonconference play, so they can enter the conference season with less pressure to score signature wins. But based on the way it has performed so far, Miami should be able to hang with with the ACC's top teams.

The Tar Heels—which, to be fair, are without their best player (Marcus Paige)—already lost to a Missouri Valley Conference program. Duke rebounded from its defeat to the Wildcats with wins over Georgetown and VCU at the 2K Classic but needs scorers to emerge in support of budding sophomore star Grayson Allen. And Virginia surrendered 73 points in a loss at George Washington earlier this month. SI.com projected those three squads to finish atop the ACC, but each has already shown vulnerability. If Miami is for real, beating those programs in January and February will prove it.

Perhaps it's too soon to buy into the Hurricanes, given they've played only two games against strong competition (Mississippi State has a long way to go).

Yet it's hard not to be impressed by what they've accomplished so far. At the very least, given last season's tourney miss, one can appreciate the importance of their early success and look forward to the ACC being more competitive. Between the wins over top-25 teams and a pair of huge recruiting additions, it's been a very good week for Miami basketball.

Are there any great teams out there?

ESPN

Myron Medcalf

Nov. 23, 2015

Miami crashes the ACC contender convo in Puerto Rico

Jim Larranaga's squad entered the Puerto Rico Tip-Off as an unranked team searching for respect. And then the Miami Hurricanes snatched it after defeating Mississippi State, No. 16 Utah and No. 22 Butler by a combined 60-point margin to win the tournament title. The Hurricanes are deep. They're experienced (six upperclassmen). Sheldon McClellan (19.8 PPG, 56 percent from the 3-point line) looks like a Wooden Award contender right now. Angel Rodriguez, a Puerto Rican point guard who played in front of family and friends, handed out 12 assists and went 9-for-10 from the free throw line.

The Hurricanes will earn a top-20 slot when the new poll comes out Monday. But they enjoyed this hype after a win at Duke last season, too. That Miami team lost five of its next eight games and ended the year in the NIT. If the Hurricanes can manage a consistent effort and receive efficient performances from Rodriguez and McClellan, however, they'll be a serious threat in the ACC.

Teams we're not sure about yet

Miami Hurricanes

So a week after praising Miami for its startling run through the Puerto Rico Tip-Off -- the Hurricanes defeated Utah and Butler -- Jim Larranaga's squad has found a spot on this list. How? Well, Miami followed its Tip-Off championship with a 78-77 home loss to Northeastern on Friday. We rarely co-sign the transitive comparisons, but the Huskies had previously lost to Miami (OH). Last season,

Miami beat Duke at Cameron Indoor Stadium and then tumbled into the NIT. Its porous defense and inconsistent offense were the culprits. So after watching the Hurricanes abandon perimeter defense (54 percent clip from the 3-point line for the Huskies), we're going to pull back the hype we promoted last week.

Rodriguez, Miami take home Puerto Rico Tipoff title

NBC Sports

Raphielle Johnson

Nov. 22, 2015

Miami's depth and talent were certainly on display this weekend as they won the Puerto Rico Tipoff, beating No. 22 Butler 85-75 in Sunday's title game. And it was clear all weekend that their hopes of contending in the ACC this season will ultimately hinge on the play of senior point guard Angel Rodriguez.

Rodriguez produced more positive plays than negative all weekend in San Juan, performing well in his return to the island he calls home. And if Jim Larrañaga's team is to make a run at their first ACC title since 2013, that will have to be the case as the Hurricanes play in even bigger games when conference play begins.

Rodriguez accounted for 17 points and three assists, but he also had four turnovers with three coming during a second-half stretch in which Butler mounted its rally. The first half for Miami was, when factoring in the caliber of the opponent, as good a half of basketball they've played all year. Even better than what they did in the first half of the win over Mississippi State on Thursday, because Butler is a team that will hear its name called Selection Sunday.

The Hurricanes' length and athleticism caused problems for Butler at both ends of the floor, as the Bulldogs shot 40.7 percent from the field, and Miami was able to shoot 52.9 percent. Half of Miami's 18 first half field goals were assisted, with Butler's help side defenders paying the price for being too quick to help in an attempt to take away driving lanes.

Tonye Jekiri accounted for eight points and seven rebounds, finishing with 12 and 12, and backup point guard Ja'Quan Newton scored eight of his 17 and dished

out three assists during the first stanza. Whatever Miami wanted to get done they were able to in the first half, leading by as much as 19 and taking a 13-point lead into the break.

Butler improved on both ends of the floor in the second half, and with Miami not playing with the same efficiency the Bulldogs were able to climb back into the game. Managing the game is where point guard play comes in, which is why Rodriguez is the most important piece for Miami as they look to compete with the likes of North Carolina, Duke and Virginia atop the ACC.

When he's on Rodriguez can be one of the ACC's top point guards, and by extension the Hurricanes are an ACC contender. But when he struggles, even with their depth the Hurricanes have the appearance of a team that's a bit scattered on the court. Outside of a few minutes Sunday night Miami got "good Rodriguez" in Puerto Rico, and as a result they head back to the mainland with the Puerto Rico Tipoff trophy in tow.

And if this group is to have a chance of reaching the heights last seen by Shane Larkin and company, that will have to be the case during ACC play as well.

Miami experiencing fairy tale success all over again

SB Nation

Mike Rutherford

Nov. 23, 2015

Jim Larranaga and Miami are rising again after a powerhouse first two weeks that included victories over ranked teams like Butler and Utah.

It's been three seasons now since Jim Larranaga and Miami did the unthinkable and claimed both the ACC's regular season and tournament championships. The Hurricanes had been picked to finish fifth in the conference before the season, so it's not like expectations were low. But to dominate the likes of Duke, North Carolina and NC State from January through early March, well, it was a season that many in Coral Gables believed they'd never see.

The succeeding two seasons have to have left some Miami fans wondering if the fairy tale season actually happened or if it was just a coping mechanism to deal with the fact that the 'Canes have still never played in a regional final.

After losing all of their frontcourt experience as well as all of a dynamic starting backcourt that included first team All-American Shane Larkin, Miami understandably took a monster step back in 2013-14. Larranaga's team fought through its talent deficiencies to finish with a winning record, but that 17-16 mark still left them without a postseason. A rough non-conference run that included losses to Green Bay, Providence and Eastern Kentucky ultimately doomed a 2014-15 Miami squad that was one of the first four teams left out of the NCAA Tournament despite having 90-74 road win over eventual national champion Duke on its resume.

The snub left a handful of folks in Coral Gables wondering if the "one of the best coaches in the game" hype surrounding Larranaga was truly justified. After all, this is a sport with a March measuring stick, and Coach L and company have spent three of their four seasons at The U watching the Big Dance from the comfort of their homes.

Larranaga addressed the state of his program as well as the totality of his accomplishments on a local radio show earlier this month:

When my staff and I got here five years ago,

there were several goals that we had. One was we wanted to beat the perennial powerhouses — Duke and Carolina — and we've done that. We've won twice in Cameron Indoor Stadium. We've won twice in Chapel Hill, North Carolina against the Tar Heels. We have winning records against both of those programs.

One of the other goals was to win a regular season championship or an ACC tournament championship and we've done both of those. One of the other goals that was gonna take a little longer — and we knew — was to create the kind of excitement here in Coral Gables and in Miami to get the fans behind this program from the start of the season to the end of the season and now with less than 500, close to 400 season tickets left — and we're selling 50 a day — we expect that before the end of the month we will be totally sold out at the Bank United Center for every home game this season... That's something that everybody told me was impossible. No one could imagine that we could do that but with the help of a great coaching staff and a terrific group of young men — players who really have elevated this program — we're gonna do something for the first time in school history and we're really proud of that.

Our goals are always high, our expectations are always to compete with the best teams in the country and in the ACC and win championships. We're all about excellence.

Through the first week and a half of the 2015-16 season, it certainly appears as though those Miami fans who had faith in Larranaga's quest for excellence are about to be rewarded.

Perhaps no team in America has been more impressive thus far than the Miami Hurricanes. While the defining storyline of the season has been power conference teams suffering shocking losses to mid- or low-major opponents, the 'Canes have rolled through the toughest portion of their non-conference schedule with next to no resistance.

After dispatching UT-Rio Grande Valley and preseason Sun Belt favorite Louisiana-Lafayette by a combined score of 179-136, the 'Canes traveled to San Juan for the Puerto Rico Tip-Off, where one of the best early season tournament fields was waiting for them. Miami humiliated super freshman

Malik Newman and Mississippi State on the first night (105-79), treated No. 16 Utah the same way in the semifinals (90-66), and then boat-raced No. 22 Butler (85-75) to claim the tournament's championship.

"It's only November," Larranaga said Sunday night. "Teams are going to get better. The really great teams are going to improve dramatically between now and March. And we want to be one of those teams."

Given the makeup of this Hurricane team, being "great" by March seems more plausible than not.

At times last season, it seemed like Kansas State transfer Angel Rodriguez was uncertain of how to best handle the dual role of team captain and offensive star. Larranaga had cast him as such before the start of the season, but when fellow junior Sheldon McClellan began to emerge as the team's most consistent scoring threat, Rodriguez appeared uncertain about how to handle it.

A year of experience and an important offseason have done wonders for the backcourt duo, which figures to have a claim for being the ACC's best. Rodriguez spoke often during the summer about deferring more to the players around him, while the soft-spoken McClellan acknowledged his need to emerge as more of a leader.

The adjustments have resulted in both players giving defining performances when the early-season lights have been the brightest. McClellan, as expected, is the team's leading scorer at 17.4 points per game. He dropped 27 points in the win over Utah on 10-of-12 shooting. Rodriguez is still putting the ball in the basket, but he's also improved on both his assist and turnover numbers from a year ago. He scored 19 points in the Puerto Rico Tip-Off championship win over Butler, and wound up being named the tournament's Most Outstanding Player.

"My goal is to be more consistent, and have a great assist-to-turnover ratio," Rodriguez said of his evolved game. "We have a very good chance of doing something special, but we have to be consistent and make sure we make it about the team rather than the individual."

Miami's Rodriguez gets his perfect ending

AP

Aaron Beard

Nov. 22, 2015

Miami's Angel Rodriguez couldn't have asked for a much better finish. Neither could all his family and friends who came to Coliseo Roberto Clemente to watch his return to his hometown for the Puerto Rico Tipoff.

Rodriguez scored 19 points in Miami's 85-75 win against No. 22 Butler in Sunday night's championship game. Rodriguez was also named the Tipoff's most outstanding player, breaking out into a big grin while wearing the flag of his native Puerto Rico draped around his shoulders.

Afterward, Rodriguez stood amid a crowd off the court, posing for pictures and signing autographs in the arena where he watched the local pro team growing up. Rodriguez left Puerto Rico at 15 to come to the mainland United States to pursue a college scholarship.

Rodriguez said he spent some of Saturday's off day at the arena visualizing playing well and helping his team win, as well as his long road to this point.

"I used to work hard and say, 'Oh yeah, i can do it,' but I didn't know I would actually be here at this time," he said. "And in my last year, to come home with such a great team ... and finish the tournament with a win has been unbelievable."

Miami won't be overlooked any longer

YahooSports.com

Jeff Eisenberg

Nov. 22, 2015

Before boarding a flight for Puerto Rico a few days ago, Miami coach Jim Larranaga solidified his program's future by securing commitments from a pair of 2016 Rivals top 50 prospects.

Then the Hurricanes arrived at the Puerto Rico Tip-Off and proved their current team is worthy of excitement too.

They annihilated Mississippi State by 26 points in Thursday's opening round. They demolished 16th-ranked Utah by 24 in Friday semifinals. They roared to a 19-point first-half lead over 22nd-ranked Butler in Sunday's championship game before withstanding a late surge from the Bulldogs and emerging with an 85-75 victory.

Three emphatic wins in Puerto Rico suggest that Miami may have been one of the nation's most underrated teams entering the new season. Not only have the unbeaten Hurricanes accomplished enough to deserve a spot in the AP Top 25 when it's released anew Monday morning, it would also be a travesty if they don't debut somewhere in the top 15.

It shouldn't be a total surprise that Miami is off to such a strong start because the Hurricanes return the core of a 25-win NIT team that last year showed glimpses of immense potential. At its best, Miami walloped Duke in Durham last season and also nearly upset ACC champion Virginia. At their worst, the Hurricanes endured surprising home losses to Georgia Tech by 20 and to Eastern Kentucky by 28.

Eliminating that inconsistency is a possibility this season if Miami neither relies too heavily on its haphazard 3-point

shooting nor on senior point guard Angel Rodriguez. When Rodriguez involved his supporting cast and they responded by making baskets, Miami was at its best last season. When Rodriguez hunted his own shot and did too much himself, his turnovers rose, his shooting percent plummeted and the Hurricanes became much more vulnerable.

Balanced, efficient offense actually became a strength for Miami in Puerto Rico. The Hurricanes have risen to second nationally in points per possession because they're two deep at every possession and they can score in so many different ways.

They're long, athletic and active enough defensively to force turnovers with smothering ball pressure and parlay them into easy transition baskets. They have a 7-foot center in Tonye Jekiri who can alter shots and rebound at one end yet post-up and score at the other. And they have an array of perimeter weapons highlighted by the aforementioned Rodriguez, sharpshooter Davon Reed and high-scoring wing Sheldon McClellan.

It was Miami's disruptive defense that caused Butler the most problems during a first half in which the typically mistake-free Bulldogs committed nine turnovers and allowed the Hurricanes to convert many of them into fast-break opportunities. Butler did a better job in the second half taking care of the ball, freeing Kellen Dunham for jump shots and attacking the offensive glass for second-chance points, but every time the Bulldogs would mount a charge, Miami had an answer.

When a Dunham 3-pointer trimmed the deficit to eight with nine minutes to play, Je'Quan Newton responded with a critical jumper. When a pair of Kelan Martin free throws pulled Butler within seven a couple minutes later, Rodriguez and Reed

buried back-to-back threes. And when the Bulldogs surged to within four on yet another Dunham deep ball, the Hurricanes responded once more by holding Butler without a field goal over the game's final three-plus minutes.

The challenge over the next six weeks for Miami will be maintaining the level of intensity it showed in Puerto Rico. The Hurricanes have a chance to enter ACC play with an impressive record considering their toughest remaining non-league home game is against retooling Florida and their lone road games are against La Salle and Nebraska.

Three years ago, a veteran-laden Miami team won 29 games, captured the ACC regular season title and advanced to the Sweet 16.

It's far too early to suggest this year's team is capable of similar exploits, but the Hurricanes are certainly off to an encouraging start.

On the Quad:

ESPN.com

C.L. Brown

Nov. 22, 2015

The team of the week

Miami's closest game this season -- a 16-point win against Louisiana-Lafayette -- seems like a nail-biter compared to what it has done in the Puerto Rico Tip Off. The Canes are playing like the best team in the ACC right now after obliterating No. 16 Utah 90-66 and Mississippi State 105-79. Another ranked team, and probably a much stiffer test, awaits Sunday at 7:30 p.m. in the Tip Off championship against No. 22 Butler.

The maturity of the Canes' senior backcourt of Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan is a big reason for their hot start. They had a tendency to be streaky last season, but they're doing a much better job of picking their spots this season.

Rodriguez has averaged 2.4 turnovers per game in his career. He's no longer forcing the issue as much this season and has committed just five turnovers in four games.

McClellan, a career 43.9 percent shooter from the floor and 31.7 percent from the 3-point line, has been more selective in the shots he takes, and it has made him more effective. He leads the Canes with 19.8 points per game while shooting 65.9 percent from the floor and 56.3 percent from 3-point range.

Miami ranks fourth in offensive efficiency (according to Ken Pomeroy) and, regardless of Sunday night's outcome, should storm its way into the Top 25 this week.

Miami center Jekiri outplays Utes' Poeltl

Salt Lake Tribune

Kyle Goon

Nov. 20, 2015

A 7-foot center had himself a career night. Just not the one Utah hoped would excel.

A thorn in Utah's side might not accurately represent Miami senior Tonye Jekiri's impact in the Hurricanes' 90-66 thrashing of the Utes — more like a whole tree in the side. He loomed large, scoring a career-best 20 points and grabbing 12 rebounds.

On the 2016 NBA Draft Express board, Utah center Jakob Poeltl has him beat by 65 spots. But at least in the Puerto Rico Tip-Off, the muscular Jekiri looked at least every bit Poeltl's equal, if not better.

"I thought the big kid did a nice job," Utah coach Larry Krystkowiak said. "He was ready, played Jakob really well. ... It seems like those times when we got stops, he was there to clean up those."

Jekiri cleaned up five offensive boards, and finished with 12 rebounds, twice as many as any other player in the game (Poeltl had 6). He was especially devastating in the first half: As Utah's frontcourt swapped lineups furiously to stave off foul trouble, Jekiri slipped beneath the defense into the paint and caught passes or got rebounds for easy buckets right at the rim.

It's kind of a pattern for Jekiri: He often goes unnoticed. But his hard work definitely has drawn the praise of his coach, Jim Larranaga.

In all, Jekiri played 32 minutes to lead the Canes — Larranaga said he was afraid to take him out.

"For whatever reason with our schedule, in our first four games we've played against

a really good big man who can score," he said. "Tonye's been very challenged, but he's done well."

'Am I going to be on TV?'

AP

Aaron Beard

Nov. 19, 2015

Miami coach Jim Larranaga and point guard Angel Rodriguez had some company at their postgame news conference following Thursday night's 105-79 win against Mississippi State in the Puerto Rico Tipoff in San Juan.

Larranaga brought grandsons Jon Temple, 7 (in green); and Henry, 5; along to let them see what a news conference is like.

Afterward, Larranaga said in an interview with The Associated Press that the kid liked being a part of the team, noting Henry listened to Christmas music with Tonye Jekiri as they rode the team bus.

So how did they like the postgame set up?

"They loved it," Larranaga said. "They asked, 'Am I going to be on TV?'"

Huge day for Hurricanes hoops: blue-chip recruits

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 19, 2015

Miami landed one of its highest-rated basketball recruits of the last 30 years.

And didn't stop there.

In one of the biggest off-court days in program history, the Hurricanes on Wednesday signed two of the nation's top prospects, shooting guard Bruce Brown and power forward Dewan Huell, and are in line to pull in their first-ever top-10 recruiting class.

Brown (6-4, 200), a four-star recruit who plays at Vermont Academy, chose UM over Indiana. Five-star Huell (6-9, 220), of Miami Norland High, selected UM over South Carolina. Florida State was also a contender.

Along with four-star center Rodney Miller (6-11, 245), who signed last week, the two represent a gigantic haul for the Hurricanes. It is their best signing class in at least 15 years, and possibly ever. Huell is their first five-star player since 2009 and third since 2002. Miami signed three McDonald's All-Americans before that.

There were about two dozen happy Hurricanes players and coaches in San Juan, P.R., where the team is preparing to face Mississippi State in Thursday's opening round of the Puerto Rico Tip-Off (5 p.m., ESPN2). The team began clapping when coach Jim Larranaga shared word of the commitments, a source said.

Miami's 2016 class is now rated No. 7 nationally by 247Sports, No. 8 by Scout, No. 9 by ESPN and No. 10 by Rivals. It's the first time the Hurricanes have been ranked in the top 10 by recruiting websites, which currently list ratings back to the early 2000s.

ESPN rates Huell, 18, the No. 21 player in the nation. Rivals and 247Sports rank him 23rd. Scout has him 25th. With Huell in the frontcourt, Norland has won three state titles in a row. The Vikings are going for their fifth straight crown, which would

tie the state record.

Huell called it a "long, hard process" before donning a black hat with "CANES" on it and signing his letter of intent. In a video posted by Rivals, he said Miami's "loyalty" helped him decide.

"They've been recruiting me since I was a freshman. I've been their No. 1 target since then," he said. "I feel in my heart that's where I belong."

Brown, rated No. 30 by ESPN and No. 44 by Scout.com, told ESPN.com he picked Miami because "they run pick-and-rolls. I love pick-and-rolls. They pressure the ball. And also Angel [Rodriguez] and Sheldon [McClellan, UM's leading guards] are leaving," he said.

Brown, from Wakefield, Mass., is the product of New England's elite prep league and the Boston AAU circuit. The 19-year-old should make an immediate impact for Miami as a defender. His AAU coach, BABC's Leo Papile, said Brown is a "big, strong dude" who is looks to create contact and gets to the rim. "He's a Marcus Smart-type," Papile said, referencing the physical Boston Celtics guard.

Brown was a two-sport player for two years at Wakefield High, before transferring to Vermont Academy. He was held back as a sophomore and when the school dropped football, Brown focused on hoops.

"If you saw him on an official visit, you'd think he was a tight end or defensive end," Papile said. "We thought he'd be playing on Sundays."

The three freshmen fit in nicely with a UM roster that will return seniors Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy, transfer Rashad Muhammad, juniors James Palmer and Ja'Quan Newton, and sophomores Anthony Lawrence Jr. and Ebuka Izundu.

Larranaga's rotation could include Newton (starting point guard), Muhammad (likely starting at the 2), Brown (2, with ability to defend 1-3), Reed and Palmer as guard/forwards, Lawrence as a 3-4, Murphy and Huell at the 4, Izundu and Miller in the

middle.

"I think they have a legit top-20 outfit there," Papile said.

Good times for a program that set an offseason record for ticket sales, is 2-0 and was ranked in the top 25 of several preseason polls, and believes it can contend for the Final Four.

Huell is still developing his game, but is considered an NBA prospect because of his size and athleticism. "Huell will have to get bigger and contribute more as a defensive rebounder and post defender, but his ceiling is high," DraftExpress.com wrote. "[Six]-10 power forward[s] who can move and jump the way he does don't grow on trees."

Huell is Miami's third five-star recruit since 2002 and first since Durand Scott (2009) and Dequan Jones (2008). The Hurricanes also signed McDonald's All-Americans in 1985 (Tito Horford), 1992 (Steven Edwards) and 2000 (Darius Rice).

According to Scout's rankings, Brown is the fifth-highest-rated player to sign with Miami in the last 15 years. Huell is tied for second-highest.

Hurricanes' highest-rated signees

From 2002-present, per Scout.com.

Five-star

SF Dequan Jones (2008) – 22

PF Dewan Huell (2016) – 25

SG Durand Scott (2009) – 25

Four-star

SG Guillermo Diaz (2003) – 32

SG Bruce Brown (2016) – 44

PG Ja'Quan Newton (2014) – 52

PG Denis Clemente (2005) – 66

SG Rion Brown (2010) – 63

SG Brian Asbury (2005) – 65

PF Donnavan Kirk (2009) – 76

SG Robert Hite (2002) – 76

PF Dwayne Collins (2006) – 84

C Rodney Miller (2016) – 90

PF Jimmy Graham (2005) – 93

PG Edwin Rios (2007) – 97

SG James Palmer (2014) – 98

Rodriguez embraces Puerto Rico homecoming

Sun Sentinel
Christy Cabrera Chirinos
Nov. 19, 2015

For Angel Rodriguez, this will be a week to savor – literally and figuratively.

The Miami guard will finally have the chance to play in front of family and friends in San Juan when the Hurricanes take on Mississippi State in the Puerto Rico Tip-Off on Thursday afternoon and Rodriguez says he's eager to show off the skills he's honed in his time away from home.

He also laughingly admits he's eager to – again – enjoy some of his favorite dishes.

"Of course I know where to go eat," Rodriguez said. "And even if I've got to tell my family and friends to drop some things off because I'm at the hotel, I'll do it. Please, do it."

Rodriguez, who played high school basketball at Miami's Dr. Krop High School before signing with Kansas State and then transferring to Miami, hasn't played in his native Puerto Rico since he came to South Florida as a high school sophomore.

So learning the Hurricanes had accepted an invitation to play in the Puerto Rico Tip-Off became one of several off-season motivators for the redshirt senior hoping to help Miami make a deep postseason run.

"This is amazing. I haven't played in Puerto Rico since I was 15," Rodriguez said. "I have a lot of family and a lot of friends who have enjoyed watching me play on TV, but never in person. To have that opportunity my last year? Playing for Miami? Are you kidding me? It doesn't get any better than that. We're all happy about it."

Like the Hurricanes, Rodriguez is hoping to build on lessons learned from a season ago, a season that started with eight

straight wins, a top-15 ranking and plenty of promise.

But after dazzling performances at Florida and Duke, he went through a brutal midseason slump that saw his confidence take a hit. Miami coach Jim Larrañaga watched as his point guard struggled and eventually, helped him connect with sports psychologist Dr. Bob Rotella, a longtime friend of Larrañaga's. Together, they worked to help Rodriguez break out of his slump. Other players tried to help with the leadership aspect to also try and help Rodriguez from putting too much on his shoulders.

All of Miami's efforts worked, with Rodriguez scoring a career-high 25 points in a February win over rival Florida State. The only problem? He hurt his wrist in that game and ended up missing key minutes down the stretch as Miami tried to improve its NCAA Tournament resume late in the year and during the ACC Tournament. The Hurricanes ended up missing the tournament and instead, made a run to the NIT championship game.

"What was kind of frustrating was the timing of it. I got into a slump, I was having a couple of bad games and all I needed was one game to bounce back. I had it against FSU and then that was the game I got hurt," Rodriguez said. "I was like, 'Man, I'm feeling good. I had a good game, but now I can't play.' That was the toughest part of it all."

As the Hurricanes get another season started, Rodriguez is feeling as healthy as he has in a long while. Through Miami's first two games, he's averaged 11.5 points and has 11 assists. He's hoping that's something to build on this season – starting with Miami's games in Puerto Rico this week.

"I'm going to play with this group of guys in front of my people," Rodriguez said. "A lot of great things are happening right now."

Miami's recruiting has officially turned the corner

CBS Sports

Jon Rothstein

Nov. 19, 2015

Miami coach Jim Larranaga initially knew he had to build the Hurricanes' program unconventionally when he first got to Coral Gables, so he did. Miami took a pair of transfers in Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan that helped bridge things together after the Hurricanes lost five starters following the 2013 season that saw Miami win both the ACC regular-season and tournament titles while earning a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament. The Hurricanes also took another key transfer in Kamari Murphy when he decided to leave Oklahoma State in 2014.

The Hurricanes received commitments from a pair of Top-30 2016 prospects on Wednesday in Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell. Both Brown and Huell were each courted by several power-five schools.

These pledges now show that Larranaga can and will recruit the best players in the country from here moving forward. Miami had had several solid moments in recruiting over the past few years when it landed players like Davon Reed and Ja'Quan Newton, but neither of those commitments produced as big of a boom as Wednesday did. This is a significant development for this program.

No. 30 recruit Bruce Brown chooses Miami

ESPN.com
Adam Finkelstein
Nov. 18, 2015

Shooting guard Bruce Brown, ranked No. 30 in the ESPN 100, announced his commitment to the Miami Hurricanes on ESPN's Recruiting Nation on Wednesday morning.

Brown chose Miami over the Indiana Hoosiers after having previously considered Xavier, Purdue and UMass from a long list of scholarship offers.

The Hoosiers had been the perceived favorite throughout the summer and most of the fall, but Brown said Miami had always been at the forefront of his mind.

"They were always in it more than people realized," Brown said. "They were just under the radar."

The Hurricanes offered a scholarship to Brown dating to February of his sophomore season, when former assistant and current Bowling Green coach Michael Huger saw him during a midseason event in his first year at Vermont Academy.

The Hurricanes made a big push again this fall, with coach Jim Larranaga and multiple assistants all making the trip north at one point or another.

"I developed a great relationship with Coach Brunt, Coach Caputo and Coach L," Brown told ESPN. "They came up to see me even after my visit and they were one of the only schools who did that."

Brown, who originally hails from Wakefield, Massachusetts, ascended the player rankings after a strong summer on the EYBL circuit. At the Peach Jam, Brown averaged 15.6 points, 5.6 rebounds and 2

steals per game while playing for Boston Area Basketball Club (BABC).

Brown's commitment is a pivotal one for Miami as he provides the Hurricanes with an immediate impact guard on both ends of the floor to team with 6-foot-10 center Rodney Miller.

Later Wednesday, ESPN 100 big man Dewan Huell (No. 21) chose the Hurricanes over South Carolina, giving Miami a top 10 class.

Five-star forward Dewan Huell commits to Miami

ESPN.com

Jeff Borzello

Nov. 18, 2015

In the span of three hours, Miami's recruiting class has gone from unranked to just inside the top 10.

Five-star forward Dewan Huell chose the Hurricanes' men's basketball team Wednesday afternoon, giving Miami its second top-30 commitment of the day.

No. 30-ranked Bruce Brown chose Miami over Indiana earlier in the day.

Huell, ranked No. 21 in the ESPN 100 for 2016, had considered Miami, Florida State and South Carolina for most of his recruitment, with Mississippi State trying to get involved late in the process. Most expected it to be an in-state battle between Miami and Florida State, but Huell dropped the Seminoles on Tuesday night and narrowed things to Miami and South Carolina. Huell officially visited both campuses, but he also took multiple unofficial trips recently to Miami, and sources have said that Huell goes to most of the Hurricanes' home football games.

Huell attends Norland (Fla.), which is just 30 minutes from Miami's campus.

"They're down the street," said Lawton Williams, Huell's high school coach.

"Stay home, your city, your town. They made him more comfortable."

A 6-foot-9 power forward, Huell is ranked No. 5 at his position for the 2016 class. He's long and athletic and continues to expand his offensive game. Huell can face up from the foul line extended and knock down shots, but he's also solid in the low post with his back to the basket. He averaged 16.1 points and 8.6 rebounds

on the Under Armour Association circuit in the spring, including seven double-doubles and a 37-point, 14-rebound performance.

"If he does what he does well, he can help them rebound and bring toughness," Williams said. "He's gotten stronger. Strength adds so much to your game. It helps you rebounding, defensively, his stamina is better. He's more sure of what he wants to do with the ball now, he's bounding out of his area better."

Huell brings Miami's class to the No. 9 spot overall in the 2016 rankings. Huell and Brown are ESPN 100 prospects, and they join four-star center Rodney Miller. Jim Larranaga's program needed a big class in 2016, and Wednesday certainly helped the Hurricanes in that regard. Expect them to continue to pursue multiple prospects, including ESPN 100 wing Alpha Diallo, into the spring. They'll also likely explore the transfer market.

This is the second tough loss of the early signing period for South Carolina, which also struck out with ESPN 100 guard Seventh Woods last week. The Gamecocks were in the final two for both Woods and Huell.

Norland star Dewan Huell signs with Miami

Miami Herald
Andre Fernandez
Nov. 18, 2015

Dewan Huell said he felt "stress relief" Wednesday afternoon.

The University of Miami men's basketball team probably just felt pure joy.

Huell gave the Hurricanes plenty to be excited about when Miami Norland's versatile 6-10 power forward signed his letter of intent to play for UM at a ceremony at the high school.

"I had thought about putting this off until the spring, but to be honest, I wanted to get this done," Huell said. "I called coach last night and told him, I'm ready to commit. I barely slept just from the excitement."

Huell capped a huge day for UM basketball recruiting, which also saw the Hurricanes land Massachusetts 6-4 shooting guard Bruce Brown, the No. 30 overall prospect by ESPN.

Huell, ranked the No. 21 overall prospect nationally by ESPN, chose the Hurricanes after careful consideration between them, Florida State and South Carolina.

"His athleticism and his toughness and his ability to rebound will allow him to jump in and play right away," Norland coach Lawton Williams III said. "I don't know if he's ready now to score on that level yet, but there are other things that will let him compete at that level next year.

"Each year on this team, his role change and he adjusted to it. A 6-10 kid that can jump like him is a skill set you don't often see. He's been pretty special."

Huell averaged 19.2 points and 9.1 rebounds per game last season for

Norland, and has played since his freshman season and been a part of three state championships for the Vikings, who have won a Miami-Dade County record four in a row. Norland is attempting to tie for the state-record for consecutive state titles if it can secure a fifth this season.

Huell, named The Miami Herald's Class 8A-6A Player of the Year and a two-time All-Dade first team selection, is the first five-star recruit for the Hurricanes since DeQuan Jones in 2008.

"With all that stress off my back, I can focus on making my team better," Huell said. "I've worked my butt off for this and the opportunity to play basketball so I'm happy to play here in [Miami]. From talking to the coaches, I feel in my heart that I belong."

An agile big man who will join a talented UM recruiting class that includes 6-11 four-star center Rodney Miller from Oak Hill Academy, Huell impressed college scouts by starring at several prestigious events including the Under Armour Elite 24 this past August in Brooklyn.

The event included some of the nation's best including Canadian Thon Maker, ESPN's top prospects such as Josh Jackson (Michigan) and T.J. Leaf (California) and highly-rated juniors DeAndre Ayton (San Diego) and Troy Brown, Jr. (Las Vegas).

"UM was on him since his freshman year and they kept pressing and pressing and they got him," Williams said. "It's great. I can see him in practice and games and I'll be there for him."

Huell said he is looking forward to playing in arguably the top conference in college basketball.

"The ACC is the best conference there's

going to be a lot more talent on every team we play," Huell said. "I'm definitely looking forward to that."

What Bruce Brown's commitment means for Miami

Sports Illustrated

Chris Johnson

Nov. 18, 2015

Bruce Brown, one of the nation's top shooting guard prospects, revealed his college decision on Wednesday, the final day of the early signing period for college basketball. Brown is headed to Miami.

Brown's announcement comes after he took official visits to Indiana, Xavier, Miami and Purdue. The Vermont (Vt.) Academy standout—who reportedly at one point considered reclassifying to 2015—drew scholarship offers from more than 20 programs but wrote in a message posted on Twitter earlier this week that he had narrowed his list to the Hoosiers and Hurricanes.

He ultimately spurned a blueblood from the Big Ten for a program that has never advanced past the Sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament.

At 6'3" and 200 pounds, Brown is known for his defense, toughness and ability to attack the basket. "Brown has high confidence and a very short memory," Rivals.com analyst Eric Bossi wrote of Brown. "Missed shots don't get to him and is more than happy to keep firing away because of his confidence. Off the dribble, Brown uses his powerfully built body to get into the lane and finish through contact."

Through 22 games this season with his grassroots program, Boston Amateur Basketball Club, on the Elite Youth Basketball League circuit, Brown averaged 16.1 points, 5.8 rebounds and 3.0 assists per game while shooting 43.8% from the field. He checks in at No. 37 in the Recruiting Services Consensus Index, a composite ranking that incorporates data from several sources.

The addition of Brown is particularly encouraging for a Miami program that watched coveted target De'Jon Jarreau pick UMass over the Hurricanes this fall. Expect coach Jim Larrañaga to lean on Brown for backcourt scoring right away, as the two guards we project to lead Miami in points per game in 2015–16—redshirt seniors Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez—are set to leave in the off-season.

More generally, Brown gives Miami a backcourt headliner in a year in which a number of top guards are set to join other teams in the ACC. Dennis Smith Jr., arguably the nation's top point guard, is headed to NC State. Duke landed five-star point guard Frank Jackson. Florida State added four-star shooting guard Trent Forrest and four-star point guard C.J. Walker. North Carolina reeled in four-star shooting guard Brandon Robinson. And Virginia is bringing in four-star shooting guard Kyle Guy and four-star point guard Ty Jerome.

Brown joins a Hurricanes recruiting class that already includes four-star center Rodney Miller and could be on the verge of adding four-star power forward Dewan Huell, who will announce his decision on Wednesday.

Miami lands future PG in Top 50 player Bruce Brown

Sporting News

Brian Finn

Nov. 18, 2015

One of the least talked about Top 50 players in this year's class had the recruiting world buzzing on Wednesday morning.

Vermont Academy guard Bruce Brown wasn't sure if he was going to decide during the early signing period or not, but decided there was no time better than the present.

Brown chose Miami over Indiana. At 6-3, he is a fantastic athlete and defender who can play either guard position, which makes him an impact recruit for the Hurricanes.

With Yogi Farrell and Nick Zeisloft both graduating, Hoosier fans were dreaming of Brown donning the pinstripes. The departure of Sheldon McLendon and Angel Rodriguez for Miami meant Hurricane fans were dreaming of Brown joining Ja'Quan Newton in their back court as well.

Ultimately, though, it was the Hurricanes who won out in Brown's Wednesday morning announcement. Now, Jim Larrañaga and company will have two big and dynamic combo-guards who compliment each other very well to work with. Brown's defensive prowess also means he will probably draw the opponent's best offensive weapon early and often.

Wednesday could be a massive day for the Hurricanes.

Five-star forward Dewan Huell decides in the afternoon, and from all accounts it sounds as though the Hurricanes will win out for his commitment as well. Throw in four-star center Rodney Miller, who is

already in the fold, and Miami has gone from an OK class to one of the better ones in the country in a matter of hours.

Huell picks Miami

Rivals.com
Russ Wood
Nov. 18, 2015

Florida State, Miami or South Carolina? Dewan Huell probably heard that question from friends, classmates and strangers a thousand times. The five-star prospect from Miami (Fla.) finally delivered an answer Wednesday.

BREAKING DOWN HUELL: Currently ranked No. 23 in the Rivals150, Huell is a high motor player who runs the floor as well as any guard, has very good hands and finishes above the rim. He does most of his damage from 10 feet in, but can keep defenders honest out to 15 feet. Despite being a lean 6-foot-10, 210 pounds, Huell's post skills continue to develop. Defensively, Huell is an effective rim protector and controls the glass even against heftier opponents.

Huell plays with a great attitude and responds well to coaching. He will have to get stronger and improve his handle, but his ceiling is still high.

IN HIS OWN WORDS: After Huell visited Florida State and Miami in early October, he tripped to South Carolina on Oct. 16. A scheduled visit to South Florida was canceled and Huell began final deliberations with his family. Late Tuesday, Huell officially eliminated Florida State before ultimately deciding that staying local was the best choice for him.

"Miami is home and the program has been loyal to me since the jump. Coach L (Larranaga) and Coach (Chris) Caputo text me and call me every day. They play in the ACC, they always play hard, have great fans and they told me that I'd be a great help to their program."

WORDS FROM HIS COACH: Lawton

Williams has coached Huell since his freshman season at Miami Norland. During Williams' time at Norland, a public school that does not recruit players, Norland has won four consecutive state titles and six in the last 10 years. Williams has played a key role in Huell's on-court development.

"The (Miami) coaches love his ability to rebound and defend. He has a chance to play early. He's a strong-minded kid."

RIVALS REACTION: For much of his Huell's recruitment, the conventional wisdom was that Florida State was his leader. Larranaga and his staff did an excellent job of recruiting Huell and made a strong impression during his official visit to Coral Gables. He becomes the third member of the Hurricanes' 2016 class and joins Rodney Miller, who ranks No. 114 overall and Bruce Brown, ranked No. 49 nationally. Brown also committed Wednesday.

Miami Hurricanes: 2015-16 Season Preview

Canes Warning
Austin Sapin
Nov. 13, 2015

Who will be this team's MVP?

Sheldon McClellan. I think what we saw last year is just the tip of the iceberg for what this redshirt senior can accomplish. His offensive game is so versatile and the way he's been shooting the ball in practice and the preseason was even better than last season.

In his first year in Coral Gables, McClellan rode in the passenger seat as Angel Rodriguez garnered all the attention and plaudits. I'm not here to say Rodriguez wasn't a great player for the Canes last year and won't replicate that again this year, I just believe McClellan will take the reins in his final season.

Amazingly at Texas and Miami, McClellan's made just one tournament appearance and still doesn't have a tournament win to his name. That's got to make the redshirt senior hungry for one more shot at leading his team in March and I think he'll display that all season.

McClellan could have tried and tested the NBA waters last season if he wasn't sold on how great this team would be and what kind of impact he could make for the Canes. He doesn't get all the national credit that the players do at a Duke or North Carolina or those blue-bloods of college basketball, but I think McClellan has a chance to be on the All-ACC First Team this season.

If the Hurricanes make into March Madness, he'll make the Canes a tough out for any opponent and considering he'll be looking for that elusive first NCAA Tournament win, he certainly won't go down easy.

Can the Canes and Angel Rodriguez rid themselves of last year's inconsistency?

If there was one thing to point to last season as the Canes narrowly missed out on the NCAA Tournament, it was inconsistency.

Wins against Florida and Illinois, but then a 28 point loss to Eastern Kentucky. A 16-point blowout at Cameron Indoor, but then a 20-point loss at home to Georgia Tech. The ups and downs were extreme and ultimately those low points cost them a NCAA Tournament appearance. This year, there's little room for error.

While I'm not expecting the Hurricanes to go undefeated this season, you have to believe that a team that experienced that kind of inconsistency last season and that also features so much experience won't let it happen again this year.

One player that certainly wasn't all to blame, but certainly had a part to play was Rodriguez. The Kansas St. transfer had the ball in his hands for much of last year and I think where his teammates are to blame is at times they would stand around waiting for him to make a play. Whether it was him forcing a shot or no movement on offense creating a rushed shot at the end of the shot clock, Rodriguez's inconsistency mirrored the team's.

Rodriguez had a remarkable 13 games last season with 15 or more points, but then on the other side he had eight games in which he scored 6 points or less (not including the three minutes he played vs. UNC). For a primary scoring option, that can't happen that often.

I think like the team as a whole, we'll see a lot less of those low point totals for Rodriguez as he's got a year under his belt in Larranaga's system and the talent around him should take the pressure off of him to try to save the team every game.

If Rodriguez can play within himself this season, he and this Miami offense will be so much more efficient and shouldn't be sweating it come Selection Sunday like they did last season.

What is the most important stretch of the schedule?

February 14 at Florida St.

February 17 vs. Virginia Tech

February 20 at No. 1 North Carolina

February 22 vs. No. 6 Virginia

February 27 vs. Louisville

March 2 at No. 19 Notre Dame

Of course in college basketball any game can make or break your season whether you know it then or not (Miami vs Eastern Kentucky last year). There is however a stretch of games that can boost your seeding for March, cement your tournament status or give you the last opportunity for some big wins. For the Miami Hurricanes regardless of their record, this is that stretch.

The Hurricanes will hopefully be in a position to make a move on the seeding curve as they begin this stretch with a matchup against the revamped Seminoles in Tallahassee.

Head Coach Leonard Hamilton brings back sophomore Xavier Rathan-Mayes who had that outrageous 30-point outburst against Miami in a narrow defeat last season and looks to be one of the top players in the ACC. The Seminoles have also had huge success on the recruiting front and feature three players from the 2015 ESPN Top 100.

While Florida St. isn't ranked to begin the season, it wouldn't surprise me to see them creep up in the Top 25 and give the Hurricanes the chance at a solid road win late in the season.

After what hopes to be an easy victory against Virginia Tech at home, the Canes will enter their toughest two-game stretch of the season with a game in Chapel Hill against the preseason No. 1 Tar Heels and then a home game with the No. 6 Virginia Cavaliers.

Remember back to last season when the Canes missed out on win opportunities vs. UNC and Louisville late, which would have negated some of their poor losses. If the Canes are in striking distance at the top of the ACC, these could be vital games to decide the regular season championship. If they are struggling on the bubble, these games could be their last hope before the ACC Tournament.

The Hurricanes end this brutal stretch with games against teams that will likely be around

them just below the first tier at the top of the ACC. Now I think the Canes could make a run at the regular season title but with such talent at UNC, Duke and UVa, it'll certainly be difficult.

These games against Louisville and Notre Dame could also potentially serve as an elimination game of sorts, similar to the Hurricanes game with Pittsburgh last year.

The Puerto Rico Tip-Off Tournament will certainly be an important set of games for Coach Larranaga's squad to begin the season, but we'll have to wait and see who they come up against. For now though, this stretch from February 14th to March 2nd could be season-defining.

How far can this team go?

During the regular season I think this Miami Hurricanes team will be up at the top of the ACC for most of the year, but just not have enough to win the regular season title. I know it isn't too bold, but I see the Canes coming in fourth in the ACC behind UNC, Virginia and Duke.

As we touched on earlier, I think we'll see a lot more consistency from this Canes squad and we won't see those ugly losses against bad teams. Watch out for the game on November 27th though when Miami takes on Northeastern at home. The Huskies, are the favorite in the Colonial Athletic Association as they return four starters from a team that made an NCAA Tournament appearance and nearly upset Notre Dame in the first round last season. If the Hurricanes take a loss there, we might see more of the same from last year.

There could be a loss that no one expects somewhere in the schedule, but that isn't too uncommon in college basketball and wouldn't kill the Canes if it was just one.

Realistically, I feel the Hurricanes will finish with seven or eight losses and make the tournament as either a four or five seed. There shouldn't be any flirting with the bubble this year considering what kind of talent this team has. If there is, I don't know how confident I'd be.

Ultimately though, I feel Coach Larranaga's team will find a way to get to the Sweet 16. Now obviously this is so hard to predict because you never know what kind of matchups will arise, but this Canes team definitely has the talent and they certainly have the coach to make it to the second weekend.

We saw last year how well the Hurricanes played in the tournament format and we know that with Coach Larranaga at the helm, anything is possible.

If the team can find consistency and use the experience that they have, there is no telling how far this team can go.

Expectations high for experienced, talented 'Canes

Sun Sentinel
Christy Cabrera Chirinos
Nov. 12, 2015

Davon Reed remembers the excitement, the standing-room only crowds, the fun.

As a high school prospect being recruited by the Hurricanes, Reed experienced what it was like to watch Miami's last ACC championship team play during that magical 2012-13 men's basketball season that featured Shane Larkin, Kenny Kadji, Durand Scott and Julian Gamble. He felt the power of a sold-out BankUnited Center.

Now, as Reed prepares for his junior season at Miami, the expectation is that once again the Hurricanes can contend for a conference title and make a deep postseason run.

They return a core of experienced players, including four starters from the team that made a run to the NIT Championship Game last March. They'll get a boost from three promising newcomers, including Oklahoma State transfer Kamari Murphy, who is eligible to play after sitting out last season.

And the Hurricanes expect their home arena to be full most nights after the program hit record season-ticket sales this offseason, something Miami coach Jim Larrañaga said was a bigger sign of respect for the program than the fact it was picked to finish fifth in the ultra-competitive Atlantic Coast Conference.

"People are anticipating we're going to have a very good team, and our fans, just like any other group of fans, like to see the excitement of these games when you're going to be battling top-20 teams throughout the season and we're in the Top 25," Larrañaga said. "So, there should be some great games and very entertaining games."

Added Reed, a 6-foot-6 guard who averaged 8.2 points and 4 rebounds per game last year: "We have a lot of talent this year and we have a lot of the right pieces, a lot of different changes, but I think we realize all that we have. We know we have to take that next step to become a great team and do whatever it takes from practice to executing in the games, all the little things it takes to be great."

For the Hurricanes, who went 25-13 last season and lost 66-64 to Stanford in overtime of the NIT championship, one major key this season will be finding the consistency that eluded them a year ago.

Gators' Dorian Finney-Smith returns to fulfill NBA dreams, finish what he started
Gators' Dorian Finney-Smith returns to fulfill NBA dreams, finish what he started
After transferring and sitting out a season, guards Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan infused the program, averaging double figures almost nightly and helping Miami win eight in a row to start the year.

That catapulted Miami to a top-15 ranking in early December.

But that ranking — and the buzz it created — didn't last long, though, after the Hurricanes suffered bad losses to Green Bay and Eastern Kentucky. And though they added to their NCAA Tournament resume with a 90-74 upset of Duke at Cameron Indoor a month later, the Hurricanes remained a solid bubble team late in the season before finally earning a berth in the NIT Tournament.

Players admit they sometimes overlooked opponents last year and they acknowledge that cost them.

They vowed not to let that happen again — not with the kind of talent they have this season and the potential they feel they have to put together a memorable season and prove basketball can be successful at a school that, for so long, has been known more for its accomplishments in football.

"I think people are expecting us to contend for an ACC title and hopefully go deep in the tournament," said McClellan, who was Miami's leading scorer averaging 14.5 points and 4.7 rebounds last season. "I think people are realizing we're a better team than we were last year. We've got a lot of guys coming back, a lot of chemistry, so we've got a slight advantage over some teams in the ACC. But we can't play teams on paper. We've got to play on the court. That's what we're going to work on."

Canes have chances for big non-conference wins

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 12, 2015

Texas-Rio Grande Valley, ranked 337th of 351 Division I teams in Ken Pomeroy's ratings, won't be a game Miami highlights on its NCAA tournament resume.

But Miami, which is 21st in KenPom to start the year, has a chance to pick up some decent early-season wins after Friday's season-opener in Coral Gables (7 p.m., ESPN3.com).

Louisiana-Lafayette, which comes to town Monday, is 101st in KenPom. Mississippi State, UM's opponent to start the Puerto Rico Tip-Off (Thurs., Nov. 19) is 111th. The winner of that game plays either Texas Tech (93rd) or Utah (21st). In the final, Miami could face Butler (29th) or Minnesota (66th). Best-case scenario for UM, obviously, is beating Utah and Butler on the road to the title. Those teams are ranked 16th and 24th in the preseason AP poll. Miami (21st in CBS Sports' poll and 37th per the coaches) is not ranked by the AP.

The Hurricanes host Northeastern (108th) when they return home Nov. 27. The Big Ten/ACC Challenge takes them to Nebraska (137th). Charlotte (261st) underwent a coaching change since Miami scheduled that series (while the opponent strength isn't high, at least the change helped Miami land Ebuka Izundu). The Hurricanes host Florida (44th) on Dec. 8 before closing with Charleston (265th), La Salle (139th) on the road and Princeton (81st).

Handling its non-conference schedule is critical for any tournament hopeful, but a major reason Miami played in the NIT rather than NCAAs last year was its 28-point home loss to Eastern Kentucky

(RPI: 142), which came during a 1-3 stretch in December that sullied UM's 8-0 start and No. 15 ranking.

"We don't want to be in that boat again, not being picked because we lost some bad games at home," center Tonye Jekiri said.

UM vows not to take any opponents lightly

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 12, 2105

University of Miami starting guard Sheldon McClellan was asked Monday if he was familiar with Friday's season-opening opponent.

"What's the name of the school?" he sheepishly replied, drawing a chuckle. "I forgot."

In his defense, the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley is a new school that was founded in 2013 and went into full operation this year. It is the merger of the University of Texas-Brownville and University of Texas-Pan American. Their team nickname is Los Vaqueros (the Cowboys).

Reminded of the name of the team, McClellan got more serious. Although UTRGV is hardly a household name, and it is ranked No. 337 of 351 teams by college basketball stats guru Ken Pomeroy, the Hurricanes (picked 21 by Pomeroy) know better than to overlook Los Vaqueros.

They don't want to make the same mistake they made last year.

The Hurricanes opened last season 8-0, beat then-No. 8 Florida in Gainesville, entered the AP poll at No. 15, and beat Illinois in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge. They picked up a few huge conference wins — a 90-74 road victory at then-No. 4 Duke and a road win over Syracuse in front of 31,000 fans at the Carrier Dome.

But, they overlooked two opponents in particular, and paid a steep price. They lost 68-55 to Green Bay and, even more humiliating, 72-44 at home to Eastern Kentucky.

Miami finished the season 25-13 (10-8 in the Atlantic Coast Conference) and did not get selected for the NCAA Tournament. Surely those two losses were a factor. The Canes settled for the NIT, and reached the final.

"Don't play teams on paper," McClellan said about the team's mentality heading into Friday night's home game. "Last year we played a lot of teams on paper, meaning that we looked at the teams on paper and knew instantly if we were going to win or not, which cost us some games and caused us to go to NIT. This year, we don't even want to look at the paper, just take each game one by one and not take anyone for granted."

UM returns five starters from the 2014-15 season — McClellan, Angel Rodriguez, Tonye Jekiri, Davon Reed and Ivan Cruz Uceda. Sophomores Ja'Quan Newton and James Palmer are back, and the team will get a huge energy and defensive boost from Oklahoma State transfer Kamari Murphy, whom McClellan describes as "a junkyard dog."

ACC still has a place for seniors

News Observer

Joe Giglio

Nov. 11, 2015

Seniors still matter in the ACC.

Duke, fueled by three fabulous freshmen, won the national title last season but the Blue Devils did not win the ACC title.

Notre Dame, behind the senior duo of Pat Connaughton and Jerian Grant, took home the ACC championship last season. Virginia, with two senior stars, won the conference title the season before that. In 2013, it was Miami and its senior-laden lineup, preceded by Florida State and its group of seniors in 2012.

That pattern bodes well for North Carolina this season, even with senior guard Marcus Paige sidelined at the start of the season with a broken bone in his right hand.

The Tar Heels, by the start of the ACC schedule, will have two strong seniors – Paige and forward Brice Johnson – to lead an experienced group that won 26 games last season and reached the Sweet 16.

Virginia, which finished first in the past two regular seasons, should be UNC's main competition with four senior starters in guards Malcolm Brogdon and Evan Nolte, forward Anthony Gill and center Mike Tobey.

Miami and coach Jim Larranaga might be able to reprise its winning formula with three senior starters, including guard Sheldon McClellan, who averaged more points per game (14.5) than all but two returning players.

Duke, after Mike Krzyzewski's fifth national title, will be a factor in the conference race and again the Blue Devils will need their freshman class to contribute, albeit not as much as last season.

Duke added three more McDonald's All-Americans, led by Kinston product Brandon Ingram, plus point guard Derryck Thornton.

Duke's new group of freshmen will be compared to last season's trio of Jahliil Okafor, Justise Winslow and Tyus Jones, who led the Blue Devils to a 68-63 win against Wisconsin in the national championship game.

Okafor was the ACC Player of the Year and the No. 3 pick in the NBA draft, joined in the first round by Winslow and Jones. All three averaged more than 11.8 points per game and accounted for 52.5 percent of Duke's offense last season.

2 Senior starters at UNC

4 Senior starters at Virginia

2 Senior starters for Duke

3 Senior starters at Miami

Is it fair to compare Duke's talented and ultra-successful newcomers on last season's team to this new group?

"What's fair?" Krzyzewski asked at ACC Operation Basketball last month in Charlotte. "But that's the way it is."

Duke, by the way, will regularly start senior forward Amile Jefferson and graduate Marshall Plumlee – so the Blue Devils will have some experience to rely on.

Your guide to the 2015-16 ACC basketball season:

Five games to watch

Welcome

1. Brandon Ingram, Duke: Bucked the Kinston tradition and picked Duke over UNC. He's not Winslow, but that doesn't mean he can't do some damage in the ACC.

2. Kamari Murphy, Miami: The rugged redshirt junior forward joins Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas) on Miami's Big 12 all-star team.

3. Damion Lee, Louisville: The graduate transfer guard from Drexel can fill it up (21.4 points per game) and will be the centerpiece of Louisville's re-tooled lineup.

4. Eli Carter, Boston College: Another graduate transfer (from Florida), Carter won't be Olivier Hanlan, but he'll have to carry the water for the Eagles.

5. Seth Allen, Virginia Tech: Maryland left the ACC, but the redshirt junior guard didn't. Allen jumped to the Hokies, where he'll be an instant talent upgrade in Buzz Williams' backcourt.

Predicted order of finish (with projected ACC record in parenthesis):

1. UNC (15-3): That's a four-game jump in the standings from last season, but Jackson and forward Isaiah Hicks should provide the extra lift.

2. Virginia (14-4): The Wahoos have back-to-back 16-2 ACC marks. They'll be in the thick of the race again behind Brogdon and Parrantes.

3. Miami (13-5): FSU is getting more love than the Ganes. That's a mistake that will be corrected come March.

4. Duke (12-6): The Blue Devils have to reinvent the wheel again, and Allen and Ingram will have to be outstanding for Duke to win its first ACC title since 2011.

5. Notre Dame (12-6): Huge hit in losing Connaughton and Grant, but the Irish have confidence and a capable returning trio in Auguste, Demetrius Jackson and Stevie Vasturia.

6. Pittsburgh (10-8): Everybody's sleeping on the Panthers. Junior forward Jamel Artis is the best player in the ACC nobody's talking about.

7. FSU (10-8): The Seminoles will be deep and sophomore guard Xavier Rathan-Mayes won't be shy. Their success will depend on how well, and quickly, the new parts blend with the old.

8. N.C. State (9-9): Barber and forward Abdul-Malik Abu will have to carry the Wolfpack, which might follow the recent pattern of struggling early and finding itself late.

9. Louisville (9-9): Almost a complete roster turnover from a Final Eight team with Lee, Cleveland State transfer Trey Lewis and freshman Deng Adel being counted on as new leaders.

Miami signs four-star center Rodney Miller

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 11, 2015

Miami's recruiting class now officially includes a big man.

On Wednesday, the first day of the basketball early signing period, UM announced the addition of Rodney Miller, a consensus four-star center.

Miller, 6-foot-11 and 235 pounds, is 11th among 2016 centers according to 247Sports, 19th per ESPN and 20th according to Scout, which rates him as the No. 77 prospect nationally. Rivals rates him No. 93. He's 96th per 247.

Scout.com called him "a hard worker and blue collar rebounder and defender who has made strides as a scorer."

Miller, from Oak Hill Academy in Mouth of Wilson, Va., said in a Scout article he was on the radar of Duke and North Carolina. He was higher on the boards of Virginia, Florida, Wake Forest and Georgia Tech, all of whom offered, according to Rivals. ESPN said he also had a UConn offer.

Center Tonye Jekiri, who has become one of the ACC's best big men, graduates after this season. Freshman Ebuka Izundu (6-10, 210) much like Jekiri as a freshman, needs to add size and strength and develop his game. UM has no other true big men in the pipeline.

The most important recruit in Miami's 2016 class is five-star power forward Dewan Huell (6-9, 210), from Miami Norland. Sources close to him said he is choosing between Miami and Florida State. Huell has visited UM numerous times unofficially. Huell is ESPN's No. 21 player overall.

UM, which can offer a limited number of official recruiting trips because of NCAA sanctions that end after this year, hosted four-star guard Bruce Brown recently and will host Australian guard Dejan Vasiljevic this season. The Hurricanes graduate four seniors and could have as many as four scholarships available to fill after signing Miller.

Next year's Hurricanes rotation could include junior point guard Ja'Quan Newton, San Jose State transfer Rashad Muhammad (brother of Shabazz, who's sitting out this year), seniors Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy and Izundu, with big guards James Palmer and Anthony Lawrence Jr. in the mix along with Miller.

In a video interview on Scout.com, analyst Rob Harrington called Miller "a long-term prospect. He's not going to get to Miami and immediately start dominating ACC players. ... He needs to get stronger. He needs to cultivate a low-post offense. But you have to think about the player development that they do so well at Miami. I think by the time he's a junior he could be one of the better big men in the conference."

Scout wrote that Miller has "the foundations of low-post offense and, given his size and sturdy frame, should improve rapidly as he gains strength and experience. He boasts good mobility as well and should mature into a tough post defender given height and base."

Talented, experienced Canes set sights on Final Four

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 11, 2015

It's common for ACC basketball programs to enter the season hoping for sold-out crowds and trips to the Final Four.

Just not at Miami.

That's why the Hurricanes believe this could be a very uncommon year. They return an experienced, talented roster. They set a program record for season-ticket sales. They're talking about reaching heights the program has never seen.

"The Final Four is a goal," center Tonye Jekiri said. "We have the team. We have the players and the coaching staff."

When a reporter commented that such talk has never been heard around the BankUnited Center, the 7-foot, 248-pound senior said it's about time it was. Even coach Jim Larranaga dropped those two words on a radio interview this week.

"I'm very, very excited about this season," said Larranaga, who is 91-49 (41-29) entering his fifth season at UM. "We have five starters back. We have eight guys returning from a team that won 25 games and for the first time in the school's history, we played in April. We want to be able to do that again – but this time in the NCAA tournament and in the Final Four."

Coming off a run to the NIT final, the Hurricanes (25-13, 10-8 ACC) open Friday against Texas-Rio Grande Valley (7 p.m., ESPN3.com). UM, picked to finish fifth in the ACC, has four seniors in the starting lineup, a key transfer and several talented second-year backups. CBS Sports ranks the Hurricanes as a potential NCAA tournament 7-seed and the 21st team overall, but they were 37th in the

preseason coaches' poll.

If Miami realizes its expectations, the latter will be the lowest ranking it will have all season.

"This is definitely the most talented team I've been a part of," junior forward Davon Reed said. "Now it's that kind of shift from being an underdog to being a respected opponent. Now you have to come out and prove you belong."

Senior guards Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan (14.5 points, 4.7 rebounds) will start alongside Reed, an efficient scorer and versatile defender. Stretch four Ivan Cruz Uceda (6-10, 217) looks like a new player, after dropping more than 20 pounds and decreasing his body fat from 21 percent to nine. Jekiri led the ACC in rebounding (9.9) and looks to improve his scoring (8.6).

The Hurricanes have high hopes for junior forward Kamari Murphy (6-8, 220), who sat out last year after transferring from Oklahoma State. He adds defense, dunks and rebounding to the mix.

"He's a junkyard dog," McClellan said.

Miami hasn't traditionally drawn large crowds – unless big-name opponents like Duke or North Carolina are in town – but that could change. As of Wednesday, 442 season tickets remained at the 7,972-seat arena. UM said it is a record for preseason sales.

Of course, selling season tickets doesn't guarantee a full house. UM, which hosts Duke, Virginia, Notre Dame, Syracuse, Pittsburgh, Florida State, and Louisville in ACC play, also hosts an enticing early matchup with Florida (Dec. 8). Miami's performance against lesser opponents – a major pockmark on its tournament resume

last season – is just as important.

Time will tell if Jekiri's words were merely preseason confidence or extraordinary prescience.

"This year, we think we can do it," he said. "The other teams that always make it to the Final Four, they're not better than us. They just push every game, respect the opponent, and start off right."

Hurricanes selling more season tickets than ever

AP
Tim Reynolds
Nov 9, 2015

Miami was picked fifth in the Atlantic Coast Conference's preseason rankings, is flirting with the Top 25 in the major national polls and is widely expected to be an NCAA Tournament team.

Those would all be considered good signs.

Here's another: People are actually buying Miami tickets.

The Hurricanes could be the first team in Miami history — or at least since such records were kept, according to university officials — to sell out its allotment of season tickets. And that suggests the Hurricanes may not face so much of a struggle this year to draw fans into their on-campus Bank United Center.

"It doesn't happen overnight," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said. "This is our fifth year. And we can see the progress we've made."

The university said more than 5,400 season tickets have been purchased, with fewer than 500 remaining. The arena's listed capacity is about 8,000.

"If you talk to a recruit and tell him we're sold out for every home game as opposed to having 2,000 fans, it makes a big difference to him," said Larranaga, whose previous coaching stops at Bowling Green and George Mason also saw large spikes in attendance during his tenure.

To put it mildly, Miami is a challenging place when it comes to ticket sales.

When a team is doing well and games seem more like events, everyone wants to be in the stands — the Miami Heat, for example, recorded their 250th consecutive sellout

Sunday night, including postseason games. But when a home team isn't doing well, or even when it's expected to roll past an overmatched opponent, Miami doesn't seem to notice.

Baseball's Marlins typically play in a largely empty downtown Miami stadium, even after getting their own facility just a few years ago. The Florida Panthers have had huge attendance woes for years, the Hurricanes' football team struggles to get people into its games at Sun Life Stadium and even the Miami Dolphins aren't the same draw as they were in South Florida for decades.

"What I had heard (when taking the Miami job) was there wasn't interest in basketball, which I knew not to be true," Larranaga said. "One of the things about fans is they like to follow winners. ... They want to be around a team that they think is going to be really, really good."

Miami won 25 games last season. Hence, there's a buzz.

So selling tickets, that's been no problem this season. Getting people to use them, that's the next issue.

The Hurricanes, on average, distributed 5,525 tickets per game last season. But the actual average number of people inside the building was roughly 40 percent lower, with only 3,534 actually going through the turnstiles on game nights. And some fans make no secret that they buy season tickets just to ensure they have seats to the "big" home games, a list that this season includes Florida, Duke, Louisville, Virginia, Notre Dame and Syracuse.

"Our fans, like any other group of fans, really like the excitement of knowing it's a big game," Larranaga said.

In an effort to help offset that, Larranaga will keep trying whatever he can to lure people inside on game nights. This week, Miami will do what it calls "dormstorming" to try and push students to games. Larranaga has made a point to promote ticket sales during his camps for kids, knowing that if Miami gets the kids, it'll likely get the parents as well.

The home opener is Friday. It's a measuring stick, in more ways than one.

"I think we've done all we can," Larranaga said.

ACC Preview - Miami

SB Nation
JD King
Nov. 6, 2015

Miami has always been an erratic program. To be sure, Miami has had some good teams, and the great Rick Barry put them on the map, but overall, it's been a very up and down history, compounded by a typical lack of fan interest.

Then Jim Larranaga showed up.

Miami has been pretty solid since Larranaga came to town. He's averaged 22 wins per year – exceptional by Hurricane standards – and that includes the year before last, when Miami finished 17-16.

Still, that's over .500, and at Miami, that's big news.

The 'Canes return 5-11 Angel Rodriguez and 6-5 Sheldon McClellan. Both players were Big 12 transfers to Miami (Kansas State and Texas, respectively) and both did quite well.

McClellan averaged 14.5 ppg, 4.7 rpg and shot reasonably well (.358 from three point range, .484 overall and .824 from the line). After the previous season, when Miami had virtually no offense, it was a big help.

Rodriguez justified his defensive reputation and was an outstanding floor general.

Then there's 7-0 Tonye Jekiri, who is the rare project who has really exceeded expectations. Jekiri has become an outstanding rebounder and had 10 games with 13 rebounds or more. He's an excellent bet to average a double-double this year.

He's not perfect by any means, but he has improved considerably each season. He

may or may not catch on in the NBA, but he could play pro ball somewhere for 10 or 15 years.

Miami has a solid core to build on. Larranaga could also start fellow senior (the afore-mentioned trio are all seniors) Ivan Cruz Uceda (6-10) or guards Davon Reed (6-6) or Ja'Quan Newton (6-2).

Or he might opt for Oklahoma State transfer – yes another Big 12-er heading for the beach – Kamari Murphy, a 6-8 player who could be a versatile defender.

James Palmer (6-5) and Chris Stowell (6-6) make up the sophomore class. Palmer got 13.3 mpg last year while Stowell played just 1.5. You can't measure everything by statistics, but statistically, neither had a big impact.

Miami also brings in three freshmen, Anthony Lawrence, (6-7), Ebuka Izundu (6-10) and Mike Robinson (5-10).

Larranaga had followed Lawrence since he was in 9th grade. He originally committed to Central Florida before settling on the 'Canes. Down the road, he could become an offensive force.

Izundu was widely sought after and picked Miami partly because of Jekiri, who is also Nigerian. He'll be the understudy for this year and likely become a starter next season.

There are some variables here, as there are for every team and every season.

The main thing with Miami though is Larranaga. His Final Four run with George Mason seemed flukish at the time, but in retrospect, it was the first time the public at large saw this masterful coach at work.

He's had Miami as high as #2 in the polls.

He adapted to losing a monster class and his top six players two years ago and still finished with a winning record.

And he's been flexible enough to find players by hook or by crook. We're not suggesting he cheated, not at all. But like NC State's Mark Gottfried, he's worked the transfer market brilliantly and found enough promising young talent to compete in the brutal ACC.

We have no idea how Miami will do this season, but we can promise you this: the Hurricanes will play to the best of their ability.

Player Profile: Tonye Jekiri

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Nov. 4, 2015

Tonye Jekiri

Senior C 7'0 248 Hialeah, FL (Nigeria)

2014-15 Stats: 8.6 ppg, 9.9 rpg, 1.0 apg, 1.3 blks, 50% FGs 73% FTs. 11 double-doubles, 9 in ACC play.

All-ACC Defensive Team.

Scouting Report:

Hard working player, who continually improves all facets of his game each year in the program. Becoming a leader on the floor as well.

Relentless on the glass, has the potential to average a double-double on the season. One of the best rebounders in not only the ACC, but the country.

Well above average defensively. Good if not great shot blocker, excellent help defender as well.

Sets good clean screens, gets open and finishes strong at the rim, improving jumper from 15 feet in, and a nice stroke from the FT line. Runs the floor exceptionally well.

Back to the basket game still a work in progress, though improving. Could be much more of an offensive force if he plays with more consistent aggression/confidence.

Needs to stay healthy. The team suffers minus his presence.

Summary: The MVP of the 2014-15 Miami Basketball Season was not Sheldon McClellan or Angel Rodriguez. It was Jekiri. If TJ doesn't miss time in the regular season match-up at Louisville, UM likely wins that game and gets an NCAA berth. If Jekiri doesn't get hurt before the NIT final, the 'Canes probably romp Stanford for the title. He's their most consistent and often most important player on the floor. Jekiri has turned into a beast on the glass, and

his defensive prowess could be the key to a huge 2015-16 season for the program. He's getting better and better at passing and scoring, and when all is said and done the 7 footer from Nigeria has a chance to be an NBA 1st Round draft pick. Guys his size with his athleticism and work ethic are hard to find. For now he has a chance to be an All-ACC player, and help the Hurricanes reach the NCAA tournament for the first time since he was a freshman.

Why Kamari Murphy Was Last Year's Missing Piece

Canes Warning

Austin Sapin

Nov. 4, 2015

Do you remember how excruciating last year's Selection Sunday was for the Miami Hurricanes? We all watched as the field of 68 was named one by one and as each school flashed onto the screen, the dagger was pushed in farther and farther as the Canes missed out.

Why didn't we make it? Maybe it was the losses to some bad teams or not enough quality wins against top opponents, the answer is unclear. What we do know about last year's team is there was just something missing and in the end, that cost them.

Sure, last year's team had some serious talent, but they were inconsistent and lacked just a bit of grit when the going got tough. What's going to change this year you ask?

Enter Kamari Murphy.

The 6'9" power forward who transferred a year ago from Oklahoma St. will finally get his chance to step out onto the floor this year in Coral Gables and boy am I glad we have him. After sitting out last season, the Brooklyn, N.Y. native will slot right into the starting lineup, which unlike last year should be pretty consistent.

Whether it was Joe Thomas, Omar Sherman, Ivan Cruz Uceda or even Davon Reed in a small-ball lineup, Coach Larranaga never found a consistent power forward he could really count on to start. With Murphy, that all changes.

In 2013-14 at Oklahoma St., Murphy started the year as just a role player known for his hustle and hard work in a squad full of highly-recruited stars. At the end of the year, Murphy was a consistent starter with all those intangibles plus some solid numbers.

In Big 12 play that season, the 6'9" Murphy actually filled in at center despite

his smaller size and was still able to put up 6.2 PPG and 8.5 RPG. Those may not seem like staggering numbers, but for a team with future first-round pick Marcus Smart and five-star sophomore LeBryan Nash, Murphy played his role perfectly.

For the Canes, they need exactly what Murphy brings to the table. Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez are terrific scorers, but at times last year they had no outlet to throw the ball to inside for easy points forcing them to take long shots from the perimeter. Tonye Jekiri has improved massively with his offensive game as well as his rebounding, but he can't do it all on his own down low.

Both of those issues came up time and time again for the Hurricanes last season, but now there is a remedy with Murphy. The starting power forwards for Coach Larranaga in the 2015 ACC slate averaged 6.2 PPG, but only 2.4 RPG, and that's just not good enough.

With Murphy he'll certainly get the numbers that the Miami coaching staff needs him to get, but his biggest impact might be the toughness and leadership that he'll provide.

There's obviously nothing you can measure this with, but just hearing his teammates talk about him showed me the respect he's earned despite not playing a single game yet for Miami.

"I love to play with him. He's going to do all the dirty things you might not want to do," Davon Reed said of the Oklahoma St. transfer. "He's going to play hard, rebound, push the ball up the court for you and get second-chance opportunities. He's just a great player to play with and you know he's going to have your back."

When talking to any player on the team they would echo that exact statement and if you asked me for a realistic player type that the Hurricanes needed last year, that would be my exact definition.

I loved Joe Thomas and he brought great energy and passion to his play, but he was

a bit limited offensively with a season-high of seven points last year. Now think of Thomas and add a pretty expansive offensive game and you've got yourself Kamari Murphy.

The thing too that I love with Murphy is he has channeled his underdog and 'myself against the world' mentality into this team. After the most recent AP Poll left the Canes out of the Top 25, that's exactly what I would want.

At media day in October Murphy said, "We have a few weeks left until the first game and once that first game comes we're going to be more than what people expected. All the stuff with preseason rankings, that doesn't matter because once that first game hits I think they'll see what our potential is and we'll only get better from there."

That is music to my ears.

Think back again to the Canes missing the NCAA Tournament or the horrible call that stole the NIT from them last season against Stanford. Think of that chip on their shoulder coming into this year.

As polls and bracketologists continue to release their preseason rankings and predictions, let them overlook the Canes. Let Coach Larranaga's squad fly under-the-radar because with Murphy I'll tell you now Miami fans, this season's Selection Sunday won't be quite so excruciating.

ACC should expand league basketball schedule

Daily Press

David Teel

Nov. 3, 2015

The ACC has a basketball problem. Sounds odd for a league fresh off the most successful NCAA tournament in its storied history — 17 combined victories, five regional semifinalists and national champion Duke — but it's true.

Commissioner John Swofford acknowledges it. So do the conference's head coaches. But they disagree on what, if any, remedy is needed.

The issue is NCAA tournament bids, or lack thereof.

When Notre Dame's arrival two years ago grew the ACC to 15 teams, many envisioned the league replicating the old Big East, which in the six seasons from 2008-13 averaged 8.5 NCAA bids, including a record 11 in 2011. And the forecast was reasonable, given the ACC's pedigree and its recent additions of Big East pillars Syracuse, Pittsburgh, Louisville and Notre Dame.

But those expectations ignored two facts: The Big East had 16 schools for five of those years, a subtle but important distinction. Moreover, the 12-team ACC had produced only four NCAA bids in each of the previous three seasons.

And now with 15 members? The sample size, two seasons, is limited, but the conference placed six teams in the bracket in 2014 and last year.

"I'd like that number to be higher every year," Swofford said during a one-on-one interview last week at ACC media day in Charlotte. "I would like for us to schedule and play in a way that that's deserved. It gets back to the potential I think we have with our 15 programs."

Specifically, Swofford said the league needs to consider expanding the conference schedule from 18 to 20 games. The only Division I leagues that played 20 last season were the 11-team Sun Belt and Metro Atlantic, affording both a double round-robin.

Led by senior associate commissioner for basketball Paul Brazeau, who held a similar position with the Big East, the ACC has run analytics to project how adding conference games might affect teams' Rating Percentage Index rankings and NCAA credentials. The findings are inconclusive.

"Would that enhance players' experiences while they are in the Atlantic Coast Conference?" Swofford said. "It seems clear that there is increased fan support for conference games, and from a fan's perspective we probably haven't reached that max. It would create a

more balanced schedule, but on the other hand, how would it affect the number of teams selected from our league to NCAA tournament play? Would it help us or would it hinder us?"

Depends on whom you ask.

Miami coach Jim Larranaga and his Syracuse colleague, Jim Boeheim, are adamantly opposed.

Larranaga: "If the conference's goal is to provide more programming for television, more games on TV intraconference, then it's a good idea. But if the league's goal is to get more teams into the NCAA tournament, then I think we're heading in the wrong direction."

Why?

"Because you want to create the perception, or the reality, that we can dominate outside the league," he said. "When you play in the league, there's always a winner and there's always a loser."

Larranaga is right in this regard: The ACC's collective record in those added conference games would be, by definition, .500, or in this case, 15-15. That record would likely be 20-10, or better, were those games to remain against non-conference opponents.

But NCAA résumés are about far more than wins and losses. Playing more conference games likely would improve teams' strength of schedule and provide them more opportunities for marquee victories.

Boeheim isn't buying it.

"We'd just beat up ourselves," he said, "and that's not the best way to get a better RPI and get more teams in the tournament. The goal is to get more teams in the tournament, so you should, if anything, play less conference games and beat other people."

God bless the terminally contrary Boeheim, but no one wants to watch, from the stands or on TV, more Syracuse-Montana State and less Syracuse-North Carolina. Consider Boeheim's 13-game non-conference schedule this season.

The Orange play Wisconsin in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge, former Big East rivals St. John's and Georgetown, and are in a three-day tournament in the Bahamas with the likes of Connecticut, Michigan and Charlotte. Syracuse's other opponents: Lehigh, St. Bonaventure, Elon, Colgate, Cornell, Montana State and Texas Southern.

Surely two of those games, especially the latter two, could be sacrificed. The purpose of a conference, after all, is to play one another.

"You can blame the 20-game schedule (talk) on me," Notre Dame coach Mike Brey

said, "because in my first league meeting, I actually brought it up. Now I was almost run out of the room, and rightfully so because I had not coached a game in the league, and some of the veteran guys were ready to strangle me."

Brey's advocacy is based on the old Big East, which went from 16 to 18 conference games for the 2007-08 season. The league had sent 8-of-16 and 7-of-16 teams to the NCAA tournament in the two previous years.

Over the next six seasons: eight bids, seven, eight, 11, nine and eight.

"If we're the best league," Brey said, "let's keep giving our inventory to TV. And the other thing is, we don't need to give the Big Ten and the Big East that many shots at us. ... Some of the old-school guys want all this non-league flexibility. We've got a non-league flavor. We should just keep playing each other. We were so proud that year we got 11 in. We were walking around flaunting it that summer recruiting."

ESPN and other television partners would love more inventory, not to mention more high-profile matchups. Toward that latter end, Brey suggests the ACC consider a more fluid scheduling model, again, much like the former Big East.

Presently, each ACC team has two rivals it plays twice annually — Virginia's are Virginia Tech and Louisville, Virginia Tech's are Virginia and Miami. You play two other league foes twice, on a pre-set rotation, and the other 10 once.

In the former Big East, commissioner Mike Tranchese would gather his lieutenants and TV partners each offseason and, based on rivalries, prospects and performance, create the most attractive schedule possible.

Swofford said the debate about future conference schedules could be resolved this winter or next spring. What could quiet the debate is a 2015-16 season that produces 8-10 NCAA teams, and looking at ACC rosters, that might well happen.

Boeheim recalled the 2003 offseason, when Big East coaches fumed that only four of the league's 14 teams made the NCAA field.

"Everybody looked around the room, and the commissioner said, 'You guys gotta get better,'" Boeheim said. "And I think this league is getting better, and I think it will get better as we go forward. I think all the things went right for the Big East a couple of those years, and that doesn't happen all the time. If you can consistently get seven or eight teams in as a league, that's pretty good."

Optimism surrounds Miami basketball for 2015-16

The Examiner

Paul Borden

Nov. 2, 2015

University of Miami basketball coach Jim Larranaga cites two things as validation for the optimism that surrounds his team for the upcoming 2015-16 season:

-- The media picked the Hurricanes for the No. 5 spot in the 15-team title race, behind North Carolina, Virginia, Duke, and Notre Dame but ahead of such notables as Louisville (7th) and Syracuse (9th).

--Season ticket sales are running at an all-time high for the program. The latest report from the school has sales up 35 percent over the 2014-15 season with fewer than 1,000 seats left for the 7,972-seat capacity BankUnited Center.

"I thought we'd probably be picked seventh because of the traditional teams in our league," Larranaga said Monday at a press briefing before the team's Wednesday night exhibition game against Dowling. "Duke and Carolina we knew they were going to be picked very high. Virginia has won the last two regular-season championships. You knew they would be picked high.

"Notre Dame, Syracuse, Louisville, I would have expected them to be picked higher than they were.

"But as you know, it doesn't matter where you are picked in the preseason. It matters where you are during the season."

The reason for the optimism is obvious. The Hurricanes return four starters from last season's NIT runners-up, including their top four scorers in guards Sheldon McClellan (15.5 points per game) and Angel Rodriguez (11.9), forward Tonye Jekiri (8.6), and guard Davon Reed (8.2).

Newcomer Kamari Murphy, a transfer from Oklahoma State who averaged 6.1 points and 5.1 rebounds a game as a sophomore with the Cowboys, is expected to add muscle up front in support of Jekiri.

More than the preseason ranking, Larranaga sees the advance season ticket sales as more a sign of respect that the program has gained as he heads into his fifth season in Coral Gables.

"The word has gotten around," he said. "We're down to five or six hundred season tickets still available."

With teams like Florida, Syracuse, Florida State, Duke, Notre Dame, Pittsburgh, Virginia, and Louisville coming to Coral Gables, fans could be scrambling for tickets, he said.

"We've got a lot of top 20, top 10 type teams coming in," Larranaga said. "If you don't get your season tickets now, you may not be able to get a ticket the day of the game because all those tickets will be gone.

"I want to make that very clear: If you don't get your tickets now, the only way you'll get them is somebody scalping them outside the BUC during the season."

After the exhibition, the Hurricanes open the regular season Nov. 13 at home against UT-Rio Grande Valley.

Player Profile: Ebuka Izundu

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Nov. 2, 2015

Ebuka Izundu

Freshman F/C 6'10 210 Charlotte, NC
(Victory Christian, Nigeria)

2014-15 H.S. Stats: 21 ppg, 15 rpg, 6
blcks.

Scouting Report:

Extremely athletic big, who is a natural finisher above the rim. Runs the floor very well as well.

Can contribute immediately as a defensive presence and on the glass. Great instincts especially as a shot blocker.

Nice touch around the basket, but the big lefty will need to refine his post game the next few seasons to be a consistent offensive threat at this level.

Needs to add size and strength to his wiry frame. Until then will likely be muscled around some against more experienced/stronger players.

Summary: Izundu reminds me a lot of the freshman version of Tonye Jekiri, who was UM's #4 big on the 2012-13 ACC Championship team. He may be a touch more refined offensively than TJ was at that stage of his career, but look for Coach L to use him similarly to the way Tonye was used as a freshman. That means playing good defense in limited minutes, occasionally finishing at the rim, but very few touches else wise. And that is perfectly okay for a developmental big. Look at how far Jekiri has come over the last few seasons. This young man has similar potential, and while I do not yet expect big things from him in 2015-16, the athletic left-handed C could be an important cog in the program as early as next season.

Preseason March Madness bracket projections

NCAA.com
Mike Lopresti
Nov. 2, 2015

Raise your hand if this starts to sound familiar.

Kentucky . . . Kansas . . . Duke . . . North Carolina . . . Michigan State. Yes, the usual gaggle of bluebloods should be fighting for the high seeds of the NCAA Tournament again come next March. The names change, but the shiny records and love from the committee remains pretty much the same.

Not that there won't be a new face or two – say hello, Maryland. Since there are only 150-odd shopping days until Selection Sunday, here's one guess on how the bracket might look in the end.

Warning: The use of this bracket could be hazardous to your reputation as a deft prognosticator.

Since a lot of it will be wrong, and the rest of it lucky.

No. 5 seeds: Notre Dame, Miami, Butler, Michigan.

Ten years ago, Jim Larranaga took George Mason on a magic carpet ride to the Final Four. Maybe he can celebrate the anniversary by doing the same thing at Miami, which has nearly everyone back from a team that came within overtime of winning the NIT. Notre Dame STILL thinks it should have beaten Kentucky last March.

Larranaga hits the Whip/Nae Nae, was mistaken for Larry David

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Oct. 29, 2015

It's almost basketball season, and that means Jim Larranaga is back in our lives.

Hearing stories from Miami's men's basketball coach is one of the best parts of covering the Hurricanes, if you'd like a reporter's opinion. He rarely disappoints, and did not Wednesday.

Not only did Larranaga open his press conference at the ACC's media day in Charlotte by describing in detail the manner in which friend and former basketball coach Bobby Cremins beat him in a game of tennis in 1979, he ended it by telling a pretty, pretty, pretty good story about the time he was mistaken for Bernie Sanders impersonator Larry David at a local restaurant.

As a bonus — and it feels like we're burying the lede here — Larranaga was taught by ACC Digital Network host Courtney Cox how to do the Whip/Nae Nae.

He was not asked to do the Stanky Leg.

These are good times for UM hoops, which returns most contributors from a team that reached the NIT final and adds standout transfer Kamari Murphy, was picked to place fifth in a loaded ACC by the media voting in Charlotte, and has set a record for ticket sales. UM has sold approximately 4,700. Not including seats reserved for students and VIPs, less than 800 remain. That's a 35 percent increase from last year.

The BankUnited Center, which seats 7,972, has been sold out just eight times since opening in 2003 — all since Larranaga arrived in 2011-12. The top 12 single-game

attendances in BankUnited Center history have come under Larranaga's watch.

Larranaga got confused for Larry David

Washington Post

Matt Bonesteel

Oct. 29, 2015

Does Miami Coach Jim Larranaga look like “Curb Your Enthusiasm” star/Bernie Sanders impersonator Larry David? Someone in Miami apparently thinks so.

Larranaga took the podium at ACC media day and recounted his recent inadvertent brush with fame (transcription via CBSSports.com):

“I eat regularly, and our team eats regularly, at a restaurant called Shula’s, once owned by Don Shula, in Coral Gables. Because I go there regularly, I’m often recognized. Then last Friday night with my wife and with another couple, I walked in and some people recognized me. But as I was about to be seated, a gentleman about 30 years old got up from his seat and came over and said, ‘I’m so excited to meet you, can I shake your hand?’

“I said ‘Sure’ and I shook his hand. He said, ‘You can’t imagine how excited I am. Your impersonation of Bernie Sanders on SNL was absolutely awesome. Then he turned and said, ‘this is Larry David of Curb Your Enthusiasm.’ So I said thanks for the compliment, I’m going to have a seat.”

Pretty, pretty good.

I mean, they kind of sound alike? Maybe?

ACC transfers making impact on court, in coaches' recruiting

The Daily Press

Norm Wood

Oct. 28, 2015

Angel Rodriguez couldn't stand the thought of starting a conversation with Sheldon McClellan in their Big 12 days, much less hanging out with him. Not the ideal chemistry for guys whose paths would eventually intertwine in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Even in college basketball, fate has a way of creating an odd match that works from time to time.

After Rodriguez transferred from Kansas State in 2013, and McClellan opted to move on from Texas the same year, the animosity vanished when they both ended up wearing University of Miami uniforms. Thrown together by the now-annual wave of transfers that has swept college basketball, it didn't take Rodriguez and McClellan long to figure out co-existing — and thriving together — was going to take them a lot further than the silent treatment.

"We didn't really like each other," said Rodriguez, who averaged 11.9 points per game last season, while McClellan contributed a team-high 14.5 points per game for a Miami team that finished 25-13.

"Now, we're best buddies. The funny thing is we never even said a word to each other, but I guess when you've played against each other and the teams have some kind of rivalry and you're the best player on the other team and, to me, he seemed a little cocky, then I might not feel so positive about you ... but I was wrong."

Many players have found comfortable landing spots on ACC rosters after beginning their college careers with other Division I programs, but the nationwide trend of transfers — more than 600 nationwide since the end of last season — has had a profound effect on the way ACC coaches have had to go about constructing their programs in recent years.

Coming from the Big 12 to the ACC meant McClellan had to adjust his game. He discovered last year in his first season of ACC play opposing teams would often switch quick defenders with long-limbed defenders to guard him on the perimeter — a defensive strategy he seldom encountered as a younger player at Texas.

"I think the difference was how they guarded me," said McClellan, who like Rodriguez is a senior.

"Competition is about the same. It's always physical in both conferences, but I think the scouting report and the way the coaches always lock in on whoever is the leading scorer or whoever is the main focus of the team really changes how you play the game. I found it tough for me to

score at times last season, but obviously, I still got my points in."

Forward Anthony Gill started his college career at South Carolina before transferring two years ago to U.Va., where he enters his senior season a preseason All-ACC second team pick, according to a Wednesday vote by media gathered at the ACC's "Operation Basketball" event in Charlotte, N.C.

Like McClellan in his first season in the ACC coming from the Big 12, Gill had to get used to going from the Southeastern Conference to the ACC.

"The SEC has a lot of athletes out there, whereas the ACC, there's a lot of talent," said Gill, who averaged 11.6 points and 6.5 rebounds last season on his way to earning All-ACC defensive team and third-team All-ACC honors.

"At each position, everybody is talented and they understand the game of basketball and they're coming at you and giving you the best ... I think it was just my mindset I had to change. Just being able to understand I had to bring it day in and day out, or I was going to get shown up."

Since 2012, U.Va. coach Tony Bennett and his staff have gained transfers from Gill, guard Darius Thompson, formerly of Tennessee, and forward Austin Nichols, a highly sought-after player formerly of Memphis. Thompson is eligible this season after sitting out last season per NCAA undergraduate transfer rules, but Nichols is sitting out this season. Players who have completed their undergraduate studies can transfer to another Division I program and gain immediate eligibility.

As productive as Gill as has been at U.Va., which was predicted by media to finish second behind North Carolina in the ACC, Bennett hasn't always been on the good side of the transfer puzzle. Since taking over in Charlottesville in April 2009, Bennett has also seen nine players transfers away from his program.

Unlike high school recruits, who can only sign a letter of intent with a college for a week in November and a month from mid-April through mid-May, transfers aren't beholden to the calendar. If they obtain a release from a scholarship, they can change schools anytime they please, which puts coaches in a recruiting bind.

"I think there should be a deadline or a date for when kids can transfer," Bennett said. "I'd be fine with that. ... You have kids leaving your own program, so something is going to happen. Just look at the numbers. Sometimes it's just hard to keep all guys happy who are on scholarship, so there's always going to be one or two available. It just seems like that's happened to me every year."

Miami coach Jim Larranaga said he went into this past spring with no scholarships to offer. Six days after Miami

lost to Stanford in the National Invitational Tournament championship game, guards Manu Lecomte and Deandre Burnett decided to transfer from the Hurricanes.

By the end of August, Miami had lost another player via transfer. Larranaga and his staff were only able to offset the losses of the three transfers with one incoming transfer in the form of guard Rashad Muhammad from San Jose State.

"We devoted a ton of time in April, May, June, July and August trying to fill our roster, and still was not able to do it," said Larranaga, who has done well with transfers Shane Larkin, Kenny Kadji, Malcolm Grant, Trey McKinney-Jones, Kamari Murphy, Rodriguez and McClellan in five seasons as Miami's coach.

"We only have 11 guys on scholarship, only 10 guys eligible to play this year, and the reason is, despite the fact we think we're a great destination for a transfer — we've got a great program in a great league, great geographical location, especially for an older guy who has some experience — but the competition is so great right now for a transfer.

"We need a transfer. At the end of this year, we're looking for guys."

Buzz Williams saw a similar exodus of players from his program when he took over in March 2014 at Virginia Tech.

In his first five months on the job, five players transferred away from Tech. Three more players — guards Adam Smith (transferred to Georgia Tech) and Malik Mueller (turned pro in Europe) and forward Joey van Zegeren (transferred to Northwestern) — left after last season.

It isn't all doom and gloom in Blacksburg, where Maryland transfer Seth Allen and South Florida transfer Zach LeDay are ready to play after sitting out last season.

No ACC team may be in get-rich quick mode more than Louisville, which gains immediately-eligible graduate transfer guards Damion Lee from Drexel, where he averaged 21.4 points per game last season (fourth in Division I), and Trey Lewis, who played at both Penn State and Cleveland State.

Lee and Lewis have already been put in leadership positions, being named two of Louisville's three captains. It's a huge responsibility for guys who have both been on campus for less than five months, and who walked into a sex scandal involving the basketball program.

"I can handle this moment, and I feel like it's making me strong," Lewis said. "It's making me a better speaker. It's making me able to handle adversity and be an ambassador for my team. I understand why I'm here, so I'm taking on this challenge, and I want to be here."

Player Profile: Davon Reed

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 28, 2015

Davon Reed

Junior G/F 6'6 210 Ewing, NJ (Princeton Day School)

2014-15 Stats: 29 games, 21 starts (missed first 8 games with injury), 8.2 ppg, 4.0 rpg, 1.9 apg, 47% FGs 45.7 3P%, All NIT Tournament Team where he played his best basketball of the season.

In five NIT games averaged 10.8 points, 7.0 rebounds, 3.8 assists, 1.0 blocks

Scouting Report:

Best perimeter defender on the team. Good on the glass as well.

Can play 4 different positions, started as a PG his freshman campaign, and has played PF in smaller line-ups through out his career.

Very athletic and very skilled. Well above average handles, passes extremely well, can finish above the rim, and has developed into a knock down shooter.

Best overall attribute may be his ability to drive and finish strong with either hand.

Needs to stay healthy and consistently aggressive.

Summary: To me perhaps the biggest key to the upcoming season, is that Davon Reed embrace his role as the #2 option behind Sheldon McClellan. Sure there will be nights where Angel Rodriguez, Tonye Jekiri, Kamarai Murphy, or James Palmer among others have big nights, but Reed needs to be a consistent force. His game is too good for him to settle in as a 4th or 5th option. He's lights out from distance, but really especially excelled toward the end of last season slashing to the hoop and finishing and/or getting to the line. His efficiency on the offensive end dictates he

get more chances. Reed is also the player most likely to draw the responsibility of guarding the other team's best scorer. The junior from NJ's length and tenacity as a defender demand it. Long story short, Reed is going to be a big key to the season on both ends of the floor. Fortunately for Miami, he's got the ability and the mindset to be a big time player. By season's end last year, Reed really blossomed into a spectacular all-around player. That development needs to carry over for this team to achieve it's goals in 2015-16. I expect Reed to score 10-12 ppg, collect 5-6 boards, dish out 2-3 assists, and be one of the most versatile and indispensable players in the entire ACC this coming year.

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Experienced team means high expectations for Miami

Associated Press

Steven Wine

Oct. 26, 2015

During the Miami Hurricanes' media day, a photographer asked senior guard Angel Rodriguez to pose by spinning a basketball on his index finger.

"I can't," Rodriguez said, drawing laughter. "I'm serious. I can't."

Yes, there are limits to the Hurricanes' talent. Even so, they enter the season with experience and expectations like never before.

"The Final Four is the goal," senior center Tonye Jekiri said. "The other teams that make it to the Final Four, they're not better than us in any way."

Once upon a time, such talk about Hurricanes hoops might have prompted hoots. But coach Jim Larranaga has built a strong program that was in a rebuilding mode after an Atlantic Coast Conference championship in 2013 and now appears poised to bid for another league title — and more.

Here are things to know about Larranaga's fifth Miami team:

LOFTY GOALS: The Hurricanes return 73 percent of their scoring and 78 percent of their rebounding from last year's squad, which went 25-13 overall and 10-8 in the league. They became the first Hurricanes team to play in April, winning seven of their last nine games and finishing as the runner-up to Stanford in the National Invitation Tournament. Jekiri's teammates echo his optimism and ambition. "We're not settling for anything less than the ACC championship and a Final Four appearance type of goal," Rodriguez said. "With a lot of talent, we can't just waste it. This is the year we could do something very, very special." Larranaga said the Hurricanes have Top 10 potential but not the advantages they enjoyed over the rest of the ACC three years ago. "In 2013 I

thought we were the biggest, fastest, strongest team," he said. "We're not separated by that right now. We're in the mix, but we're not above the crowd."

MOVING ON OUT: Three players transferred out of the program after last season, including starting guard Manu Lecomte, who averaged 7.9 points in the Hurricanes' crowded backcourt. Rodriguez said the departures bring more cohesion. "It probably opened some of the guys' eyes to know what they can do to help the team," Rodriguez said. "To win a lot of games, to win the ACC, you need everybody on the same page."

NEWCOMER: Kamari Murphy, a 6-8 transfer from Oklahoma State, gives the Hurricanes more versatility up front and shores up their weaknesses. "Two areas we needed to improve and needed to devote a lot of attention to, Kamari does very well," Larranaga said. "He's an outstanding defender and rebounder, and a terrific athlete. He can guard one through five, and he likes playing defense, and he likes rebounding." That's not all. "He talks nonstop," Jekiri said.

HUNGRY UCEDA: Senior forward Ivan Cruz Uceda has lost 20 pounds since last season, and is now 6-10 and 217. He reduced his body fat to 9 percent from 24 percent by working with a strength and conditioning coach, and the results are evident in his play, Larranaga said. "He is faster, quicker and stronger, he jumps higher, and he's more confident and comfortable," Larranaga said. "He's in for a great senior year." Uceda averaged 5.2 points, 3.5 rebounds and 17 minutes last season.

HOME COURT: The Hurricanes hope to play better at home than a year ago. They beat three Top 25 teams on the road, including No. 4 Duke, but lost December home games to Green Bay and Eastern

Kentucky. "Really bad," Jekiri said. "This season we're trying to make sure we don't lose games at home." Better crowd support for the attendance-challenged Hurricanes could help. They've set a school record by selling 4,600 season tickets.

UM looking to take 2014 success to the next level

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Oct. 26, 2015

The average sports fan may not remember who played in the previous season's National Invitation Tournament final, but University of Miami men's basketball fans surely remember it well.

Last season ended at Madison Square Garden for the Hurricanes, with a thrilling, but heartbreaking overtime loss to Stanford in the NIT championship game.

Watching from the bench were injured starters Angel Rodriguez, nursing a wrist injury, and Tonye Jekiri, who was out after suffering a concussion in the semifinal. Guard Manu Lecomte, who has since transferred to Baylor, played only five minutes that night and aggravated a knee injury.

It was that kind of season for the Canes. There were big moments, tempered by setbacks.

The Hurricanes opened the season 8-0, beat then-No. 8 Florida in Gainesville, entered the AP poll at No. 15, and beat Illinois in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge. They picked up a few huge conference wins — a 90-74 road victory at then-No. 4 Duke and a road win over Syracuse in front of 31,000 fans at the Carrier Dome.

But, there were crushing defeats — 68-55 to Green Bay and, even more humiliating, 72-44 at home to Eastern Kentucky.

Miami finished the season 25-13 (10-8 in the Atlantic Coast Conference) and did not get selected for the NCAA Tournament. The Canes settled for the NIT, and made the most of it.

"Had Angel not hurt his wrist, I think it could have been a spectacular year," UM coach Jim Larrañaga said. "It was a very good year. We won 25 games, and played in April for the first time in school history."

Almost everyone is back from that team, healthy and determined to use their NIT

success as a springboard to the NCAA Tournament.

Lecomte, Deandre Burnett (Ole Miss) and Omar Sherman (Paris, Texas, Junior College) transferred. But the Canes hope to make up for the losses with Oklahoma State transfer Kamari Murphy, who is an experienced junior, and freshmen Ebuka Izundu and Anthony Lawrence Jr., whose father played for UM in the early 1990s.

Murphy is known as a tenacious rebounder and defender, and skilled enough to handle the ball if he has to. He is also, like Rodriguez, a vocal leader.

"Love him," Larrañaga said of Murphy. "Last year, I thought there were two areas we needed to improve and give attention to. Kamari Murphy does both very well. He is an outstanding defender and rebounder. He can guard one through five. That's how quick he is. ... Once he's settled in, maybe 10 games in, he's going to be really, really good."

Added Rodriguez: "Kamari brings what this team needed — somebody else to be very vocal, what I call a dog. He not only gets himself going, he gets everybody going."

Another player expected to make a big contribution this season is the leaner, quicker Ivan Cruz Uceda. The 6-10 Senior from Spain slimmed down from 237 lbs. to 217 lbs. and dropped his body fat from 24 percent to nine percent.

The result?

He is faster, quicker, stronger, jumps higher, and is more confident. With Uceda and 7-footer Jekiri, UM should be formidable in the paint.

"Ivan is in for a great senior year," Larrañaga said. "He was bound and determined to become a better athlete. Last year from a defensive standpoint, he struggled guarding ball screens. This year, he's much more comfortable. He's a much better Ivan than a year ago."

The backcourt should be strong with proven scorer McClellan, reliable Davon

Reed, and floor general Rodriguez, who is determined not to repeat his roller coaster season.

"My goal is to be more consistent, and have a great assist-to-turnover ratio," Rodriguez said. "We have a very good chance of doing something special, but we have to be consistent and make sure we make it about the team rather than the individual.

Rodriguez, a native of Puerto Rico, is especially pumped about the schedule because the Canes are playing three games in the Puerto Rico Tip-Off Nov. 19-22. He hasn't played there since moving to the United States at age 15, and said many friends and family members will be there.

Player Profile: Amp Lawrence

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 25, 2015

Anthony "Amp" Lawrence Jr.

Freshman F 6'7 210 St. Petersburg, FL

2014-15 H.S. Stats: 30 ppg, 12 rpg, 5 apg (played a lot of PG as a senior).

Scouting Report:

Very versatile player who projects as both a wing and a 4 early in his college career. But could even play some point as he develops. Handles, shoot, and passes very well.

Explosive athlete who can really finish above the rim (see below). Great size as well for a wing.

Should eventually develop into a good defender considering his length and athleticism. But will likely struggle as all freshman do, early on.

Might take a while to find his identity on this level. UM's needs might dictate he plays some down low, but his natural skill set is more suited to play 2/3 or even PG.

Summary: I think there is next to no chance this kid redshirts. He's too good to not fill a role early on, even on a deep Hurricanes team. Look for him to get some minutes at the 4, though a lot of that depends on how well Ivan Cruz Uceda plays. Once he gets his footing and learns the speed of the game at this level, he could be an absolute monster on the defensive end. Has a similar skill set to Davon Reed, but with more size. I absolutely love Lawrence's future in the program, but big time stats might not be in the cards for 2015-16. A better measure of how good he is as a freshman will be in growth as a player, and impact on the game not seen in the box score. Perhaps by season's end though, his role could increase. In the next few years his talent

will be one of the biggest reasons to be excited about this program.

Canes hoops teams unveil new uniforms

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Oct. 23, 2015

th of the Hurricanes basketball teams have high expectations going into the season.

And on Thursday afternoon, at an invitation-only event for some of Miami's top donors, the teams unveiled three of the new looks they'll wear this season as each bids to return to the NCAA Tournament.

The Hurricanes will have orange, white and green uniforms designed by the school's new apparel partner, Adidas, with some alternate looks likely being unveiled later in the season.

According to a release from Miami, the uniforms feature the "Hurricanes" nickname etched across the jersey's shoulder for players to see as they put the uniform on. They are made of the same lightweight material used in Adidas' NBA jerseys and the school says the uniforms have "targeted ventilation zones on the chest, back, and side" designed to keep players cool.

Along with seeing the new uniforms – which were modeled by basketball players Angel Rodriguez, Tonye Jekiri, Sheldon McClellan, Jessica Thomas, Michelle Woods and Adrienne Motley – the donors also got to watch both teams practice and hear from athletic director Blake James as well as coaches Jim Larrañaga and Katie Meier.

Miami's men's team is coming off a 25-13 season which culminated in a run to the National Invitation Tournament championship game. The women, meanwhile, went 20-13 and advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Player Profile: Kamari Murphy

State of the U
Oct. 22, 2015
Jerry Steinberg

Kamari Murphy

Junior F 6'8 220 Brooklyn, NY (Lincoln H.S. - Oklahoma State)

2014-15 Stats: (sat out NCAA transfer rules) In 2013-14 with OSU averaged 6.1 ppg, 6.3 rpg and shot 54% from the floor.

Scouting Report:

Already being lauded by Coach L and his teammates for his defensive prowess (can guard all 5 positions on the floor) and unselfish nature.

Likely the second best athlete on the team behind Sheldon McClellan.

An accomplished and proven force on the glass from his days in the Big XII.

Developing offensive game. Larranaga has already praised his ability to drive to the hoop. Shooting/touch remain a work in progress.

Fills the most important need on the team. Is a classic defense/rebounding first 4.

Summary: Every great team needs a guy like Murphy to bring it all together. He is the kind of player who can potentially score in double figures some nights, with out a single play being called for him. More importantly though, his presence on the glass will create more possessions on offense, and protect Tonye Jekiri from having to do too much on defense. Little things, like his potential to set screens up top, help defense, and the energy he could bring to the floor, are all qualities that could turn a very good UM team into a great one in 2015-16. Think back to 2012-13 and the role Julian Gamble filled for that squad. Murphy is not quite as tall as Gamble, but an even better athlete and

a more versatile defender. The Brooklyn native is a very key cog the success of the program the next two seasons. He should be fun to watch as well.

Player Profile: Ivan Cruz Uceda

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 19, 2015

Senior F-C 6'10 217 Madrid, Spain
(Harcum College, Pa)

2014-15 Stats: 21 games (missed first 16
NCAA transfer rules) 5.2 ppg, 3.5 rpg,
33.9% 3P%

Scouting Report:

Has a very quick release when shooting
from deep. And terrific range.

Very good hands, and adequate if not
spectacular on the glass.

Nice skill set overall, can pass well, and
knocks down his FTs.

Limited athletically which makes him a
liability at times, especially on pick and
roll/individual defense.

Does not establish position well enough to
get post touches, which relegates him to
mostly jump shooting on the offensive end.

Summary: The really good news here,
is that Coach L raved about how much
better Uceda's conditioning is coming
into this season compared to last. That
should help him both in rebounding and
defense, the two areas he needs the most
improvement. I still don't expect ICU to
play heavy minutes in 2015-16, but he will
be needed at times to spell Tonye Jekiri &
Kamari Murphy, especially now that Omar
Sherman has transferred. If he can come
in and play 10-12 minutes a game, knock
down some open jumpers, and just hold his
own down low it will be a huge plus for this
team. Anything on top of that would be
gravy. Look for subtle improvements this
season from Uceda, even if his numbers are
about the same as last season's. He may
not be a superstar, but he can fill a role for
this team and help toward ACC contention
and a berth in the NCAA Tournament.

Profile - Davon Reed

Draft Express

Derek Bodner

Oct. 16, 2015

Davon Reed missed the first three weeks of Miami's 2014-15 season after suffering a torn meniscus during offseason workouts. After returning in early December, Reed worked his way into the starting lineup, starting in 21 of the final 22 games for Miami and helping the Hurricanes rebound from a disappointing 2013-14 season.

Reed was measured at 6'5 in shoes at the LeBron James camp a few years ago, with an impressive 6'10.5 wingspan. That length, combined with a well-developed frame and good athletic tools provides Reed with considerable intrigue as a prospect, especially considering the potential he's shown as a jump shooter.

On the offensive side of the ball, Reed's primary contributions come from his set shot, which he hit at a tremendous clip last year. Reed made 45.7% on his 81 three point attempts last season and shot 46% on his catch and shoot opportunities per Synergy Sports Technology, a percentage which yielded 1.381 points per possession and placed Reed in the top 10% of college basketball.

Reed gets tremendous elevation on his jump shot and has range well beyond the college three point line. His shooting motion is compact, which combined with the elevation he gets allows him to get off accurate looks at the basket with little space. The overall sample size is small, so a regression wouldn't be all that surprising, but there's reason to believe Reed can be a plus shooter even with a larger sampling of attempts.

Reed also has a quick first step and long, rangy strides, which allows him to attack

closeouts and get to the basket. He's a good athlete who can elevate around the rim, and has pretty good body control and touch around the hoop, although he doesn't yet appear to have confidence finishing with his left hand.

Because he's a relatively low-usage player, who gets shots primarily either behind the three point line or at the rim, Reed has a fairly high free throw rate at 47%. The combination of getting to the line – 3.7 attempts per 40 minutes, pace adjusted, compared to just 8.0 field goal attempts per 40 minutes pace adjusted – and effective three point shooting gives Reed excellent efficiency. His 62% true shooting percentage placed him in the top-15 among all shooting guards in our database last season.

The rest of Reed's offensive game is still a work in progress, as evidenced by his extremely low utilization in Miami's offense. Reed attempted just 5.5 field goal attempts in his 27.5 minutes per game, with an extremely low 15.7% usage rate. Reed is an inconsistent shooter off the dribble, which limits his usefulness in the pick and roll, and lacks the advanced ball handling skills and creativity to create with regularity. For the most part, Reed's offense is limited to spot-up attempts, transition opportunities, and cuts to the basket off the ball.

Reed's athleticism and physical profile gives him a lot of potential as a defender, although right now he's inconsistent in his ability to turn that potential into production. Reed has the length and lateral foot speed to defend on the perimeter, and the size and strength to defend multiple positions.

The effort is there, which is a big building block for his long-term development, but he's going to have to improve his technique

and decision making in order to reach his three-and-D potential. Reed can frequently be caught too upright and off balance, and can get burned on misdirection moves. He can also get caught roaming off the ball looking for steals or when committing to double teams, and leave his man wide open at times. All of these are correctable deficiencies.

The upcoming 2015-16 season is a big one for Davon Reed, who played his entire sophomore season at 19 years of age. Reed has some potential as a three-and-D candidate, something that is extremely valued in today's NBA. If Reed is able to show that the accuracy he displayed in his jump shot is sustainable with more attempts, round out the rest of his offensive game so he can offer more in the half court, and turn some of his immense defensive potential into consistent production, he could find himself on the radar as a prospect down the line.

Player Profile: Ja'Quan Newton

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 15, 2015

Sophomore G 6'2 180 Philadelphia, Pa
(Nuemann-Goretti H.S.)

2014-15 Stats: 34 games. 4.0 ppg. 1.4
rpg. 1.3 apg, 40.5 FG%

Scouting Report:

Fearless competitor who absolutely loves taking the ball to the rim.

Has very good court vision and does a good job finding open teammates in the half court as well as the open floor.

Good array of moves and decent medium range game.

Needs to work on his outside shooting, and his especially his stroke at the FT line.

Good but not great defender as a freshman.

Has the mindset and skill set to be an outstanding defensive PG.

Summary: Now that Manu Lecomte has transferred to Baylor, it's crystal clear who the top PG behind Angel Rodriguez is. And considering the up and down season Rodriguez had last year, and the injuries he suffered, that is a more important role than it even sounds. Newton was a top 50 player coming out of H.S. and you could see his talent in spurts last year. Like any freshman he had his out of control moments. But if he improves his jumper, and his decisions, the already confident game of Newton could take off to another level. I expect a much better version of Angel this season ahead of him, so for now Newton will have to settle in as one of the top options off the bench. Look for him to play a little off the ball as well, and have some big games when the team needs it. 7-8 ppg and 2+ rpg/apg seem well within reason for the very talented Philly native in 2015-16. That would be a good launching point for the player who is earmarked to take over for Rodriguez as the starting PG

once he graduates. And at that point, the sky is the limit for JQ.

Larrañaga confident healthy Canes can make splash in ACC

Sun Sentinel
Christy Cabrera Chirinos
Oct. 5, 2015

Just two practices into the season, Jim Larrañaga can't help but be excited. His Hurricanes, who made a run to the National Invitation Tournament championship game earlier this year, are coming off one of the more memorable seasons in school history. They return seven contributors from a 25-win team that Larrañaga believes was one Angel Rodriguez injured wrist away from being "spectacular." On top of that, Miami has added key newcomers in freshmen Ebuka Izundu and Anthony Lawrence, along with a solid defensive presence in transfer Kamari Murphy.

So what kind of season does the veteran coach expect this year's Hurricanes to put together? No doubt, a solid one – as long as Miami can stay healthy, something that was an issue late last season when Rodriguez, one of Miami's leading scorers, was hampered by an injured wrist that plagued him throughout the last month and a half of the season. During that stretch, fellow starters Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri even dealt with various health problems, though they powered through as best they could.

"We have to stay healthy," Larrañaga said. "If we stay healthy, then we have to play well on that given night because the team we're going against [in the ACC] is every bit as good as we are."

Ahead of each season, Larrañaga has made it a point to share his expectations with members of Miami's Board of Trustees. Ahead of the Hurricanes run to the 2013 ACC championship, he urged Miami's top boosters to buy season tickets because he had a good feeling there would be plenty of exciting basketball that season. A year later, when the team was in transition, he urged patience.

This year he's told those around the program he feels this team has the potential to put together the kind of season those 2013 Hurricanes had – if Miami can stay healthy and navigate the ACC.

On that front, Larrañaga said some players have been limited during Miami's first practices, but no one has been held out with anything serious. Rodriguez has missed practice while recovering after having his wisdom teeth removed, while sophomore James Palmer and Izundu have missed time while dealing with an illness.

Some other thoughts from Larrañaga's preseason press conference on Monday as the Hurricanes continue their initial practices ahead of the 2015-16 season:

* Larrañaga says he's been impressed with the commitment Ivan Cruz Uceda and Jekiri have shown in the offseason to prepare their bodies for the rigors of playing in the post against some of the ACC's top players.

Cruz Uceda, a forward from Madrid, has lost 20 pounds and reduced his body fat percentage from 24 to 9 percent, with Larrañaga joking the senior is nearly unrecognizable.

"He's faster, quicker, stronger, jumps higher, is more confident, more comfortable and his teammates are more confident and comfortable with him," Larrañaga said of Cruz Uceda. "He's in for a great senior year. ... Ivan was bound and determined to become a better athlete. Last year, from a defensive standpoint, he struggled guarding ball screens. This year, he's much more comfortable doing it. It doesn't mean he's going to be like Kamari Murphy, but he's a much better Ivan than he was a year ago."

Jekiri, a senior center, meanwhile, has added 25 pounds of muscle while working with strength and conditioning coach Steve Felde.

"He went from 215 pounds [as a freshman] to 250 pounds, but he's all muscle," Larrañaga said of Jekiri. "He's a huge human being and his confidence has grown as well. He's now really looking to score more and if he can average a double-double, which is our goal for him, then he's going to be an all conference player in the ACC and probably an NBA draft choice."

*Two of the areas where Miami struggled at times last year were on defense and in

rebounding. But Larrañaga expects the Hurricanes will get a boost with both of those this season with the addition of Murphy. A transfer from Oklahoma State, Murphy sat out last season but is ready to return to action and Larrañaga couldn't be more excited to have him in the lineup.

"Love him. I thought two areas that we really needed to improve and we needed to devote a lot of attention to, Kamari Murphy does very well," Larrañaga said. "He's an outstanding defender and rebounder. Terrific athlete. He can guard 1-5. That's how quick he is. He likes playing defense. He likes rebounding. That's a big part of it. If you can see yourself in the role that the coaches have for you and his confidence in his shooting and ball handling and shot selection is improving. Now, I say that with a caveat [because] he hasn't played any games yet. Things change when the games come. But I think once he's settled in, maybe 10 games into the season, he's going to be really, really good."

* While Rodriguez had a strong start to the season (remember that game at Florida where he had 24 points?), there were times he struggled later in the year ahead of the wrist injury. And Monday, Larrañaga conceded that may have happened because he put too much responsibility on his point guard's shoulders. Miami seemed to get a handle on that later in the year after Larrañaga asked McClellan, Jekiri and Davon Reed to take on bigger leadership roles and ease the pressure on Rodriguez.

Expect to see that group share those leadership roles this season.

"What happened last year is, Angel was supremely confident to begin the season in his own abilities and played great. Then there was a stretch where he played well some games but didn't play quite as well. In those games, he just needed more help. He needed guys to step up," Larrañaga said. "When Angel got injured, it required other guys to step up. And they not only stepped up a little bit, they stepped up a lot of times in a very big way. Now I think now they feel much more confident and comfortable in being a leader."

Miami 2015-16 Team Preview and Prediction

Athlon Sports

Oct. 20, 2015

At this time last year, coach Jim Larranaga had a team of unknowns. He had three returning players, one of whom was injured, and nine newcomers who had never worn the Hurricanes uniform. He had little idea what to expect.

He does now. Almost everyone returns from a group that reached as high as No. 15 in the polls and reached the NIT final. Not only that, but the Hurricanes also added a talented transfer at forward, a position of need. A midseason slide cost Miami an NCAA Tournament berth last year, but anything less than a trip to the NCAAs this March will be a major disappointment.

Frontcourt

After shouldering a heavy load last year, Tonye Jekiri has a little help. The 7-footer from Nigeria landed on the ACC All-Defensive Team after leading the conference in rebounding (9.9 rpg) and finishing fifth with 1.4 blocks per game. He also chipped in 8.6 points while playing 30.3 minutes per game. That workload was possible because he learned how to defend without fouling. Not bad for a player entering his sixth season of basketball. He's not in the category of Jahlil Okafor, Montrezl Harrell or Rakeem Christmas, but with those players gone, Jekiri could be on of the ACC's best all-around big man and become an NBA Draft pick if he continues to round out his game.

Who will start next to him is another matter. UM has high hopes for Kamari Murphy, a 6'8", 216-pound forward who excels at defense and dunking. The high flyer sat out last year after transferring from Oklahoma State, where he averaged slightly more than six points, six boards and one block two seasons ago. Now a fourth-year junior, Murphy should be an immediate contributor on defense and in the transition game. If he proves he can

score, he'll see most of the work.

Senior Ivan Cruz Uceda has considerable offensive potential but was limited last year because of poor conditioning. It was especially tough for Uceda; after the Madrid native transferred from junior college, he was ineligible for 16 games and was then thrown into the fire of January conference play. Uceda brings a crafty touch inside and is unafraid to shoot from the perimeter (62 of his 99 attempts were 3s). The senior needs work defensively.

Miami Facts & Figures

Last season: 25-13, 10-8

Postseason: NIT runner-up

Last NCAA Tournament: 2013

ACC Projection: Seventh

Postseason projection: First Round

Backcourt

This group includes one of the ACC's most gifted scorers, a strong point guard, a versatile defender and two sophomores with lots of offensive ability.

Leading scorer Sheldon McClellan, who averaged 14.5 points per game while shooting 48.4 percent from the field, could play himself into an NBA Draft spot with night-in, night-out consistency. The 6'5" senior from Houston can score in a variety of ways, though he's best slashing to the hoop or throwing down alley-oops.

UM hopes McClellan's running mate, point guard Angel Rodriguez, won't repeat his roller-coaster season. The 5'11" senior shot down Florida and Duke early in the year but suffered a catastrophic slump that left him with a pedestrian 11.9 points-per-game average (to go with 3.9 assists and 1.8 steals).

At 6'6", junior Davon Reed guards four positions and is one of the league's most efficient shooters (1.51 points per attempt, 8.2 points per game). UM will start him in a three-guard lineup.

The Hurricanes lost two guards to transfer but should handle those losses

well. Manu Lecomte (Baylor), a strong perimeter shooter, and Deandre Burnett (Ole Miss) were in and out of the lineup. Sophomore combo guard Ja'Quan Newton and sophomore wing James Palmer are ready for larger roles. Newton, a slasher, needs to improve his outside shooting, while Larranaga wants more defense and rebounding from Palmer.

Key Losses: G Deandre Burnett, G Manu Lecomte

Top Players: G Angel Rodriguez, G Sheldon McClellan, G Davon Reed, F Kamari Murphy, C Tonye Jekiri

Newcomers

Kamari Murphy's D-and-dunk game could have helped Miami last year, but he sat out after transferring from Oklahoma State. The 6'8" junior needs to improve his shot but will be an immediate contributor on defense and in transition. With a veteran-heavy rotation, the Canes can afford to take it slow with their two freshmen: 6'10" Nigerian Ebuka Izundu, who is a skinny project in the mold of Tonye Jekiri, and 6'7" wing Anthony Lawrence Jr.

Final Analysis

Miami has a chance to muscle its way into the top 25 and stay there. The Canes are on the outside of the league's elite but should battle Notre Dame, Louisville, Florida State and NC State for next-tier supremacy. In a league this strong, that's not a consolation prize; that means you're headed to the NCAA Tournament. That's where Miami should be going, given its strength in the middle and in the backcourt. Comparisons will be drawn between this team and the 2012-13 squad that surprised the bluebloods by winning the ACC title. This group doesn't appear to be quite that strong, but it should be a fun season in Coral Gables nonetheless.

Player Profile: James Palmer

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 15, 2015

Sophomore G/F 6'5 202 Washington D.C.
(St. John's College H.S.)

2014-15 Stats: Appeared in all 38 games, averaged 3.7 ppg, 1.4 rpg, 36.5 3P%, 41.3 FG%.

Scouting Report:

Silky smooth player with excellent handles who can play positions 1-3 on the floor.

Very fluid jumper, and surprisingly athletic in the open floor. Great size as well.

Coach L says he will start the season as a 2/3 but could play a lot of minutes at PG in his future.

Needs to work on his defense, but a very good/versatile player in most aspects of his game.

Summary: Palmer is in perfect position to be UM's sixth man this season. He no longer has to compete with Deandre Burnett for minutes, and will be top back-up for both Sheldon McClellan and Davon Reed on the wing. And while JaQuan Newton is expected to spell Angel Rodriguez at the point, when the 'Canes go to bigger line-ups he can also run some PG. However, I expect his initial role to be as a knock down shooter/scorer off the bench. With his natural abilities, underrated athleticism, and excellent size, he should get to the line more often in his second season as well. Palmer could end up as the top scorer off the bench and average anywhere from 6-10 ppg if he develops as expected. Look for him to come close to 40% from deep as well, with his very pretty outside stroke. Miami has a star studded starting 5, but look for Palmer to play a big part of the success of the 2015-16 Miami Hurricanes and possibly blossom into a star in years beyond.

Key assistant coaching hires

NBC Sports

Scott Phillips

Sept. 30, 2015

Assistant coaches lay low and out of the spotlight most of the time, getting tireless amounts of work done to recruit and scout for upcoming games. This offseason saw a number of teams make nice additions to their staffs in the form of assistant coaches. While some guys on this list are connected recruiters, others are former head coaches who add a lot in player development, game planning or advance scouting. Here's ten programs who made impact assistant coaching moves this offseason.

Jamal Brunt, Miami: One of the most underrated hires of the spring was Richmond associate head coach Jamal Brunt moving to Miami as an assistant. Brunt moved from Richmond's director of operations up the ladder to associate head coach by recruiting high-caliber talent (Justin Harper) and coaching in a program that had a lot of success the last 10 years when he was there.

10 Glue Guys To Watch

CBS Sports

Jon Rothstein

Sept. 28, 2015

TONYE JEKIRI

Miami Hurricanes | Center

Comment: 7-footer is a throwback because he's a player that's worked hard and gotten better during every season of his four-year career. An anchor in the paint, Jekiri (8.6 points, 9.9 rebounds, 1.4 blocks per game in 2014-15) will have a role for the Hurricanes similar to what Patric Young had for Florida when the Gators advanced to the 2014 Final Four.

Murphy looking to show full skill set at Miami

NBC Sports

Raphielle Johnson

Sept. 25, 2015

In two seasons at Oklahoma State, forward Kamari Murphy played a role that didn't change all that often. Defending, rebounding and being a supplemental figure on the offensive end were his responsibilities, and there didn't seem to be much room for him to go outside of those roles. After a sophomore season in which he averaged 6.1 points and 6.3 rebounds per game, Murphy decided to transfer and ultimately wound up joining a Miami program that also worked hard to reel him in as a high school prospect but fell short.

Now eligible to compete after sitting out last season, the 6-foot-9 Murphy is eager to take the floor. And with that comes the desire to show that he can do a lot more skill-wise than he was able to do in two seasons in Stillwater, as noted in a story written by Christy Cabrera Chirinos of the Sun Sentinel.

"The two years I was [at Oklahoma State], we had great teams, but I think I was used in the wrong way and the media and press got the wrong perception of me, that I'm just a rebounder or a set screen guy," Murphy said. "I'm [more] than that. This year, I'm not going to do too much, but I'm going to show people I have the skill work and my IQ is better than just setting screens and running the floor. That's why I can't wait to play, to prove people wrong."

Murphy joins a front court that includes seniors Tonye Jekiri and Ivan Cruz Uceda, and there is room for the New York native to show off a wider array of skills. One of Miami's personnel losses from last season was forward Omar Sherman, who transferred after averaging 4.8 points and 2.3 rebounds per contest as a freshman.

While Sherman didn't post prolific numbers, he was a face-up four who could step out onto the perimeter and hit shots in pick and pop situations.

Can Murphy fill a similar role for the Hurricanes, who have the pieces needed to return to the NCAA tournament after missing out in each of the last two seasons? Given Miami's numbers in the front court, with just five scholarship options, head coach Jim Larranaga and his staff will need Murphy to not only fill that role but be more productive in doing so.

Kamari Murphy ready to – finally – suit up for Hurricanes

Sun Sentinel
Christy Cabrera Chirinos
Sept. 24, 2015

Kamari Murphy wanted to be a Hurricane once. His family initially wasn't on board.

As a highly-recruited fifth-year player out of IMG Academy in Bradenton back in 2011, Murphy found himself drawn to Miami's program, players and Hurricanes basketball coach, Jim Larrañaga.

But with the Hurricanes mired in the uncertainty stemming from a protracted NCAA investigation into the actions of a former booster, Murphy's parents had plenty of questions.

Would the Hurricanes be hampered by massive scholarship reductions? Would they have to forfeit the chance to play in the postseason? Could Miami give him college experience he wanted?

Ultimately, uncertainty won out and Murphy passed on the Hurricanes, signing instead with Oklahoma State. But after two seasons in Stillwater, Murphy longed to be closer to home.

He sought a transfer. And the 6-foot-8 forward realized he couldn't say no to Larrañaga twice.

"He was just like, 'Man, Murph, you passed up on us once, but we've got a good situation here. We've got two guys from the Big 12 here,'" Murphy said, recalling one of his conversations with the Miami coach. "He explained the sit out process, how they got better and once I took the visit out here, my family loved it. It was a perfect fit."

And so, though it meant even sitting out a year to satisfy NCAA transfer requirements, Murphy finally became a

Hurricane. He spent all of last season practicing and working out with his new teammates, learning more about them, about himself and the game.

Now, Murphy is ready to return to the court and add experience, power, and size to a Hurricanes team that has high preseason expectations after making a run to last season's NIT championship game.

Miami, which starts practice Oct. 2 and opens the season Nov. 13 against UT Rio Grande Valley, returns leading scorers Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez, two former transfers who helped Murphy deal with some of the frustration that comes from missing a year's worth of games.

Also back are guards Davon Reed, Ja'Quan Newton and James Palmer, forward Ivan Cruz Uceda and center Tonye Jekiri. It's a core a stronger, smarter Murphy says he feels he can only help as the Hurricanes look to contend for another ACC title and a return to the NCAA Tournament.

"I learned how Coach L likes to run his system, what he likes from my position and different positions. I got a good scouting report on other teams just watching my guys play against them and [seeing] what they like to do and the players coming back," Murphy said. "That's how my [basketball] IQ rose in a sense. But just sitting and watching players ... how I can play with other players, that raised my IQ to another level."

Said Reed of Murphy's addition, "He's already gotten a chance to experience the ACC and how we play from the sidelines. He's become very familiar with our team and the way the game is played. ... He'll provide us that defensive presence we need, he'll be able to run the floor for us and be an athletic presence. He knows

what it takes to win and he knows what it takes to be the team we can be. He'll bring that, night in and night out."

For Murphy, this fresh start at Miami is also personal.

At Oklahoma State, he led the Cowboys with 199 rebounds and 40 blocks as a sophomore. He averaged 6.1 points and 6.3 rebounds, numbers that earned him a reputation of sorts as a defensive specialist.

But Murphy believes his game is more diverse than that and he says playing with Miami in the ACC will give him a chance to prove he's a well-rounded, complete player.

"The two years I was [at Oklahoma State], we had great teams, but I think I was used in the wrong way and the media and press got the wrong perception of me, that I'm just a rebounder or a set screen guy," Murphy said. "I'm [more] than that. This year, I'm not going to do too much, but I'm going to show people I have the skill work and my IQ is better than just setting screens and running the floor. That's why I can't wait to play, to prove people wrong."

Murphy ready to finally don Miami uniform

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Sept. 22, 2015

Kamari Murphy was one of those recruits who turned down the University of Miami because of the Nevin Shapiro booster scandal. But after two years at Oklahoma State, he decided to transfer to the Hurricanes program that had initially been his first choice.

He sat out last season, and now the 6-9 forward from Brooklyn is itching to play. He and the rest of the Hurricanes started heavy gym work this week to prepare for the first day of practice Oct. 2.

"Funny story, I was supposed to come here my freshman year," Murphy said Monday. "But my parents, with the sanctions and the stuff going on, didn't feel it was the proper situation for me. If I had come here, I'd already have an ACC ring. But now I'm happy to be here."

Murphy started 21 games as a sophomore at Oklahoma State, averaged 25 minutes, 6.1 points and 6.1 rebounds, but didn't feel he was "being used properly." When he announced he wanted to leave, UM coach Jim Larrañaga called.

"I couldn't turn him down twice," Murphy said, smiling.

Larrañaga says Murphy is the team's "X factor." Like former Big 12 transfers Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan, Murphy has high-level college experience. He is a tenacious rebounder, can defend multiple positions and can also score.

"I bring toughness, rebounding. I'm an energy guy, a vocal leader," Murphy said. "The two years I was at Oklahoma State we had great teams, and I can't say I regret going there, but I think I was used in

the wrong way, just as a rebounder, a set screen guy. This year I'm going to show people I have the skills and the basketball IQ. I can't wait to play and prove people wrong."

Murphy will be one of three new players in a UM jersey, along with freshmen Ebuka "Buka" Izundu and Anthony Lawrence Jr. Izundu, a 6-10 native of Nigeria, was spotted at a camp and moved to the United States in 2013. He attended high school in Charlotte, North Carolina.

"Buka reminds me of Tonye as a freshman," Larrañaga said, referring to senior Nigerian center Tonye Jekiri, who has become a mentor to Izundu. "Buka came in at 201 pounds and he needs to get to 225 or 230. He's not quite ready to do what he'll be capable of when he gets stronger, but he's a willing learner."

Lawrence is a 6-7 forward from St. Petersburg, and he has deep UM roots. His father, Anthony Sr., played at UM from 1991-93, and his uncle, Patrick, was a Cane from 1991-94. Coaches like his versatility.

The Hurricanes return seniors Rodriguez, McClellan, Jekiri and Ivan Cruz Uceda. Junior Davon Reed returns, as well as sophomores JaQuan Newton and James Palmer. Three players transferred — Manu Lecomte (Baylor), DeAndre Burnett (Mississippi) and Omar Sherman (Paris, Texas, Junior College).

"As a player, you need to be someplace where you're really happy, and if their playing time wasn't satisfying them, it's best for me to be honest, even if it's not what they wanted to hear," Larrañaga said. "They are all good young men and we wish them well."

Canes Building a Program From the Ground Up

CaneInsider
Austin Sapin
Sept. 20, 2015

Think back to 2013.

The Miami Hurricanes had made one of their most impressive runs in years with a 29-7 season, but looking forward, what was left behind? One freshman that averaged a combined 6.9 minutes a game, two graduate students and a program skinned bare to the core.

That 2012-13 season was an undoubted success, but for how great the regular season ACC title, the ACC Tournament title and the Sweet Sixteen run were, what was left to build off?

Over the past two seasons, the Miami Hurricanes have dealt with plenty of change and have done a serviceable job of filling in for those missing pieces. Now in year three of this Miami rebuild, that foundation that was wiped clean after the 2012-13 season has finally been repaired and boy does it look great.

Even when that foundation has looked like it's cracking the past six months, Coach Jim Larranaga and his staff have showed over and over that this program is in a new phase.

Take the transfers of Omar Sherman, Deandre Burnett and Manu Lecomte for example. You think Miami could have dealt with losses like this over the past few years? No shot.

With these departures, Larranaga hasn't just found a stopgap, he's managed to build both for this year and also for years to come.

It's not just a group of seniors that will leave a program in ruins now. To see that,

all you need to do is look at the roster this coaching staff has put together.

The current seniors that include Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri will get the spotlight, but juniors Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy will have plenty of experience and talent to lead this team next season.

Behind them are sophomores James Palmer and Ja'Quan Newton, who both showed flashes of excellence last season and are sure to be featured prominently in the rotation once again this year.

Then you get to the freshmen, Anthony Lawrence Jr. and Ebuka Izundu who haven't played a minute of college basketball, but will be able to learn under one of the best coaches in the country and gain a wealth of experience from the veterans on this team. Oh yeah, they can also play a little bit too.

That current roster speaks volumes to the type of depth and talent this program possesses now and instead of settling, the Canes have only added more.

While he'll have to sit out this season, Rashad Muhammed, a 6'6" guard who transferred in from San Jose St., will give the Hurricanes another scoring option for presumably the 2016-17 season and 2017-18 season.

On the recruiting front, the Canes and Coach Larranaga now find themselves in the hunt for some of the best recruits in the country, something the Miami program isn't really familiar with.

This Hurricanes staff has already locked up 6'10" center Rodney Miller from legendary Oak Hill and the names they've been linked with should have Canes fans salivating at the mouth. Names like Dewan

Huell, Juwan Durham and Brison Gresham could give the Hurricanes a freshman star they haven't had in years.

This season, the Canes have a realistic shot at making a run not just in the ACC, but in March as well. That in itself is exciting, but what makes this roster and this team so promising is the fact it won't just be a blip on the radar and that this program should be successful in the future as well.

Think back to 2013. Think about how exhilarating and fun that season was. Now imagine something like that for the next few years. I think it's safe to say this Miami program is here to stay.

SEASON PREVIEW: ANGEL RODRIGUEZ

Hoops HD

Jon Teitel

Sept. 13, 2015

Many college basketball players decide to transfer because they are not having much success at their original school and want to try their luck elsewhere, but that was certainly not the case for Angel Rodriguez. As a freshman at Kansas State he played in 32 games and led his team in both assists and steals before starting a pair of NCAA tourney games. As a sophomore he started all 33 games and was named to the Big 12 All-Defensive team. After transferring to Miami in 2013 and sitting out for a year, he became 1 of the best PGs in the ACC while helping the Hurricanes get back to the postseason after missing out in 2014. HoopsHD's Jon Teitel got to chat with Angel about growing up in Puerto Rico and recovering from a wrist injury last winter.

You grew up in Puerto Rico: how did you 1st get into basketball? I was a baseball player as a kid but it did not really work out for me. Basketball is big in Puerto Rico so I just started playing with my friends.

You began your career at Kansas State, where you started a pair of NCAA tourney games as a freshman: how were you able to come in and contribute right from the start? I knew my role and was not trying to be the star: I just wanted to help us win games by being a "dog" on defense. On offense I just tried to run the team.

You made the Big 12 All-Defensive team as a sophomore and were #3 in the ACC in SPG last year: what is your secret for being a good defender? Defense is not a skill: it is more of a mental thing. You must have the desire to stop your opponent and take pride in it rather than just going with the flow. My college coaches have always taught me to take pride in playing defense. I was used to just competing on offense

like most young guys do, but I have been able to build a reputation for myself on the defensive end in college.

In the 2013 NCAA tourney you had 4 AST but missed a shot at the buzzer in a 2-PT loss to La Salle: how much of a home-court advantage did you have while playing in Kansas City? It was a great home-court advantage for us, but the problem was that we disrespected our opponent and were looking forward to playing Wisconsin in the following round. It does not matter where you play in the tourney: everyone will bring their "A" game, which is why underdogs can pull off the upset.

After the tourney you decided to transfer: why did you pick Miami? Miami is my home: I have my high school friends and girlfriend here, and my family in Puerto Rico is only 2 hours away. It is nice to be in the ACC and the coaches here have been perfect for me.

You play for Coach Jim Larranaga: what makes him such a good coach, and what is the most important thing that you have ever learned from him? He gives a lot of freedom to his guards and is also a good person. I would be lying if I said that the most important thing I learned from him was on the court. He teaches us little things about how to succeed in life like looking people in the eye and shaking their hand: I truly appreciate him taking the time to teach us about life.

Last January you scored a career-high 25 PTS including 3 FTs in the final second of regulation in a 9-PT 2-OT loss to undefeated Virginia: how were you able to come all the way back from a 19-PT 1st half deficit, and did you think that you were going to make all those FTs? I would call it perseverance. We were not executing certain stuff in the 1st half so we had to make some changes at halftime. We had a new team of young

guys and even veterans like myself were not doing much, but we gathered ourselves and finally made a few stops. I never doubt myself: I will take the blame if I miss a shot and take the credit if I make a shot. I could not go out by being scared of losing: that is just not who I am.

You missed the 2015 NIT title game (a 2-PT OT loss to Stanford) with a wrist injury: do you think your team would have won if you were healthy, and how is your wrist feeling at the moment? Of course I think I could help the team if I was healthy, but if I had played then I would have hurt the team because I was not ready to play and could not pass or shoot with my right hand. It was a good experience for our team because it taught us how to try to find other ways to win. My wrist is 100% right now and I feel as good as I have ever felt.

Your non-conference schedule includes games against Mississippi State/Nebraska/Florida: which of these games do you feel will present your biggest test? Last year I would have picked Florida but this year I am truly taking it day-by-day because it is my final year of college basketball. It is going to be very emotional but a very fun ride: I used to dream about playing in college and I want to make the best of it.

What are your goals for the upcoming season, and what are your expectations for the upcoming season? I have very high expectations for the team this year. I think we underachieved last year but we are more mature this year and know what it takes to compete at this level, so we will never settle for less than we can achieve. We have a couple of guys who will play bigger roles and I think we have become more of a team with a lot of experienced guys who can guide the younger guys.

The Brunt of Great Expectations: CanesHoops are a Veteran Team

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Aug. 20, 2015

With just over a month until full-time practices begin, State of the U had the opportunity to speak with Assistant Coach Jamal Brunt, to get his thoughts on the team and the expectations for the upcoming season.

SOTU: As a newcomer to the program and to working for Coach L, what has been your impression of the team in the time that you've spent with them, and how have they looked in the gym?

JB: "I've been very, very impressed with the culture of work. These guys, they get in the gym a ton. Obviously, the NCAA limits the amount of hours that we (coaches) can be in the gym with them per week, but those guys are constantly, constantly in the gym, working out, getting extra reps, extra workouts, extra shooting. That was probably the biggest takeaway I had from the summer - I just was blown away by that culture of work."

SOTU: What are your expectations for the upcoming year?

JB: "I'm expecting a great year, and that was obviously an attractive selling point for me, making the move here. I get to work with a veteran group that is really poised to make a big jump. You've got a lot of experienced guys coming back, a couple of fifth-year guys that should be great leaders. I'm looking forward to it. Guys should be ready to work once they get back on campus, and some guys are in town already. Tonye (Jekiri) and Ivan (Cruz Uceda) haven't left. Davon (Reed) came back early, (Kamari) Murphy stuck around. All the guys have committed themselves to making sure they're ready. I think it should be an exciting year, knock on wood, if everyone stays healthy - that's obviously the key for any season."

SOTU: Speaking of health, can you give us an update on injuries? How is Sheldon

(McClellan) following offseason surgery?

JB: "He's good to go, and actually was invited out to the Adidas Nations (camp). They have college counselors out there. Chris (Caputo) got some good feedback from some NBA scouts and GMs that were there evaluating guys. He looked good and was in the gym working once he got back for the second summer session. Everyone else is good, other than occasional bumps and bruises from just working and playing this summer."

SOTU: Last year, Omar Sherman and Ivan Cruz Uceda had to adjust to the size and speed of ACC big men. How have they benefited from the offseason workouts?

JB: "Omar has dropped a ton of weight and Ivan's body has really transformed, even from the time I've been here (in April). Just watching him go from where he was the first day of summer workouts to where he was on the last day of summer workouts, he really had a great summer, I think. We're all hopeful that will translate on the floor. He's been here getting extra workouts in every day since everyone went home (before classes start), and he's been putting in the work. I really, really think he's put himself in a great position to have a really good year. Omar looks a lot better and needs to continue to get stronger but weight-wise, seeing how he looks from when we played in the NIT to how he looks now, he really looks slimmer. I always joke around with him and say, 'Learn and mean, you've got to stay lean and mean.' He is getting there and wasn't getting tired at end of workouts. He says he's working out at home and we'll see that he's still in pretty good shape when he gets back in town."

SOTU: How has the transition to Adidas been so far?

JB: "It does seem like Adidas is trying to be very, very helpful. They're doing a great job to make sure the transition is smooth as kids can be apprehensive given (past) brand loyalty to the Swoosh. They've done

a lot just to come in and fit the guys' feet well, to make sure this is the size for you, allowing the guys to do custom colors. I think they're really making an effort to make the program feel special."

SOTU: With more continuity from the returning players, are we going to play any differently this year? Maybe institute the scramble more?

JB: "I know Coach has some things in mind with the change to a little bit shorter of a shot clock (from 35 seconds to 30 seconds). We're in meetings all week, all day before the kids get back. We're definitely going to want to try some things out in workouts and early practice."

We can also expect for the full season schedule to be released by the end of the month. The Hurricanes announced their out-of-conference schedule at the beginning of August, and the ACC announced last week that the team will host two "Big Monday" games. Defending national champion Duke comes to the BankUnited Center on January 28 and ACC regular season champion Virginia visits on February 22. Both games are slated for 7 PM tips and will be broadcast on the "flagship" (ESPN).

Rashad Muhammad transfers to Miami

NBC Sports

Terrence Payne

Aug. 7, 2015

Former San Jose State guard Rashad Muhammad has transferred to Miami, sources confirmed to NBCSports.com on Friday night.

Jeff Goodman of ESPN first reported the news. DePaul and San Francisco were also reportedly in the mix for his services.

Rashad Muhammad is the brother of ex-UCLA Bruin and current Minnesota Timberwolves guard Shabazz Muhammad.

The 6-foot-6 sophomore averaged 13.9 points and 3.3 rebounds per game, scoring in double figures 43 times in 58 games with the Spartans. The sophomore was the bright spot on a 2-28 team that failed to defeat a Division I opponent during the 2014-15 season. Muhammad announced his decision to transfer out of the program on May 23.

Muhammad will have two years of eligibility remaining after sitting out the 2015-16 season, per NCAA transfer rules. Following the 2015-16 campaign, the Hurricanes will need to replace the production of Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez, the team's top two returning scorers. Miami's back court depth took a hit this spring when Manu Lecomte and Deandre Burnett both decided to leave the program.

5 Offseason Questions from the ACC

CBS Sports

Jon Rothstein

July 27, 2015

4. Which ACC team is being disrespected nationally?

Miami. The Hurricanes aren't being overlooked, they're being insulted. Jim Larranaga's team returns seven of its top nine scorers from last year's squad that won 25 games and lost to Stanford in the finals of the NIT. But when people talk about the teams to beat in the ACC next season hardly anyone mentions Miami. That will not be the case here. Other than North Carolina and Virginia, no team in this conference possesses the depth, experience, and overall balance that the Hurricanes do. Miami starts two fifth-year senior guards in Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan as well as a brute force in the middle in Tonye Jekiri (8.6 points, 9.9 rebounds per game in 2014-15). The forgotten piece for this team? Oklahoma State transfer Kamari Murphy. The 6-8 power forward averaged 6.3 points and 6.1 rebounds per game two years ago on a team that advanced to the NCAA Tournament and will likely an immediate starter for the Hurricanes. Many people will probably rank Duke as the ACC's third best team starting next season behind North Carolina and Virginia, but the Blue Devils should not be put ahead of Miami -- at least not yet.

Larrañaga talks summer practice, recruiting & more

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

July 15, 2015

Earlier this week, the Hurricanes basketball team had its first practices of the summer and already, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga is optimistic about how his team will perform.

The Hurricanes are coming off a run to the NIT championship game and the longest season in school history – the first in which they played all the way through March.

Miami returns the bulk of its roster, including leading scorers Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez, and that's just one of the big reasons Larrañaga is excited heading into a new season.

Here's more from our conversation with the veteran coach, who this summer has come up with individual goals for each of his players and is adjusting to a new staff after losing top assistants Michael Huger and Eric Konkol, both of whom took head coaching jobs in the off-season.

On how he and his coaching staff are making the most of UM's limited summer practices:

"The very first thing is we established some priorities of how this time is going to be dedicated. We're only allowed two hours a week in working with the players with a basketball. Believe it or not, we're allowed six hours a week of conditioning, which to me doesn't make any sense at all. The guys would much prefer to be working on their shot and ball handling than they would be spending time conditioning and running. So our focus is on the skill development and on working with the individuals on the areas of their games that we think needs specific attention. That primarily means shooting, scoring, how are you going to score the ball, what shots are you going to get, what shots should you be practicing. We have a whole series of drills that we do that work on those things, different drills for the guards, then we do the big guys."

On the impact newcomers Kamari Murphy, an Oklahoma State transfer, and freshman Anthony Lawrence Jr. can make this season:

"Kamari Murphy was with us last year as a practice player and on our scout team. So we had a chance to see his strengths and weaknesses throughout our practices.

We know he's an outstanding defender and a very good rebounder. He's a terrific athlete. If you look at our team from last year, the area that we could have used more help in was defensive rebounding. Tonye [Jekiri] was a great rebounder, but as a team, we were just average or below average in that area as a defensive team ... we were good at times, but we were inconsistently good. I think adding Kamari really adds to what can be a much better defensive effort for our team.

"Anthony Lawrence Jr., it's too early to tell, but he's got the size and skill that will give us some flexibility because he can play multiple positions and from a coaching standpoint ... Last year, there were times early in the season we did not have Davon Reed. For the first half of the season, we did not have Ivan Cruz Uceda, so having a guy like Anthony Lawrence Jr., if that was the case again, and Davon was out with an injury, we have a guy with good size that can take his place. If Ivan Cruz Uceda's situation were to arise with any of our players, okay, Anthony Lawrence can actually play some at the 4 spot because he's 6-foot-7 and he's over 200 pounds. He's very strong. He bench pressed 260 pounds. That's very rare for a freshman. Then you add Ebuka Izundu, and I'm seeing this is a guy very much like Tonye was; he's long, he's tall, and he might be able to do what Tonye did and back up Tonye for a year."

On the continued development of center Tonye Jekiri, who last season emerged as the ACC's top rebounder (9.9 rpg):

"At the beginning of the year, we set his goals pretty high. We wanted him to average a double double, 10 points, 10 rebounds. He was really able to do the rebounds ... the scoring wasn't always in double figures, but his percentages were improved. He shot 73 percent from the foul line, he scored better around the basket and his game is getting better. Again, we expect him to average a double double, but we'll set the goal for 12 points a game, we think he's very capable of doing that."

On how the 2013 ACC title and this year's NIT run have helped Miami on the recruiting trail:

"There are a lot of things that can help you or hurt you in recruiting. Some of the things that help you are being successful on the court and getting the TV exposure

and recognition for your program on television. Just about every one of our games was on TV. I thought we got great coverage and it was great for our brand to get that kind of TV exposure. Winning the ESPN tournament at the College of Charleston, playing on their network three straight games, that really, really helped. We have a lot of scholarships available for next year and we're bringing in a very strong recruiting class. We're involved with some talented players, but one thing we know is that every kid we're recruiting that we really, really like, so do all the other top 25 programs in the country. So we're competing against the very best teams in the ACC, SEC, Big 10, Big East."

On the adjustments to his coaching staff after the departure of longtime assistants Michael Huger and Eric Konkol:

"I always describe it as we have three new members of the staff. The first is Jamal Brunt, who took Michael Huger's place. He's hit the ground running. He's a 10-year veteran, he's got a lot of recruiting experience, he's a very bright guy and he really knows the game well. I think he's going to be an outstanding assistant coach and in a very short period of time, a very outstanding head coach. Adam Fisher moved from basketball operations to Eric Konkol's position as an assistant coach ... after watching him in the role of Director of Basketball Operations for two years, the impact he had working with me side by side gave me the confidence he's going to be a terrific assistant. ... We hired James Johnson, who was a former assistant of mine at George Mason, who I have the utmost confidence in. He's got tremendous experience not just as an assistant, but as a head coach, so I can rely very, very heavily on him mentoring Adam, showing him the ropes of how to get things done, but also to help me coach the team in terms of not just practicing, not on the floor coaching, but in organization. If I'm on the road ... I have a guy with head coaching experience here. He can keep the program functioning at a very high level when I'm gone. And then the big key is Chris Caputo has been elevated to associate head coach. He's been with me for 14 years. He's done a tremendous job. I think at some point, a very smart athletic director is going to hire him away from us as a head coach."

Larrañaga expects more consistent 'Canes this season

Sun Sentinel
Christy Cabrera Chirinos
July 14, 2015

men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga expects more consistency this season

During their run to the NIT championship game, the Hurricanes played some great – and maddening – basketball. But with a more experienced roster returning, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga expects much more consistency.

Jim Larrañaga, Hurricanes basketball, UM basketball

A year ago, things were plenty unsettled for Hurricanes basketball coach Jim Larrañaga and his program.

Though there were reasons to be excited, especially with transfer guards Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan ready to play their first games in Miami uniforms, there was uncertainty too, with the Hurricanes' roster featuring nine new players.

Things are a little different this summer, with Miami returning the bulk of a roster that made a run to the championship game of the National Invitation Tournament this past spring. It marked the first time in school history the Hurricanes had a season run all the way through March. Now, with Miami having started its offseason workouts, Larrañaga feels optimistic about the now-experienced Hurricanes moving past some of last season's inconsistent play to challenge some of the powerhouse programs in the ACC.

"It wasn't like last year we didn't expect to make the NCAA Tournament. We did. But we knew we had a lot of major hurdles to overcome," Larrañaga said on Tuesday, after the Hurricanes' second practice of

the summer. "This year, the guys have played together and have played against everybody in the league ... now, we're an experienced team. We've got veteran players at every position. We know what we're capable of doing. Let's get the job done."

To that end, Larrañaga has set individual goals for each of his players throughout summer workouts. But before focusing on those, the coach says his team had to worry about getting healthy.

At season's end, several players – including both McClellan and Rodriguez, Miami's leading scorers who each averaged more than 11.9 points per game – were nursing nagging injuries. Rodriguez missed time late while dealing with a wrist injury that Larrañaga says has improved, but McClellan is still dealing with a groin issue that has limited him in some summer workouts. Center Tonye Jekiri had to recover from a concussion, and guard Ja'Quan Newton dealt with a torn ligament in his hand. That meant a little bit of extra time off for the Hurricanes, though Larrañaga says everyone aside except for McClellan recovered in time for summer.

"The very first thing is we established some priorities of how this limited time is going to be dedicated," Larrañaga said. "Our focus is on the skill development, on working with the individuals on the areas of their games that we think need specific attention. ... I'm happy. Their effort and their attention to detail has been very, very good these two days."

Along with returning the core of McClellan, Rodriguez, Jekiri, Davon Reed and Ivan Cruz Uceda, the Hurricanes will have Newton, James Palmer and Omar Sherman coming off the bench. They'll add Oklahoma State transfer Kamari Murphy, now eligible play after sitting out a year,

and incoming freshmen Anthony Lawrence Jr. and Ebuka Izundu, who Larrañaga says can all make an impact early.

Murphy, who had 199 rebounds as a sophomore with the Cowboys, is expected to give Miami a boost defensively, while Lawrence has the versatility to play several spots on the floor.

Those were things the upstart Hurricanes needed last season while inconsistent play had them picking up big wins at Florida, Duke and Syracuse, but dropping games to Georgia Tech, Green Bay and Eastern Kentucky before finishing with a 25-13 record.

"When you have so many new players, you're going to have times when you're inconsistent," Larrañaga said. "We'll be much better at that this year. We'll be much more consistent."

Summer check-in, Part II: Larranaga on 2015-16 team

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

July 10, 2015

Continuing our summer check-in with Hurricanes men's basketball. Click here for Part I, in which coach Jim Larranaga discussed recruiting and roster makeup.

Now, for a little something about the players currently on the team ...

High hopes for Tonye Jekiri. UM's senior center is OK after missing some early offseason conditioning work following tonsil surgery (I'm told that when you have tonsil surgery as an adult, rather than as a child, it takes a lot out of you). In four years, Jekiri, 20, has gone from basketball newbie in Nigeria to one of the top centers in his class. It's easy to imagine Miami beating Stanford in the NIT final last year had Jekiri not missed the game with a concussion.

"I think he could be the best center in the league," said Larranaga of Jekiri, who averaged 8.6 points and an ACC-best 9.9 rebounds per game. "I think he could lead centers in rebounding and scoring. If he would trust himself a little bit more, if he would have the same kind of confidence that I have in him, he would average a double-double and be well into double-figures, 12, 13, 14 points a game."

McClellan's ceiling: Miami does a practice drill called the "The Kevin Durant," in which players spend three minutes moving around the court taking 2s and 3s. Players take a 15-footer from the right corner, then a 15-footer from the right wing, then back to the corner, then to the wing. They do that for 30 seconds, then step back beyond the arc, right corner, right wing, for the next 30 seconds. Next: the same thing from the elbows, then the top of the key, then the left side. The goal is to score 100 points. Not all players get there. Many don't get close.

This summer, Sheldon McClellan set the program record – 134 points in three minutes – and topped it with 138 this week. The best Larranaga has heard of: former Charlotte Hornets guard Troy Daniels, who put up 152 while at Boston College. Few at UM would be surprised if McClellan beat that mark before he's done at UM. It's not just his shooting they like. McClellan, who averaged a team-high 14.5 points last year as a junior, upped his aggressiveness in the second half and was a major factor in the Hurricanes' NIT run despite battling a groin injury. After the school year ended, McClellan went home to Houston for an extended period to rest and refocus.

If the Canes get more of the McClellan that put up 16 points and 11 rebounds in the NIT semifinal

win over Temple, they'll be in good shape.

"He's on an escalator, and he keeps going up and up and up," Larranaga said. "It's steady. We have no idea what floor he can get to. His ceiling is so high."

Could he be an NBA draft pick?

"I can't project at this point," Larranaga said. "I will say this: if he, and our team, play up to our capabilities, I can see him being an NBA draft choice and potentially a first-rounder." But that's if McClellan is at his best against UM's marquee opponents – and the rest of the teams on the schedule.

Getting in shape: In their first seasons of ACC play, freshman Omar Sherman and junior college transfer Ivan Cruz Uceda were limited by their conditioning. Both forwards, Larranaga said, are making "baby steps," but continue to make steady progress. At a practice I watched last month, Sherman and Uceda were running the floor better than last year.

Another area Uceda needs to improve: his defensive awareness, and understanding of defensive concepts. "Still an area of concern," Larranaga said, though he noted that's not something UM will address until full-team practices begin in the September. Summer's about conditioning and skill work.

Making a point: Angel Rodriguez suffered a major scoring slump last year, but Larranaga isn't concerned about his senior point guard's shooting ability. He feels that's not what caused the slump.

When Rodriguez' teammates weren't scoring consistently last year, he put pressure on himself to make shots. When he was hitting everything and his confidence was high – as it was against Florida – that worked. When he wasn't, his game and the Hurricanes' game suffered. In a chat at practice last month, Rodriguez acknowledged this. He said he wants to be a better leader, and that means trusting his teammates.

"Angel is an outstanding shooter," Larranaga said. "What he needs is for his teammates to play well, and for him to show great confidence in them. There's a balance that has to be there. ... He needs to have confidence in teammates, and patience to know that even if they miss a few, we'll get it next time."

Does Larranaga believe Rodriguez can take that step?

"Oh yeah," Larranaga said. "Yeah. I think [last] year really helped him."

Speaking of shooting: In limited time as a freshman, guard Ja'Quan Newton showed he can drive to the hoop and score (4.0 points in 13.5 minutes). But since he rarely took threes (4-for-10 on the season), opponents had a relatively simple game plan against

him. As such, outside shooting is his summer focus. "Not to the point where it's consistent enough, but he's clearly improved in several areas of shooting," Larranaga said. "His arc is better, his footwork is better, his preparation is better. He'll be a much-improved three-point shooter this year."

Palmer's development: Sophomore guard James Palmer, who turns 19 on July 31, was one of the youngest players in the ACC last year. He showed flashes of potential all over the court. This summer, Larranaga is getting specific with him: "Needs to be more aggressive offensively, and needs to dramatically improve his defensive rebounding," Larranaga said. "He's big, he's strong, he jumps really well, he's got long arms. He should be a good rebounder."

What can Murphy bring? I watched Kamari Murphy at a practice last month and came away thinking he can really help UM. He's fluid, covers a lot of ground quickly and can guard multiple positions. At 6-8, he is also perhaps the best leaper on the team. Larranaga's assessment: "As a defender, as a rebounder, as a run-and-jump athlete, running the court and scoring in transition, his ability to guard ball screens and switch onto smaller players, those will be assets for us."

The former Oklahoma State forward, who sat out last year after transferring, needs to improve his shooting. But a large, athletic four-man is a player UM would have loved to have had last year. Since he's a redshirt junior, they'll get him this year and next year. He and junior guard Davon Reed will be the elder statesmen next year.

Will the freshmen contribute? Unless someone arrives late, UM's freshman class consists of center Ebuka Izundu (6-10, 210) and guard/forward Anthony Lawrence Jr. (6-7, 185). Larranaga said he won't really know what they can bring until November, when he's tried them at multiple positions. Like Jekiri four years ago, Izundu is a project who needs to add size and strength. If he plays this year, it'll likely be at the 4. Lawrence is a face-up player with good handles, Larranaga said, who guarded four positions in high school. It seems he might start at the 3.

Staff roles: Chris Caputo remains Miami's "defensive coordinator," and new hire Jamal Brunt will take over Eric Konkol's role coordinating the offense. Adam Fisher will be the scout team coordinator and help Larranaga coach UM's big men. Larranaga said he's very happy with how the crew is working together. "I had great confidence in my former coaches and I have great confidence in these guys," he said.

Summer check-in, Part I: Larranaga talks recruiting

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

July 10, 2015

What's Jim Larranaga up to these days? Not relaxing on the beach with a book, that's for sure.

Right now he's in the thick of summer showcase season, which takes him to gyms in Charlotte and Atlanta and North Augusta, S.C., where hundreds of college coaches are permitted to evaluate the nation's top recruits, under the banners of Under Armour, Adidas and Nike, respectively.

He's also thinking about this year's team, which has worked through a couple rounds of summer conditioning and is taking a short break before the next. We're a little ways from Nov. 19 – when he and the Hurricanes will be in Puerto Rico for a tip-off tournament along with Butler, Minnesota, Mississippi State, Missouri State, Temple, Texas Tech and Utah – so much is still unknown. Unlike last year, when all but three players in the lineup were new, this fresh set of unknowns is slightly less challenging. All but three players from last year returns this fall.

Between Larranaga's recruiting calls and staff meetings Wednesday, he chatted about some areas of (my) interest.

In Part I, we'll talk recruiting. In a much longer Part II, coming Friday, we'll discuss players already on the roster.

* * * *

Recruiting: NCAA regulations prohibit coaches from publicly discussing unsigned recruits, but Larranaga said generally speaking, UM is looking for the best available players at any position for 2016. There's a lot of room. Guards Sheldon

McClellan and Angel Rodriguez, center Tonye Jekiri and forward Ivan Cruz Uceda will graduate after this season, and UM may not be able to fill its remaining open scholarship for 2015.

"We're going to look for a team," Larranaga said. "A group that fits well together. We need guards and we need bigs. We've got plenty of playing time available."

Every basketball recruiting class has a select group of players that are clearly NBA-bound. Though Miami has certainly not recruited poorly under Larranaga, the Hurricanes have found it tough to compete for those elite-of-the-elite players, against programs like Duke, Kentucky, North Carolina, etc. Can Larranaga get in the game for a top-25 player?

"I cannot predict, nor will I," he said. "Recruiting is bizarre. There's no way for me to forecast what might possibly happen. Things change every single day."

In a previous conversation, Larranaga said he wants to land one or two elite players from Florida every cycle.

While the focus is mainly on 2016 and subsequent classes, Miami has one scholarship left for this fall. That spot, if it is filled, could be taken by an unsigned high school player, a signee who asks out of his letter of intent, upperclassman transfer, or an overseas player. While the market seems dry at the moment, Larranaga pointed to Brooklyn Nets guard Shane Larkin, who signed with DePaul in 2011 and attended summer classes, but asked for a release in August.

His existing relationship with Larranaga, who previously recruited him as George Mason's coach, was one of the reasons he chose Miami. Out of nowhere, the Hurricanes landed a player who led them

to the ACC title two years later.

"You're never out of the recruiting business," Larranaga said. "You're always looking for guys. You never know when a player will materialize."

James Johnson reunites with former boss at Miami

Daily Press
David Teel
June 28, 2015

Constant competition and occasional backstabbing aside, coaches are a tight bunch. So when a fraternity member is out of work, invitations abound: attend games; observe practices; participate in staff meetings.

James Johnson took full advantage of those opportunities after his March 2014 dismissal as Virginia Tech's basketball coach. Out of the business for the first time since his playing days at Ferrum College more than 20 years ago, Johnson visited with colleagues such as Richmond's Chris Mooney, Georgetown's John Thompson III, UNC Wilmington's Kevin Keatts and Maryland's Mark Turgeon.

Courtesy of Michael Hazel, Penn State's director of football operations and a former colleague at Elon, Johnson even spent a week inside the Nittany Lions' football program, just to see how head coach James Franklin runs his organization. During that time with Penn State, Johnson also encountered Florida State coach Jimbo Fisher and Old Dominion's Bobby Wilder.

All the experiences confirmed to Johnson's mind what his heart always knew: He wanted to return to coaching.

As Miami big whistle and Johnson confidant Jim Larranaga said: "I knew he was dying to get back in."

Fittingly, Larranaga made it happen, hiring Johnson, 43, as the Hurricanes' director of basketball operations.

Fittingly because Larranaga and Johnson both are basketball lifers, addicted to the job and game, motivated by their players' best interests. Fittingly because they shared George Mason's ride to the 2006 Final Four, Larranaga as head coach and Johnson as assistant coach.

"It was a good situation for me because, and I've had some opportunities at other places, but this was a good situation for me because one, I know Coach L," Johnson said. "I know how he is, what he likes, what he doesn't like, how he likes to do business. And two, we're going to have a good team. I'm familiar with the players (here) and in the ACC."

Led by guards Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez, the Hurricanes return their top four scorers, and eight of their

top 10, from last season's NIT finalists. That's a luxury Johnson did not have in his two years as Tech's head coach.

Johnson went to Blacksburg in 2007 as an assistant to Seth Greenberg. He had worked at Mason only two years and considered Larranaga a mentor, but the move from the Colonial Athletic Association to the ACC was irresistible, especially with Larranaga's encouragement.

Absent head-coaching experience, and with the Hokies coming off a last-place ACC finish, Johnson was a risky choice to replace Greenberg, whom then-athletic director Jim Weaver turfed in 2012. With Johnson unable to elevate Tech in the standings, and with the school hiring a new athletic director (Whit Babcock) and president (Timothy Sands), Johnson realized what was next.

"I came early to accept what happened," he said of his firing. "One of the things I learned is when you're a head coach ... or a CEO or athletic director, you have to make decisions, and a lot of them are tough decisions. I think Whit made a decision that he thought was best for the basketball program at Virginia Tech and the athletic department at Virginia Tech.

"At the end of the day, I understood. ... I've been in it long enough to know, you have a change in athletic director, a change in president and with the two years we had. We had a good start to the first year but didn't finish strong, and the second year we had some young kids, and we thought (when) they grew up a little bit we'd have a chance. But the decision was made, and I learned to move on."

Out of respect for his successor, Buzz Williams, Johnson said he refrained from contacting Tech players during last season. He texted Will Johnston, Christian Beyer and Joey van Zegeren when they graduated, and reached out to Ben Emelogu, now at Southern Methodist, when Emelogu injured a knee.

Johnson bunked in Northern Virginia during his year away from coaching and already has relocated to Coral Gables, Fla. He remains incurably upbeat, grateful and disciplined — we spoke at 7:30 a.m., by which time he had worked out, showered and was on the job.

"I started coaching when I was 21 years old," Johnson said. "I graduated in May (1993), and I started coaching at my

school, Ferrum College, in August, and I'd coached ever since up until last year. Just being away from the game, not being part of a team, part of a staff, which is a family atmosphere to me. I missed that. And then the competitive part of it, the games, the practices, the game-planning. That was difficult for me."

Johnson and Larranaga spoke frequently during Johnson's time at Tech and year in exile. This offseason, two Miami assistants became head coaches, Eric Konkol at Louisiana Tech and Michael Hugar at Bowling Green, affording Larranaga a chance to help his protégé.

Larranaga hired Jamal Brunt from Richmond and promoted operations director Adam Fisher to fill his two vacancies before tabbing Johnson for Fisher's ops gig.

"J.J. and I have been friends for 10 years," Larranaga said. "He was really the only guy I considered for the position."

Operations directors are not allowed to recruit off-campus or instruct on the court during practice. But Larranaga believes Johnson will be an ideal teacher and example for Fisher, who is new to those roles.

In addition to mentoring Fisher, Johnson will coordinate recruiting visits, assist in game-planning and evaluate practice and game video. All while working for one of college basketball's brightest minds and most effective strategists.

So while Johnson certainly aspires to run another program, he's in no hurry to leave Miami. The Hokies and Hurricanes play twice each season under the current schedule rotation, giving him an annual trip back to Cassell Coliseum.

Coach as long and move as frequently as Johnson, and such reunions are inevitable. But this one will be different. Tech was Johnson's home for seven years, gave him his first head-coaching job and excused him two years later. He counts many friends among Hokie Nation.

"I don't know," Johnson said, "how weird it will be."

Perhaps not so much. Disappointed as Tech faithful were in Johnson's tenure, surely they realize the game needs more men of his character.

James Johnson happy to join Miami staff

The Roanoke Times

Mark Berman

June 24, 2015

James Johnson is returning to college basketball — and to the ACC.

Johnson, who was fired as Virginia Tech's men's basketball coach in March 2014, is the new director of men's basketball operations for Miami. The Ferrum College graduate was out of basketball last season.

"I've coached since I was 21 years old, so I wanted to get back in the gym, be a part of a team," Johnson said in a phone interview Wednesday, one day after his hiring was announced. "I'm blessed to be back in the business."

The move reunites him with Miami coach Jim Larranaga. Johnson was one of Larranaga's assistants at George Mason from 2005-07, helping the Patriots reach the 2006 Final Four.

As director of basketball operations, Johnson will be handling administrative tasks, watching film and practices, participating in meetings and sitting on the bench during games. The role does not permit him to coach in practice or to go on the road to recruit.

Johnson, 43, spent the past year observing practices, games and staff meetings at Maryland, Richmond, Penn State, Georgetown, George Washington and UNC Wilmington.

"I learned a lot," he said.

But it was hard for him to watch games, either on TV or in person.

"It was just tough to watch, knowing that you've been on the sideline for 22 years and then you're not," he said.

Since his dismissal, Johnson divided his time between the Fairfax home he still owned from his years at George Mason and spending time with family in the Richmond area.

Johnson was a Tech assistant for five years before being hired by then-Tech athletic director Jim Weaver to replace Seth Greenberg as coach. Johnson went 22-41 in his two seasons at the helm of the Hokies before being fired by Weaver's successor, Whit Babcock.

"For me to have been a head coach ... I'm very thankful for that opportunity," Johnson said. "[Babcock] came in and he did what he thought was the best thing for the program.

"Down the line, I'd like to have that opportunity again."

Johnson was replaced by Buzz Williams. Two of the freshmen on Williams' team last season — Justin Bibbs, who has made the U.S. under-19 national team, and Jalen Hudson, who had a big game in the ACC Tournament — were Johnson signees.

"When they were recruited to Virginia Tech, we knew they were talented," Johnson said. "Buzz has done a great job with those guys."

Eight of Johnson's former players have exited the Tech program since Williams was hired.

"That's the nature of the business," Johnson said. "Buzz, he's got a ... style of play and he has a certain type of kid that he wanted to get in and that's just how it goes."

James Johnson named Miami director of basketball operations

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

June 23, 2015

James Johnson's last game as a head coach was against the Hurricanes. His return to basketball will be with the Hurricanes.

UM coach Jim Larranaga hired Johnson, formerly of Virginia Tech, as his director of basketball operations, giving his young staff of assistants an experienced mentor.

"JJ and I have been good friends for 10 years," Larranaga said in a press release, adding that he has "always respected his knowledge, work ethic and genuineness."

Johnson, 43, was on Larranaga's George Mason staff from 2004-06 and left the Patriots after their Final Four run 2006. He was an assistant for five years at Virginia Tech and before being promoted to head coach.

His run in Blacksburg was short-lived. Johnson went 22-41 in two seasons — 6-32 against league opponents — before he was fired. His last game as a head coach was March 12, 2014 in the first round of the ACC tournament. Miami beat the Hokies 57-53.

"I don't know in the history of the ACC if there's ever been a coach who was given two years to prove himself," Larranaga said recently of Johnson. According to one report, there hadn't been one in 40 years.

"It would be one thing if the cupboard was full," Larranaga added.

After he was promoted to replace Seth Greenberg as coach, Johnson lost two centerpieces of his future with the Hokies. Freshman Dorian Finney-Smith transferred to Florida and signee Montrezl Harrell

flipped to Louisville. Both were key players for championship-caliber programs and likely have NBA futures.

Johnson, who played at Ferrum College in Virginia, takes over for Adam Fisher, whom Larranaga made a first-time assistant coach at age 31. UM also hired former Richmond assistant Jamal Brunt, 34 this offseason. Larranaga, who had largely the same staff for the last decade, lost longtime assistants Michael Huger and Eric Konkol this spring. Chris Caputo, 35, is the only returning assistant.

State of the U Catches Up with Coach L

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
June 18, 2015

In the four years since Jim Larranaga took over the program, the Hurricanes have won an ACC Regular Season & Tournament Title, appeared in the Sweet 16, made an NIT final appearance, been consistently competitive in the power house ACC, and probably should have appeared in two more big dances.

Heading toward 2015-16, Coach L and the 'Canes have a talent laden roster.

How successful can this team be next year? Who are the key performers?

For all that and more we sat down with Miami's very enthusiastic and successful skipper.

SOTU: Coach, you have an activity you did once with George Mason in 2004, and once last year with UM, where you have players release butterflies. Can you tell us a little more about that, and what it symbolizes?

Coach L: Well we try a lot of different motivational techniques. We try different ones each year. The idea of the butterflies actually came from my brother, Bob. In a conversation more than 10 years ago he was telling me that at weddings they release butterflies. I asked him what the significance was and he said the old Native American Indian theory was that butterflies when released fly together to a particular destination. And the butterflies were a sign of good fortune and that when people got married they were traveling together to a set destination. And hopefully they would enjoy good fortune and success on their journey. When he told me the story I researched it. I found out what it was all about, and we did it one time at George Mason and the players loved it. And we did it last season as well here at Miami, where we had a lot of new guys, and we wanted them to bond. The reason we did it was to tell them that they were on a journey together, and we wanted them to have a good time together.

SOTU: Can you please talk about some of the staff changes that the program has undergone this offseason? Can you talk about who you've lost, what it means, and who is replacing them?

Coach L: Well first of all, what we tell our players and coaches all the time is, my job as the Head Coach at the University of Miami is to help my assistant coaches and to help my players achieve their goals. And their job is to help me and our program achieve our goals. And one of the goals of every assistant is to become head coach one day. Michael Huger who was one of my former players, and an assistant with me for many years, was given a chance to go back to his alma mater Bowling Green. He was thrilled and it is a great opportunity. A month later Coach Erik Konkol who had been with me for 11 years, got the Head Coaching job at Louisiana Tech. Louisiana Tech is a program that has been at the top of Conference USA for a number of years. So those opportunities do not come along very often. What we did was we elevated Coach Chris Caputo, who has been with me 14 years, to associate Head Coach. That gives him a little more responsibility. We also hired Jamal Brunt, who was an assistant coach at the University of Richmond, to replace Coach Huger. Jamal is someone who did a fantastic job at Richmond and is someone I have gotten to know over the past 7-10 years, and I think he is going to be a great addition and a great role model for our young players. We then elevated Adam Fisher, who had been our director of basketball operations, to take Coach Konkol's position. Adam did a great job in the Ops spot, and now is getting a chance to help us full time in recruiting and on the court coaching for the first time in his career. He was replaced in the Ops spot by James Johnson, who was a former assistant of mine at George Mason, and also the Head Coach at Virginia Tech for two years. He brings wealth of experience to our program.

SOTU: Angel Rodriguez did some incredible things in his first year in Miami, but was also up and down. What do you think Angel needs to do this coming season to help the program?

Coach L: Angel impacts the game in so many ways. He is a terrific leader on and off the court. He's an

outstanding shooter when he is on, and has the capability of scoring in the 20's. Angel also can shoot the ball from long range, has great moves to the basket, and can find the open man very well. He's a great on the ball defender as well. His only issues this past season were two things. One he was a little inconsistent at the times where I thought he was trying to do too much, and two he got hurt toward the end of the season when he injured his wrist against FSU. If he did not sustain the injury, our season might have ended up even better. I think what he needs to be is just focused. I think again that sometimes he put so much pressure on himself that at times he did not make the same decisions as when he was really sharp. Players don't play the same way every time out. If you watched the NBA Finals you saw a guy like Timothy Mozgov went for 28 one night and only played 9 minutes the next. Even Steph Curry went like 4-16 in game 2 and then in game 5 goes for 37 points. Players don't always play the exact same way. What we need is for our players to play a little more consistently. And that's what we need Angel to do, make consistently good decisions.

SOTU: Tell me about Davon Reed. By season's end he seemed way more aggressive. What can we expect from him this coming season?

Coach L: I think Davon has an outstanding sophomore season. And the incredible thing about it he injured his knee in September and the Doctor said he would miss 4-5 months. He was able to come back in December, and he was a little rusty. It took him maybe 4 weeks to shed the rust, but he had a heck of an ACC campaign and he just keeps getting better.

SOTU: Can you talk about Oklahoma State transfer Kamari Murphy, who after a year with the team practicing will be eligible this year?

Coach L: Kamari is very athletic. He's about 6'8 and can run the floor extremely well, and can jump extremely well. He's a very good rebounder at both ends of the court. He has the potential to be an outstanding defender, and he's going to add a lot of athleticism to our front court.

SOTU: How about incoming freshman Anthony Lawrence Jr.?

Coach L: Anthony goes by the name "Little Amp" or just "Amp." He is a very versatile player. His dad, who played for the University of Miami, was also his high school coach. His dad is about 6'9 and Amp is about 6'6 or 6'7 and about 200 pounds, but he may grow a little more. We're not sure exactly what position he's going to play. He might be a three, he might be a four. But he handles the ball very well, so eventually he might end up in our back court. He played point guard in high school. I don't think he will play PG for us initially because a lot of times when you play point you match-up with point guards on defense. He'll handle the ball a lot because of his skills, but he'll likely guard the 3 position on defense.

SOTU: What can we expect from sophomores to be JaQuan Newton, Omar Sherman, and James Palmer?

Coach L: I think JaQuan Newton took a major step forward during his freshman year. We do want him to become a better three point shooter though, and he is working on that during the off season. James Palmer is a very versatile player, and a very smart player. He can shoot, handle, and pass, but we need him to be a better and more focused defender. Omar Sherman can really shoot the three and has a nice post up game. A guy of his size at 6'8 260 pounds, really needs to focus on rebounding and defense though. If Omar can become better at defending, especially the ball screens, and rebounding his position he could have a tremendous sophomore campaign.

SOTU: Flat out, is Tonye Jekiri the most underrated player not only in the ACC but maybe the country?

Coach L: Tonye has improved dramatically over the course of his career here. And hopefully he will take another major step forward this coming year. He is going to be a senior and he led the conference in rebounding last season. We are trying to get him to become more of an offensive threat. He has a very nice shooting touch, and he has gained more and more confidence in that. Now he has to find ways to free himself inside to make

more shots. If he does that he should have a sensational senior campaign, and average a double-double.

SOTU: How important will it be to have Tonye around for incoming big man Ebuka Izundu's first year in the program?

Coach L: Ebuka will make a very nice transition primarily because Tonye's a great role model and they will get along well, and he will learn a lot from Tonye. But he will also have guys like Kamari Murphy, to show him some things defensively, and Omar Sherman who can help him with his shot especially given they are both left-handed. He's going to have very good role models to work with.

SOTU: Sheldon McClellan have a fantastic first year in Coral Gables. Can we expect even more from him this coming season?

Coach L: I am going to expect more from Sheldon. He got very, very good by the end of the year just by believing in himself. The coaches always had tremendous confidence in him. He is a great athlete, incredibly skilled, and a wonderful young man. We just need him to be as aggressive as possible. There were games where he wasn't quite as aggressive as we'd like last year. He's at his best when he is attacking and looking to score in double figures.

SOTU: Coach, what do you think the identity of this team will be in terms of style of play?

Coach L: We are going to want to run more than we have at any point in our first four seasons, primarily because our team is built that way. But also with the shot clock now at 30 seconds, it will dictate a faster game for us naturally. We are going to have a quicker front court. When you add guys like Kamari, Ebuka, and Amp, you add three very good athletes to the program. They can all run and they can all jump. We expect to be better defensively. Defense was an area of weakness last year. We were in the top 75 teams defensively, but to accomplish our goals we need to be in the top 25 defensively.

SOTU: How satisfying was it to watch Duke cut down the nets? Did it prove that Miami should have been in the NCAA Tournament given that UM defeated Duke at Cameron?

Coach L: Well I definitely think we deserved to be part of the field. I was very impressed by the job Coach Mike Krzyzewski did, because when we played them I think we exposed some things that they needed to adjust to improve as a team. And Coach K made those adjustments. His team dramatically improved, and he was playing with 4 freshman, who were key to their run. The way they played offensively and defensively in March and April was very, very impressive.

SOTU: What is the focus for recruiting this coming year given the program will lose Angel, Sheldon, Tonye, and Ivan Cruz Uceda as well?

Coach L: Well recruiting is like breathing, you have to do it everyday and you have to do it a lot. So my coaching staff has been very busy. But we've gotten great response from the young men that we've talked to. They seem to have a great deal of interest in the University of Miami. We won't really know anything before September. I know a lot of teams in the ACC are getting commitments now, but we do not anticipate anything like that. But we do think we are in good enough shape we should get some in September.

SOTU: Last but certainly not least, how important it is in this coming year with the team looking to have everything in place for a big year, for the fans to come out and fill the Bank United Center consistently?

Coach L: I think the Bank United Center is a fantastic home court, when the arena is packed. When our pep band is playing, and the student section is waiting on line to get to best seats, it's incredible. Every time we have sold out the BUC, our team has responded and had a great performance. So it is very, very important that we get that consistent support. Starting in non conference, we are playing some great opponents, including our game against Florida. We need our students and our community to get behind this team, because we feel like this can be a very special season.

Observations: Miami an ACC Contender?

CBS Sports

Jon Rothstein

June 12, 2015

2. Miami should be viewed as an ACC contender entering next season

It's not an oversight, it's an insult. Other than North Carolina, Miami returns more starters from last season than any ACC team that finished in the top six of the conference standings. Yet when people talk about the top squads in this league heading into next year, you rarely hear the Hurricanes in the conversation. That's a mistake. Jim Larranaga's squad doesn't just have the majority of its nucleus back from a 25-win season, it adds a legitimate starter at power forward in Oklahoma State transfer Kamari Murphy. Another thing about Miami? It's an old team. Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan are two returning perimeter starters who will be fifth-year seniors and both have been through the gamut. Meanwhile Murphy and Tonye Jekiri are the team's two projected starters in the front court and both are in their fourth year of college basketball. If you're not going to be able to recruit like Duke, Louisville and North Carolina, you better be experienced and savvy. That's the exact model Larranaga has used in Coral Gables. Anything other than projecting the Hurricanes as a Top-25 team and a legitimate contender at the top of the ACC isn't accurate.

Former Coach Bill Foster, Dies at 79

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

May 27, 2015

Bill Foster, whom the Hurricanes chose to lead their basketball revival in the mid-1980s, died Wednesday, UM confirmed. He was 79 and had been battling Parkinson's disease, according to a report.

In 1984, Athletic Director Sam Jankovich tabbed Foster to take over a program that had been dormant for 14 seasons. At the time, Foster, a native of Palatka, was 47 and had spent the previous nine years at Clemson, reaching the Elite Eight in 1979-80.

Given a year to prepare, Foster built his program from a converted storage closet in UM's sports information department. His team practiced on outdoor courts used by the rest of the student body. He referred to his team as the "F-Troop," in reference to the short-lived 1960s sitcom about a rag-tag band of soldiers.

Foster spent five seasons in Coral Gables, as players such as Tito Horford, Eric Brown and Dennis Burns played in the Knight Center and later, the Miami Arena. In Foster's tenure UM scored its first win over a top 20 program, beating defending national champion Kansas in Jan. 1989, and raised its profile enough to earn an invitation to the Big East.

After posting two winning seasons and a 78-71 overall record — including a 19-12 mark in 1988-89 — Foster left UM for Virginia Tech in 1990. He coached the Hokies to an NIT title in 1994-95 and the following season reached the NCAA tournament for the second time. He retired in 1997.

In a 30-year career as a head coach, Foster, who is credited with establishing

basketball at Shorter and guiding Charlotte during its first years as a Division I program, went 523-324.

Among the notable players Foster recruited: Cedric "Cornbread" Maxwell at Charlotte, and Larry Nance, Horace Grant and Harvey Grant at Clemson. His first UM recruit was Tim Harvey, a 6-foot-10, 240-pound center who transferred after two years at Georgia Tech.

UM coach Jim Larranaga, who first crossed paths with Foster while Larranaga was a Virginia assistant, said he hadn't spoken to Foster in several years but remembered him as a fine coach and "a great guy." One of Foster's first hires at UM was Seth Greenberg, who was a Virginia assistant alongside Larranaga.

UM names Adam Fisher assistant basketball coach

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

May 21, 2015

UM coach Jim Larranaga chose to elevate Adam Fisher to assistant coach, he told the Post on Tuesday afternoon.

Fisher, Larranaga's director of basketball operations for the last two seasons, will replace Eric Konkol, who spent 11 seasons under Larranaga at George Mason and UM before taking the Louisiana Tech head coaching job Monday.

Larranaga said former assistant Michael Huger, who recently left UM for the head coaching job at Bowling Green, had his eyes on snatching Fisher.

"That confirmed in my mind how the other coaches on my staff felt about him," Larranaga said. "He's done a great job in the role that he's had. He's a tireless worker. He gets along well with everybody. He's made a lot of friends since coming here. Even my fantasy campers rave about him. So, when Michael reached out to him, I did not want to lose him."

Fisher, 31, does not have coaching experience, but Larranaga praised his ability to motivate, communicate and teach the game during summer camps. Fisher, in his previous role, was not allowed to coach, but performed administrative duties and sat in on meetings.

Fisher, new hire Jamal Brunt, 34, and holdover Chris Caputo, 35, comprise one of the youngest staffs in the ACC, if not all of Division 1. But Larranaga, who was the youngest Div. 1 assistant coach when Davidson hired him in 1971, and got his first ACC job at Virginia at 29, has no qualms about that.

"The guys I've hired over the years, both

Div. 1 and Div. 3 players, I haven't found there to be a difference in their ability to do the job that I've hired them to do," he said.

"I'm looking more at the person. Is this guy the kind of role model I'm looking for, for our players? Is the kind of mentor and teacher who can help them develop?"

"You don't have to be a great player to be a great coach. Just ask Gregg Popovich."

Fisher, a native of Jamison, Pa., is a Penn State grad (class of 2006) who returned for two seasons as a video coordinator (2011) and director of player development (2012). Before that, he spent two years at Villanova as a graduate manager (2007-09), working on his master's in education leadership degree. He was also an assistant recruiting coordinator during that time.

Larrañaga loses two assistants; Meier hires two

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
May 18, 2015

University of Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga will begin the 2015-16 season without two of his three longtime assistants by his side.

On Monday, Eric Konkol was named coach at Louisiana Tech, replacing Michael White, who went to the University of Florida to fill the vacancy left by Billy Donovan's departure. Last month, Michael Huger was hired away from UM as coach at his alma mater, Bowling Green. Larrañaga's lone remaining assistant from his George Mason staff is Chris Caputo.

"Eric Konkol is one of the brightest young coaches in the college game," said Larrañaga. "His intelligence, energy, enthusiasm and commitment to academics are at the highest level. His knowledge of the game, his ability to recruit outstanding student athletes, and his ability to communicate with those players will make him highly successful as a head coach.

"The players at Louisiana Tech are going to love this guy, just like our Miami players did."

Konkol had been with Larrañaga the past 11 years — four at UM and seven at George Mason.

"Eric has a national reputation as a great recruiter, a rising star and a coach with a highly intelligent basketball mind," Louisiana Tech athletic director Tommy McClelland said.

Huger spent eight seasons on Larrañaga's staff.

"He's an outstanding X-and-O man, a terrific recruiter and a real family man,"

Larrañaga said. "He will bring Bowling Green to new heights."

Meanwhile, 6-10 center Ebuka Izundu of Charlotte, North Carolina, signed a letter of intent to play at UM. He averaged 21 points, 15 rebounds and six blocks for Victory Christian Center School. He originally committed to Charlotte but got a release. He chose UM over Arkansas and Cincinnati.

"Ebuka Izundu is a young man from Nigeria who is fairly new to the game of basketball," Larrañaga said. "Like Tonye Jekiri coming out of high school, he is 6-10, 205 pounds and has the potential to develop into an outstanding frontcourt player."

There have also been changes on the women's basketball staff. Coach Katie Meier hired two new assistants — Fitzroy Anthony from FAU and 19-year veteran Tia Jackson from Rutgers.

Anthony, a former AAU and Coral Springs Charter School coach, is well-connected in recruiting circles.

"I am extremely humbled, working for the University of Miami has always been a dream for me, being a South Florida guy," said Anthony, who moved to Boca Raton at age 12 from Antigua.

"Fitz is a rising star in this profession. He works hard, is extremely loyal and has a passion for the game that is unmatched," Meier said. "His energy and work ethic will make an immediate impact on this program. ... Fitz will help us make huge strides in recruiting, as he has worked his way up the ranks in Florida via both the high school and AAU levels.

"Most importantly, Fitz has always wanted to be a Miami Hurricane."

Jackson, a former Rutgers player, spent four years as head coach at Washington. She replaces Darrick Gibbs, who left to become coach at North Florida.

"Tia is an incredibly significant hire for me personally and for this program," Meier said. "We have positioned Miami as one of the nation's elite basketball programs, and hiring Tia pushes us over the top.

"She's a tremendous recruiter, terrific with her X's and O's, and brings head-coaching experience that will enhance our program."

How long will Larranaga coach the Hurricanes?

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

May 12, 2015

The question isn't a pressing one, because Jim Larranaga is clearly still going strong. Recent evidence of this came at a booster dinner in Orlando last week.

With his booming Bronx-accented voice, Larranaga stole the show. He had a room full of Hurricanes boosters clapping and cheering after giving an impassioned speech about the importance of giving — how money leads to facilities, which leads to recruiting, which leads to winning.

His team made the NIT championship last year, and returns all but three players. Miami has never recruited at a Duke, Kansas or Kentucky level, but Larranaga has held his own — especially given the program's recent NCAA battles.

The question is worth asking, though, since Larranaga, who turns 66 in October, will retire someday. UM Athletic Director Blake James isn't ready to guess when someday will come.

"He's going at 100 percent," James said Tuesday at Amelia Island during the ACC's spring meetings. "If the time comes that he's no longer at 100 percent, that's where I have to have a conversation with him. To me, there's no indication that time's coming any time soon. The energy he has, his success on the court, in the classroom, and in life. The young men he brings into that program, the mentoring and leadership he gives them — he's got plenty of energy."

Entering his fifth year at Miami, Larranaga is 91-49 (.650) with one NCAA tournament appearance and one ACC title, the program's first. He has won 20 games in three of four seasons. One of the things

that got the Orlando boosters cheering: he is 3-2 against Duke, including last year's 16-point win in Durham, the only home loss suffered by the eventual national champion.

Before coming to Miami, Larranaga put George Mason on the national map with a Final Four appearance in 2005-06 and 13 winning seasons in a row.

Only Bruce Hale, who went 220-112 (.663) from 1954-67, has a better winning percentage among UM coaches with more than 100 games. Only Leonard Hamilton (1990-2000) has more NCAA tournament experience; he suffered four losing seasons before making the dance in his final three years at UM.

"It would be impossible for me to guess a year," James said. "I guess what I would say from my side, the evaluation happens when it becomes apparent he's not going 100 percent anymore. Until then, I have 100 percent confidence in everything he's doing."

Getting the Scoop on Freshman to Be Amp Lawrence

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
April 29, 2015

It only takes a few brief looks at 6'7 freshman G/F Amp Lawrence to fall in love with his game.

He can shoot, handle, defend, dunk on 7 footers, and absolutely loves to throw up "The U."

What more could you want in a freshman player? Obviously he has a lot of work to do to be a big time contributor in the ACC, but a strong foundation is already there.

To learn more about Amp's game, we sat down with his Coach and Dad, Anthony Lawrence Sr.

On Amp's game as a whole:

The best description I've ever heard describing Amp's game, is "Swiss Army Knife," because he can basically do it all. He averaged 30 points a game for us, 12 rebounds, and 5 assists this past season and had a fantastic senior year. He is really able to score. He finished his career with over 2,000 points in high school. But more than anything, he really, really enjoys passing the ball. Amp shoots the ball very well, but he was also our point guard this year, as we didn't have another point guard. That tells you a little more about his versatility. He's a really good and intense on the glass. He gets off the floor very well and can block shots easily. Basically he can do anything you need on the floor.

On what Amp needs to work on:

I think like any high school player moving up to the next level, defense is of course is something he needs to work on. All freshman need to work on defense. He also needs to continue to build on the skills he already has and improve all around. Also in high school he could do a

little of everything because of his physical advantages, but at Miami he will have to hone in on one particular skill. We'll have to see what that turns out to be, He can also improve how he shoots the three. But overall, mostly just being more intense. He's on the right path. he has the right mind set. He goes to the gym everyday and shoots and trains and works very hard to improve his all around game.

On why his son chose UM:

Coach L. Right off the bat. Coach Larranaga. Anthony (Amp) was looking around at a lot of schools. It wasn't just Miami. Texas, USC, and Texas A&M as well as Florida were all looking at Amp. But we really got to know Coach Larranaga and the type of person he is. Between that and his coaching style it was a fit. Coach L was the biggest reason, way more than even me being an alumni, that Amp chose Miami. He really likes Coach L.

What can Hurricanes fans expect from Amp next year:

It's hard to say what a freshman coming into a situation like the one at the University of Miami can do, especially with all of the talent they return. He might get off to a quick start or he might struggle. But I think he'll be given a chance to be a part of the rotation. I think he can definitely help on the inside. He's big enough at 6'7 to play a smaller 4. He handles the ball and shoots the ball well enough to play in the back court, but inside might be where he contributes early on.

Additional Notes: I asked Lawrence Sr. about how his game compared to another jack of all trades, Davon Reed, and the elder Lawrence liked the comparison. He felt his son had a long way to go to compare to Reed but physically was similar, even though Amp is actually a touch bigger/thicker than Reed.

How non-tourney ACC teams can bounce back

ESPN

John Gasaway

April 21, 2015

My colleagues at ESPN.com are in the process of looking ahead at what next season may bring in the ACC, and I've decided to pitch in and help out on hat score. That being said, you'll notice I'm seeing this particular glass as half-empty rather than half-full. For now I'll leave it to other observers to fret about what the future will hold for heavyweights like Duke, Virginia or North Carolina. Today I want to look at how the ACC's other half lives, so to speak.

Here are the ACC teams that missed the 2015 NCAA tournament (listed in the order in which they finished in league play). At the risk of being rude, if you're missing the tournament there's a problem -- so for each program I've offered one number that speaks to the main issue that needs to be addressed.

Miami Hurricanes

Problem number: -0.04

I don't want to be too hard after the fact on an inexperienced Miami team that no one expected to do much last season. This is, after all, a group of Hurricanes that beat eventual national champion Duke by 16 at Cameron Indoor Stadium. You won't often see a team go 10-8 in the ACC only to be left out of the NCAA tournament, but the fact that the Canes lost to Eastern Kentucky by 28 in Coral Gables likely had a good deal to do with that particular snub.

Still, to the extent that Jim Larranaga could pinpoint one performance factor behind his team's trip to the NIT, it may have been the fact that in ACC play the opposing teams actually shot better

from the field (posting 50.4 effective FG percentage) than did Miami (50.0). Better defense from Sheldon McClellan, Angel Rodriguez and Tonye Jekiri can erase this shooting differential and put Miami back in the tournament again (last trip: 2013).

Observations: Miami Fine Despite Transfers

CBS Sports

Jon Rothstein

April 16, 2015

2. Miami is beyond fine for next season despite losing two transfers: The Hurricanes lost two players in the past week --- Manu Lecomte and Deandre Burnett --- who were quality pieces in Miami's rotation, but also replaceable ones. The truth is this: the Hurricanes had seven capable perimeter players for three spots this past season and now they have five. This team will have better role allocation next year as a result and should be a Top 20 squad nationally and one that could legitimately compete for a spot in the top third of the ACC. The recent departures at Duke, Louisville, and Notre Dame have opened up the conference after North Carolina. Expect the Hurricanes to take advantage. Jim Larranaga has five quality perimeter pieces in Angel Rodriguez, Ja'Quan Newton, Sheldon McClellan, Davon Reed and James Palmer while Tonye Jekiri, Omar Sherman, and Ivan Cruz Uceda return on the interior. The X-Factor for this group? Oklahoma State transfer Kamari Murphy. The 6-9, 220-pound power forward averaged 6.1 points and 6.3 rebounds two years ago in the Big 12 and immediately fills a void for Miami. The Hurricanes were probably one win short of reaching the NCAA Tournament and wound up finishing in the NIT where it lost to Stanford in the finals. That won't happen a year from now. This squad is poised to reach the field of 68 in 2016.

A Hale of a Coach: Rick Barry about father-in-law Bruce Hale

College Hoops Daily

Jon Teitel

March 8, 2015

Miami will need to score a few more points this week as they try to get off of the bubble and into the tourney. 50 years ago the Hurricanes were an unstoppable offensive machine thanks to Coach Bruce Hale and star scorer Rick Barry. After spending the winter of 1965 leading his team to an NCAA record 98.4 points per game, Barry spent the summer enjoying married life after his wedding to his coach's daughter Pam. Hale played pro basketball before becoming a college coach and later got back into pro basketball as coach of the ABA's Oakland Oaks, but is best known for his 12 straight winning seasons at Miami. Hale passed away in 1980, but CHD's Jon Teitel got to chat with Barry about his relationship with Hale both as a player and as a son-in-law.

Bruce was nicknamed "Slick" due to the way he combed his hair: who gave him the nickname, and how did he like it? I think he got it back in his playing days: his hair was always kind of slicked back.

As coach at Miami he sent you a full scholarship on the advice of scout Buzzy Fox: what did it mean to you to have a coach recruit you without ever having seen you play? I had about 35 scholarship offers but his advantage was that he had nice weather and was as far away from New Jersey as you could get! He was a nice guy who did not pressure me a lot and he played a pro-style game. We lived in on-campus apartments that were fully-equipped. It was a great decision on my part.

In the 1963 NIT Mike McCoy scored 29 points in a 1-point win over St. Francis (NY): how were you able to pull out the win? We were a good team and Mike was

the prototype 7-footer who liked to shoot from long range.

NIT MVP Ray Flynn scored 38 points in a 10-point win by eventual champion Providence: was it just one of those scenarios where every shot he put up seemed to go in because he was "in the zone"? I remember that we made a great comeback. Playing at MSG against a team from the Northeast was like playing 5-on-7 due to the home-court advantage. When I got called for a foul late in the game I lost my cool, threw the ball against the rim, and got called for a T.

In 1965 your team set an NCAA scoring record with 98.4 point per game: how on earth was your team able to be so unstoppable on offense? We played man-to-man defense and were a good rebounding team that pushed the ball. Our starting guards had unbelievable range. John Dampier was the greatest long-distance shooter I ever saw and had pretty good size but he hurt his knee. If we had a 3-PT line back then we would have scored a ridiculous number of points because we could all shoot it from long-range.

After that season you married Hale's daughter Pam: how did your relationship change from coach and player to father-in-law and son-in-law? He was a great man and was like a second father to me. I wish I spent more time learning about his past and what he had experienced. He taught me and prepared me so well to play in the pros, which is how I became All-Pro as a rookie.

You two won an intramural tennis doubles title together: who was the better tennis player? He was better to start with but I got better over time: I never played tennis until coming to college. He was not a big power guy but could hit some nice shots.

He posted 12 consecutive winning seasons from 1956-1967: what made him such a great coach, and what was the most important thing you ever learned from him? He was able to utilize his personnel in the best way possible and the up-tempo style was fun to play. He got in there and taught me how to use my body properly. He was one of the top five pro players himself back in the day.

In 1968 he became coach and GM of the ABA's Oakland Oaks: why did he take the job, and how close did you come to playing for him again? I went over there to go play for him but had to sit out a year, and by the time I was ready to play they had hired Alex Hannum (who had coached me during my rookie year). The game was always fun for me so it was intriguing for me to be reunited with my former coach/father-in-law.

He died of a heart attack in 1980: when people look back on his career, how do you think he should be remembered the most? As the best coach in the history of Miami, without question. He established the program for the university and they are starting to make strides again.



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 Hurricanes

Miami Herald

Greg Cote

Feb. 5, 2013

The University of Miami men's basketball team climbed as high as it ever has Monday — to a No. 8 national ranking in The Associated Press poll — and the man who made that magic ladder appear, Jim Larrañaga, had just heard the news when we spoke.

"It feels great. I'm excited," the coach said. "It represents a major step forward."

I asked Larrañaga if he planned to break the news to his team. He smiled.

"Those guys know everything before I do," he said. "By now someone has texted it, tweeted it, Facebooked it or instant messaged it."

Nothing stays a secret for long anymore, and so these Hurricanes haven't.

Less than a month ago they were off the national grid, and barely making South Florida pay attention. Now they are one of the sweet stories in all of college basketball, rocketing up in the polls from nowhere to 25th to 14th to eighth in three heady weeks.

A signature 90-63 pasting of No. 1 Duke on Jan. 23 in Coral Gables made America take notice. Reggie Johnson's miracle last-second tip-in to win at No. 19 North Carolina State on Saturday made you wonder if this team wasn't charmed.

Football is done now. You ready to pay attention to something besides the Heat?

This is your team. This is the time.

Larrañaga's guys have won nine in a row entering Tuesday night's home game vs. Boston College. They are 17-3. They are 8-0 in the mighty Atlantic Coast Conference — the first ACC team other than Duke or North Carolina to do that since 1981.

The only other time the UM men ranked No. 8 was in March 1960, even before Rick Barry arrived. The Canes have never finished a season ranked higher than 10th.

This year, though, you get the idea anything is possible. You get the feeling March Madness

will very much include this team as a major player.

A couple of weeks ago there was speculation about this being a Sweet 16 team. Then came the stunning whipping of Duke. Then came the top 10. Now if you're talking Sweet 16 you seem to under-selling UM's potential.

Elite Eight, anyone? Final Four, even?

This is Larrañaga's problem at the moment. Well, his challenge, at least. The excitement of possibility nourishing this program is all good, but it also raises the stakes on the coach making sure his players keep their focus.

"Our point of view is to get ready for Boston College," he said Monday. "At any time, circumstances can change. We are not looking two weeks or a month down the road. The only thing [being ranked No. 8] does is fire up your opponent. The whole reason we are enjoying success is that we have prepared one day at a time. We do not get too full of ourselves just because somebody else has decided we're good."

The even keel is easier because five of UM's top six scorers are seniors — Johnson, Durand Scott, Kenny Kadji, Trey McKinney Jones and Julian Gamble — itself unusual (and pleasantly so) in the one-and-done NCAA.

That is also why this season figures to be Miami's best opportunity, although Larrañaga, 63, in his second season here, has earned the faith that he can recruit and win with his own guys, not just with the talent inherited.

This coach took a long time to get to his dream job, but he has arrived at it.

He is best known for coaching mid-major George Mason to the Final Four in 2006, but that was just part of the climb.

"I'm very goal-oriented. I was an assistant in the ACC at Virginia [1979-86], and when I left I wrote down that one of my goals was to become a head coach in the ACC," Larrañaga said. "So when the Miami job opened up I was very interested."

He did his research. He always loved the talent pool in Florida, and he found more than half the teams in the ACC had changed coaches

recently.

"I saw a league going through a transition period," he said. "If we were able to recruit well, we could do some damage in this conference. It seemed like an opportunity to come in and succeed very quickly."

Larrañaga had a very small inner circle of family and friends he consulted about the Miami job: his wife, two adult sons, Celtics coach Doc Rivers and sports psychologist Bob Rotella.

The conduit for Larrañaga coming here was Jose Mas, whom he had met while coaching at a Michael Jordan fantasy camp. Mas, the son of Jorge Mas Canosa, the former Miami business leader and Cuban exile fixture, called Larrañaga and invited him to forward his résumé to UM.

Larrañaga was traveling and had no access to his résumé so, at a son's suggestion, he copy-and-pasted his Wikipedia page and sent it to UM. An interview was set up. His hiring didn't take long thereafter.

(Speaking of Mas Canosa, it happens that Larrañaga is part Cuban. His father's father was Cuban, emigrating to Key West in the early 1900s.)

Larrañaga knew he was coming here to not just coach a team, but to grow a program in a city that hardly is a college hoops hotbed.

"I want everyone in this community to be dying to get a ticket to watch us play," he said. "At Bowling Green and George Mason everybody also told me we couldn't draw, but by the time I left the place was packed every night."

Coaching in the ACC had been Larrañaga's "ultimate goal to really test yourself." Now he is finding out the league isn't too big for him. He's big enough for the league.

I asked him if the satisfaction he feels is different now.

"Don't know yet. We are still in the process of competing," he said. Then he added something that should make Canes fans smile as 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 has 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 nonconference play.

"If we can succeed without Reggie in the nonconference then we should be able to set ourselves up to compete for postseason play out of the ACC," Larrañaga said. "I've never had the ambition to retire. I love coaching. I have the passion to keep doing it and see players develop and mature."

Larrañaga ready to put UM on national map

CaneSport.com

April 22, 2011

Jim Larrañaga was introduced today as the Miami Hurricanes' new men's basketball coach. And he has lofty goals for UM's program.

"I am very excited to be here, there ain't no question about that," Larrañaga said. "(This) offers a tremendous opportunity to compete at the highest level of college basketball. The ACC since the day I arrived at Virginia in 1979 is the best basketball league in the country. And it is our opportunity now as coaches, players and a community to get behind the program and do something very, very special. It's going to take a lot of work, but the reason I came here is because of the people.

"We have a lot of hard work in front of us, but I'm excited to get started."

Larrañaga pointed out how his George Mason team was being ranked in the early top 25 for next year and said, "I would not have left that caliber of team if we didn't feel we had that caliber of talent already here at the U, if we had the capability of challenging the very best teams not only in the ACC but also the entire country. Our challenge is to build a program that can (be successful) over an extended period of time so everyone in this community will be dying to get a ticket, get a seat to watch us play. You may say 'that ain't going to happen here.' I heard it at Bowling Green and George Mason (and fans packed the stands there). We want to create that atmosphere here."

Larrañaga also joked that "It didn't take me long to feel part of the program when Malcolm Grant greeted me as I walked into the office and tried to pronounce my name correctly."

Larrañaga addressed trying to get more students show up for games by saying "My staff and I will be in the dormitories recruiting students. We will work with the faculty.

"We need to reach out to the community of Coral Gables, the people who make up the community. My wife is the social director - I guarantee she will know more people in the community in the next year than some people who have lived here their whole lives.

At 61 years old, Larrañaga was asked why he wants to take this job at this point of his career.

"I'm crazy," he said to laughs, adding, "I love a challenge. I thought about my own career, what goals I wasn't able to accomplish in my 40 years. And one was I'd love to coach in the ACC, take a team to Cameron Indoor Stadium or the Dean Dome. At this time in my life I felt once I talked to Shawn Eichorst and could hear the energy in his voice, to find out things about the other basketball program here, the job that Katie Meier has already done - it showed if the women can do it the men should be able to do it. It's a challenge for me, but something that excites me very much. It's like the last piece in a coaching career to finalize what I hope to be all about. When I first arrived at George Mason I said we wanted to do something very special,

and our run to the Final Four was that moment. But we didn't win the national championship, and quite frankly that irks me. I think being a member of the ACC, with the opportunities to recruit nationally but with a focus locally and regionally, with the talent already on hand, we can be headed in the right direction to challenge the best programs in the conference and the country."

* Larrañaga said that when the UM job opened up he inquired about it through friends that were tied to a Michael Jordan camp "as coaches do - who is going to get the job?" Larrañaga said. "They shared a name with me (who was being looked at), it wasn't me. And then they called me back and said 'Hey, would you be interested.' So I made contact with the University to let them know of my interest."

* Larrañaga addressed the team, which met with him before the press conference and then attended it as he spoke: "The members of the team become our family," Larrañaga said. "We will have the players to my house. My wife will cook for them - you will love her chocolate chip cookies."

- Reggie Johnson wasn't at the press conference - Larrañaga said he remained home in North Carolina.

* Two of Larrañaga's players at George Mason were from Florida, and he made it clear that recruiting Florida is his No. 1 priority.

"We will actively recruit in-state players to try and build our program with a very strong foundation of local recruits," Larrañaga said. "We want to develop the relationship with youth league coaches, high school coaches, AAU coaches."

* Larrañaga addressed leaving George Mason, saying, "The players that I leave behind at George Mason are an incredible group of young men. They just finished the best season in school history in terms of record. I thank those players who made my job so much fun every day. I told those players today that when we met in Fairfax in our locker room that I was going to become the head coach of the U basketball program. Every one of them hugged me and wished me well, and I did the same to them. But this opportunity is very, very special to me. ... I love coaching, helping players be the best that they can be."

* Larrañaga's grandfather on his father's side was from Cuba, and Larrañaga said "I'm very proud of my heritage, of having grown up spending time in Kissimmee and Key West and in the State of Florida, because that's where my father vacationed every year. And now I feel I'm back home at the University of Miami. We're going to put together a fantastic Hurricane team."

* First-year athletic director Shawn Eichorst said of his decision to hire Larrañaga that "I was asked what we were looking for in our next men's basketball coach - we are delighted to say we have found it, and it's Jim Larrañaga. (He) is a fundamentally sound teacher of the game and will positively lead our student-athletes with a tremendous amount of passion, integrity and dedication. Jim is a man of great

character who will be a first-class ambassador for the University of Miami and our basketball program. He has successfully transitioned two other programs at George Mason and Bowling Green. And he is no stranger to the ACC having served as an assistant coach at Virginia - they won three ACC championships and finished in the top five of the AP rankings. Jim is a tremendously gifted speaker and communicator. His players follow his philosophy and play fundamentally sound basketball, take care of the basketball, play fierce defense and are very efficient on the offensive end of the court.

"This is an exciting day for the University of Miami."

* Football coach Al Golden attended today's press conference, giving Larrañaga a hug before it began.

* Of his basketball philosophy, Larrañaga said, "I have two boys - when my wife and I were raising our sons the two things we stressed (were) we wanted them to grow up to be happy and successful. But to accomplish both those goals they had to be great students and use those smarts to advance themselves, enjoy their life. That's the same approach we take as a coaching staff with this team. Basketball is a game, it should be fun. We emphasize attitude, commitment and class. Attitude, we ask our players to have a positive attitude, talk about life being 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react to it. Second we talk about making a total and unconditional commitment to being the best at everything you do, every aspect of your life. The third is class - we want our players to always behave in a first-class manner.

"As far as basketball is concerned, I'm a big believer that defense wins championships. And we are coming here to compete and win. That means we have to be fundamentally sound on the defensive end of the floor. We have to be able to guard the basketball but also help the guy who guards the basketball. Players will hear me and my coaching staff say 'one man guards the basketball and four men help him guard the basketball.' Our choice is to be an up-tempo team. The defense will create the offense. One part of our offensive opportunity is to create fast-break layups and open threes in transitions. That will not change.

"The scramble defense - I'm hoping to implement that to a degree so it can become a weapon and something the opponent has to prepare for. But it will depend on the work ethic of the team, because it forces the players to play at a high level of intensity for a (long) time. It requires a deep bench. My Bowling Green teams scrambled 70, 80 percent of the time. My George Mason teams of recent years have scrambled less because we 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.

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."

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."

Former PDS star Reed overcomes injury to excel at Miami

The Trentonian

Nick Peruffo

April 1, 2015

Back in early September, former Princeton Day School and University of Miami forward Davon Reed thought his season could be over after undergoing surgery on his torn left meniscus.

Seven months later, the Ewing native has not only fully recovered, but has emerged as one of the main catalysts for a Hurricanes team that will meet Stanford in the NIT final Thursday night at Madison Square Garden.

"His work ethic is nothing like I've ever seen before," said coach Jim Larrañaga, after Miami's 60-57 semifinal win over Temple Tuesday night. "He was in that training room with the doctors, with the trainers, with our strength and conditioning coach. The doctors told me in November that it's the fastest they've ever seen anybody recover."

Though the sophomore scored just six points on 3-of-8 shooting against the Owls, he was still able to have a huge impact on the game with seven rebounds, four assists and three blocked shots in a team-high 37 minutes of action. Defensively, he was able to help the Hurricanes overcome the loss of 7-foot center Tonye Jekiri, who left the game with a concussion in the first half, by guarding nearly every position on the floor.

Temple finished the game shooting just 30.2 percent from the field, and 10.5 percent from beyond the 3-point arc.

"My dad (David Reed) always taught me growing up that it's not about how tall you are or how big you are," said Reed, who measures in at 6-foot-6 and 208 pounds. "It's about the size of your fight. It doesn't matter (guarding) one through five. Obviously sometimes you are outmatched, but if you have the heart and the will to do it, you can do it."

Reed had a solid freshman season,

averaging 6.6 points in primarily a bench role, but looked primed to make a major leap in his second year in Coral Gables. His defense in particular earned rave reviews during the Hurricanes' summer trip to Europe.

"Davon had a sensational summer," Larrañaga said. "We took the team to Spain and he was our best perimeter defender, our second-best rebounder. He was shooting the ball extremely well."

Shortly after the team returned home, however, disaster struck.

"It's strange," Reed said, when asked to describe the injury. "I was actually in the training room. My leg was folded and it just locked up on me and I couldn't straighten it. I went to the doctor and they said my meniscus had folded. It was a freak accident, but things like that happen"

The original prognosis was that he'd miss four to six months, making a redshirt year seem likely.

"It's very hard to come back from that," Larrañaga said. "In fact, I told him 'if you are out for three months, it's going to take you three months to get back.' In the back of our minds, we thought, well, if he's not able to do it, we'll just redshirt him."

By the time Reed made his return against Green Bay on Dec. 6 — just three months after surgery — his doctors had declared his left knee was stronger than it had been before the injury.

"We have an excellent training staff at the University of Miami and excellent facilities, so they did a good job of pushing me and I pushed them as well," Reed said. "It has been a blessing in disguise."

Reed moved into the starting lineup Jan. 17 at Notre Dame, and has averaged eight points and four rebounds in 29 games this year. He was recently named a team co-captain along with Jakiri, Sheldon McClellan and the injured Angel Rodriguez.

"He's shot the ball well, he's passed the ball well, he's defended, he's rebounded, he's played multiple positions, and late in

the season I decided that we'd give him even more responsibility," Larrañaga said.

Though the Hurricanes finished the regular season 21-12 with a 16-point win over Duke on their resume, they also had a pair of bad home losses to Green Bay and Eastern Kentucky and were ultimately left out of the NCAA Tournament. Reed acknowledged that the NIT represented a chance for his team to prove the selection committee wrong.

"We were definitely disappointed, but at the end of the day, we left it up to the committee instead of locking up a spot in the Dance because we had those two bad losses at home," Reed said. "We set out a goal at the beginning of the NIT of 'why not win this and show why we belong in the tournament?' I think the team took heed of that, and every game we are coming more and more together."

On a more personal level, reaching the NIT's Final 4 also meant playing at Madison Square Garden, just a short New Jersey Transit ride away from Mercer County.

"I had a lot of family and friends here tonight, so it was great seeing them," Reed said.

Considering what he's already overcome this season, Reed may just give those familiar faces something even bigger to celebrate Thursday night.