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Freshman Reed Discusses Season

InsideTheU

Chris Stock

Feb. 10, 2014

Reed, who has had productive games like when he had a career-high 19 points in a win over Arizona State and 16 points against current No. 1-ranked Syracuse, has also seen his role change as a starter to a reserve.

"There's been some ups and downs, but that's just a part of growing," Reed said. "I'm pretty--I wouldn't say pleased—but I'm feeling pretty good and I'm starting to get more adjusted. I'm only looking up from here."

Reed is averaging 6.8 points and 1.9 rebounds in 23 games, making 10 starts, for the Miami Hurricanes (10-11, 2-7), who will play at Florida State (14-9, 5-6) on Monday night at 7 p.m. on ESPN.

Reed started 10 consecutive games from Nov. 29 to Jan. 8 as the team's point guard before returning to the bench as a reserve.

"Even though I think (playing point guard) helped with his ballhandling a little bit, it really took away from his strength and his strength really is scoring the ball," coach Jim Larranaga said. "He can really shoot. He's got good size, good length, but as a coach you have to do with the players that you have so he was our next-best point guard ballhandler and he did a very good job doing it, but at the expense of his development on the wing. I'm more comfortable with him coming off the bench."

In each of the three games Reed as scored over 15 points in a game, he's followed them up with scoring outputs of 6, 5, and 6. Still he tries to remain positive.

"Well you're competing at the best level so you're not going to have a high-scoring game every night," Reed said. "I'm just trying to mentally adjust as well as physically to the new game. You can't get too down on yourself necessarily. You have to put that game behind you and go look at the tape, see what you can fix, and just get back in the gym to try to work towards the next game."

Having big games has helped Reed's confidence level that he can produce at this level.

"I definitely know and I think people know what I'm capable of," Reed said. "It's just a matter of being comfortable and being able to do that every game potentially. I don't know how soon that will happen, but it should be coming whenever it comes."

Reed has played some point guard this year, which is a new position for him after primarily being a wing player before he got to UM. He hasn't played as much point lately as he did with fellow freshman Manu Lecomte improving.

"It's a very demanding role," Reed said. "Leading your team out there trying to put everybody in the right places and get the plays together. It's a challenge, but like everything I'm learning and trying to grow and you can only going up from here."

Miami has lost five of their last six including five consecutive ACC games.

"I don't think confidence is the thing, just coming together as a team," Reed said. "I don't think we're quite a unit yet. We're just still, I don't want to say individual players on the floor, but we're not connected as well as we should be."

Lecomte revitalized after demotion

Miami Herald
Walter Villa
Feb. 8, 2014

Even though he is a freshman starter for the the University of Miami men's basketball team, Manu Lecomte might not be the team's point guard of the future.

That designation, by reputation at least, belongs to Angel Rodriguez, who is sitting this season out because of NCAA transfer rules. But he started 50 games at Kansas State and made All-Big 12 second team as a sophomore last season.

Still, Lecomte, a 5-11, 160-pounder from Belgium, doesn't seem to mind the prospect of added competition.

"We're going to have a lot of guards next year," Lecomte said, referring to shooting guard Sheldon McClellan, who is sitting out this season after transferring from Texas, and combo guard Deandre Burnett, who is injured but should return next season.

"Angel is a very good player, and he's doing a great job [in practices]. It's a chance for me to get better."

The Canes are hoping that improvement comes quickly because they have lost four consecutive Atlantic Coast Conference games and are 0-5 in league play at home this season.

Miami (11-11, 2-7) can break both streaks with a win Saturday against ACC rival North Carolina State (14-8, 4-5). Tip-off at BankUnited Center is at 2 p.m.

Lecomte, who has started 13 games, is fourth on the team in scoring (8.0), second in assists (5.5) and tied for third in steals (1.3).

His 40 turnovers are second most on the team, but that is not an awful amount of miscues for a freshman point guard playing his first year in the United States and thrust into a starting role in an elite league such as the ACC.

Lecomte, of course, would have been a backup had Shane Larkin not opted to leave early for the NBA. Even so, Lecomte has looked comfortable most of the time.

He is a pass-first point guard — the type teammates like to play with — but Lecomte can shoot. He is deadly on drives, and his 40.9 three-point percentage leads the team. He also makes 77.4 percent at the foul line, second best on the team.

Earlier this week, Canes Coach Jim Larrañaga said Lecomte has played well for the past five games but needs to keep that going.

"Manu is a very conservative young man," Larrañaga said. "He would probably prefer to distribute the ball. But he happens to be one of our best shooters."

Lecomte was benched for nine consecutive games, starting Nov. 29 against Cal State Fullerton. The Canes went instead with 6-6 freshman Davon Reed, a natural wing, and Larrañaga said at the time that the reason for Lecomte's demotion was that more length was needed on defense for Miami's new zone.

To his credit, Lecomte did not sulk. In fact, during his nine games out of the starting lineup, he scored in double figures twice. The last of those came Jan. 8, when he scored 11 points in an upset win at North Carolina.

Lecomte's days on the bench were done after that — for now at least. Larrañaga said the bench has a way of getting players'

attention, and Lecomte didn't disagree.

"He told me to be more aggressive," Lecomte said.

Larrañaga said when Lecomte first arrived on campus he deferred too much to the upperclassmen.

"He found out that's not what I wanted," Larrañaga said. "I wanted him to try more and do more."

Larrañaga also said he found out that Reed's place is on the wing, where he can be a spot-up shooter. He also knew Miami needed more scoring after ranking among the worst teams in college basketball in points per possession.

"We were happy with Davon at point guard initially against nonconference opponents because they didn't pressure him," Larrañaga said.

But that was not the case in league play.

"Manu didn't get any bigger in our zone," Larrañaga said, "but he started to be more productive on offense, and we need anyone who can score to be out on the floor."

Reed continues adjusting to college game

Sun Sentinel
Christy Chirinos
Feb. 7, 2014

In some ways, Davon Reed's first season at Miami seemingly mirrors what the Hurricanes as a whole have experienced in recent months.

Both have had encouraging moments of impressive, solid play. But both have struggled with consistency and disappointing stretches. Now, with just nine games remaining in the regular season including Saturday's showdown against N.C. State (14-8, 4-5) at the BankUnited Center, both Reed and his Miami teammates are hoping they can find ways for the Hurricanes to finish strong and extend the season a little longer.

"There have been some ups and downs," admitted Reed, who is averaging seven points and two rebounds per game. "That's part of growing. I'm pretty...I won't say pleased, but I'm feeling pretty good and I'm starting to get more adjusted. I'm only looking at up from here."

Reed arrived in Coral Gables with plenty of fanfare. Rated the 18th-best shooting guard in the nation by ESPN and Rivals, he was a four-star prospect that Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga felt could make an immediate impact at Miami, especially after the departure of so many players from last year's ACC championship team.

But there have been adjustments. Reed's had to get used to the slower pace Miami's offense has been running this year, along with adapting to the rigors of the college game. And most challenging? The fact that because of Miami's depth issues, Reed's had to play out of position. He started nine games at the point, and while he improved his ball-handling skills, Larrañaga worries

it may have hurt his development at his natural position.

"We expected Shane Larkin to be our point guard and Manu [Lecomte] to back him up and that really would have helped Davon," Larrañaga said. "Then he would have developed very naturally at the wing. He would never have been asked to play the point and even though I think it helped him a little bit with his ball-handling, it really took away from his strength. His strength is scoring the ball. He can shoot, he's got good size, and good length. But as a coach, you have to do with the players you have. He was our next best point guard ball handler, and he did a very good job doing it, but at the expense of his development at the wing."

Still, despite the adjustments, the freshman from Ewing, New Jersey has had his share of memorable games. He had a career-high 19 points when Miami (11-11, 2-7) upset Arizona State in the Wooden Legacy and last month, he had 16 points at the Carrier Dome when the Hurricanes came within four points of upsetting top-ranked Syracuse. Performances like those have Reed encouraged that he'll continue improving, despite the challenges he's faced.

"When you're competing at the best level, you're not going to have a high-scoring game every night," Reed said. "You can't get down on yourself. You just have to put that game behind you, go look at the tape and see what you can fix...I definitely know what I'm capable of. It's just a matter of being comfortable and being able to do that every game, potentially."

Once viewed as high-octane, the ACC is slowing down

Sports Illustrated
Brian Hamilton
Feb. 6, 2014

Pittsburgh and Miami were set for an ACC basketball game on Wednesday night. It would be a meeting of two of the most deliberate teams in the country, under the banner of a league long known for energized play. Before the game, Hurricanes coach Jim Larranaga was asked if either side would score 50 points that evening. After a pause, Larranaga sounded almost wistful at the prospect.

"I hope if someone does," he said, "it's us."

Both teams did cross the mark in a 59-55 win for the Panthers. But they needed overtime to get there. In a game just three days earlier, neither Pittsburgh nor Virginia could cross 50-point line. The landscape of the ACC has muddied this year, as the league features the slowest team in America (Miami, at 58.7 possessions per game) joined by three other programs (Virginia, Syracuse and Clemson) in the bottom 17 of the tempo rankings, all at 62.8 possessions per night or less.

Just two teams, North Carolina and Maryland, reside in the tempo top 100. Some teams can pry themselves out of the holding pattern – Duke dropped 78 points on Syracuse in regulation on Feb. 1, after all – and it's premature to assess if the league will be penalized for slow play. But what was once perceived as a high-octane league now has multiple programs pumping the brakes. For some, it's full speed ahead. For others, it's all systems whoa.

"We've really done a good job of defending teams and getting them out of what they want to do," said Virginia's Mike Tobey, the center for the 335th-fastest team in the nation. "We're a half-court team. When we have the ball on offense, we're going to make you play 35 seconds of defense. And when we're on defense, we're going to make you play 35 seconds of offense. By the end of the game, some teams that aren't used to playing like that are completely exhausted. That's what we try to do. That's our style of play."

No one is budging. But then no one should be shocked, either.

The ACC got what it asked for in at least two cases. Syracuse only had four decades of playing a zone defense under Jim Boeheim before it was welcomed into its new league, and in the Orange's defense, they are unhurried but productive (No. 4 in the country in adjusted offensive efficiency, per kenpom.com). Likewise, Pittsburgh's play under Jamie Dixon is no revelation – the Panthers are 295th in the nation in tempo and a top-15 team in defensive efficiency.

Meanwhile, a defensive-minded, patient approach was practically a birthright for Virginia coach Tony Bennett. And when Larranaga faced a talent dropoff this season and went to a primarily zone defense, it set the tone. That tone just happened to be a dirge.

"It's whatever a coach feels comfortable with," said North Carolina coach Roy Williams, whose club is the lone ACC representative in the tempo top 20. "I want to play a lot faster than we're playing right now, it frustrates me that I can't get us playing faster, yet the other team has a great deal to say about that. When they want to spend more time with shot clock, it does make it difficult. If it's better players, higher-caliber teams, it's harder to get them out of their pace."

League coaches offered two theories on the more measured pace. The first: If teams commit to playing zone defense, it means an offense must burn more clock mounting an attack. And the better the zone – like, say, Syracuse's – the longer it takes. And the longer it takes, the fewer possessions a game will feature. "You have to spend a lot of time to find a good shot against them," Larranaga said of Boeheim's league-leading Orange.

The second theory is also about belief, but it's more fundamental. Clemson coach Brad Brownell cited the Midwest roots for himself, Bennett, Georgia Tech's Brian Gregory and even Wake Forest's Jeff Bzdelik as influencing a more deliberate approach.

"Things maybe were a littler slower when we were growing up and we learned

our craft under some people that way," Brownell said. "I don't know if that's the reason for all of it, but I do think there are some defensive-minded coaches in the league. Ball-control offense and defense is something that some of us have preached over the years."

All counter attacks carry their own risks. Want to trap a slow team? Williams believes slow-goers actually welcome that, given the odd-man advantage they get if they split the double team. Want to speed a game up with some hasty offense? Williams points out that could lead to a spiral of five-second offensive possessions followed by 30-second defensive possessions followed by five-second offensive possessions and so on.

In this case, the diminishing returns pile up faster than the points. "It's going to get you beat," Williams said.

Ultimately, the ACC has become the Big East.

It's an amalgam of philosophies – and teams – spread far and wide, much like the Big East was until this season. The schools come from everywhere and the players come from everywhere and the operating systems come from everywhere, too.

The affect of the slow-down in games might not be measurable for some time in terms of prospects' perceptions of the ACC; decades of history suggests Duke or Syracuse or North Carolina or Pittsburgh or soon-to-arrive Louisville won't lack for quality recruits. The ACC teams that slow it down may be intractable. The ACC teams that still want to rev it up likely won't abandon their speed. Success will be determined by who can play their style better that night and in the long run ... or long stroll.

"When we're good, it's hard for people to slow us down, too," Williams said. "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder."

If the beholder can bear to watch.

Miami, Pitt matchup to have big Nigerian influence

Miami Herald
Walter Villa
Feb. 5, 2014

There are nine Nigerians who have made it to the NBA, and the smallest of those is 6-9, 270-pound Obinna Ekezie, who played in the league from 1999 to 2005.

Four more jumbo-sized Nigerians — all hoping to end up in the NBA — will be on the court Wednesday night when No. 25 Pitt (18-4, 6-3) visits the Miami Hurricanes (11-10, 2-6) in an Atlantic Coast Conference men's basketball game.

Miami is 0-4 so far this season in ACC home games.

The Canes' Nigerians are 7-0, 235-pound sophomore starter Tonye Jekiri and 6-9, 240-pound senior reserve Raphael Akpejori.

Pitt's Nigerians are 6-9, 230-pound senior starter Talib Zanna and 6-10, 260-pound sophomore reserve Joseph Uchebo.

Akpejori, who didn't know Jekiri until the latter visited campus during his recruitment, said there is an immediate bond among Nigerian basketball players.

"The circle is really small," said Akpejori, 23, who has known Uchebo for eight years but has yet to meet Zanna. "Joseph is my boy — I call him from time to time."

Hakeem Olajuwon, a Hall of Famer, is by far the most famous player to emerge from Nigeria, and he and Akpejori share the same hometown, Lagos, which is the country's largest city.

Among the other Nigerians who have made the NBA are Festus Ezeli, who plays for the Golden State Warriors, Michael Olowo-

kandi, who is no longer in the league, and the late Yinka Dare.

Zanna, Pitt's center, seems like he could have a chance to make the NBA. He is averaging 12.9 points and is fifth in the ACC in rebounding (7.8).

Of the other three, Jekiri — the only 7-footer — might have the most long-term potential. He has started 10 of Miami's 21 games and is second on the team with 17 blocks. He is also averaging 4.7 rebounds in 20.2 minutes per game.

His biggest struggles have come on offense, where he is averaging 3.7 points and is shooting 41.7 percent from the floor and 46.7 percent from the foul line.

Canes coach Jim Larrañaga said Jekiri's offense is a work in progress.

"I don't think we're going to see anything this year," the coach said. "I'm hoping we will. But the experience he gains this year will plug him into developing over the spring and summer."

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/02/05/3913627/miami-hurricanes-pitt-panthers.html#storylink=cpy>

Larrañaga not Lowering Standards, but Changing Them

CanelInsider

Victoria Hernandez

Feb. 3, 2014

Miami basketball coach Jim Larrañaga's goal has always been for his teams to score 75 points per game. His perfect team would have five players averaging double digits. This Hurricanes team simply cannot meet these standards. Therefore, he has switched his goal to score 60 points per game. And that is exactly what the Hurricanes can do, averaging 61.

Rion Brown is the only player averaging double digits, but Garrius Adams has stepped up to score 12 the last two games. He is right on the brink, averaging 9.8 points this season.

"He is driving. He's getting to the rim more, he's getting fouled more and that's really what he needs to do," Larrañaga said.

Donnavan Kirk is almost there with 9.6 points per game. And that term has come to define this Hurricanes season: almost there.

"We've put ourselves in a position to be in every game. We haven't won as many as we'd all like, but we haven't gotten blown out a lot either," Larrañaga said.

Miami's biggest loss was against then-No 18 Duke, a margin of 21 points. But the Hurricanes hung with then-No 2 Syracuse twice and beat traditional power house North Carolina on the road.

The Hurricanes are hesitant to say they have momentum coming into their next conference game against the No 25 Pittsburgh Panthers.

"I hope that's the case, but it's really too early to tell. I hope we just go out on the court and know that we've gotta get roll-

ing in February and it's time to go out and get some wins. But I definitely think if we play our game we will win the game," said Davon Reed.

"We're just taking that as another game because we know that's a very good team, they're top 20, so it don't matter. We've just got to play them on their best day," said fellow freshman Manu Lecomte.

Miami just snapped a three-game losing streak with a win over the Norfolk State Spartans. Then-No 18 Pitt lost a close game to Virginia.

Larrañaga had nothing but praise for the Panthers. He said they have not only the best passing game in the Atlantic Coast Conference, but probably the whole NCAA. He pointed out point guard James Robinson's 4.1 assist-to-0.9 turnover ratio is "off the charts."

Tipoff is set for 7 p.m. Wednesday at the BankUnited center.

Tonye Jekiri still growing into new role with Canes

Sun Sentinel
Christy Chirinos
Jan. 31, 2014

At first, Tonye Jekiri couldn't stomach the thought of American food.

But the rice and beans that are staples at Miami's countless Cuban restaurants? They reminded him of the food in his native Nigeria and were a little easier to eat.

A new diet isn't the only thing the Miami center had to adapt to since arriving in the United States in 2010. But of all the changes, it's the still-continuing transition from soccer player to basketball player that he, and the Miami Hurricanes, hope pay the biggest dividends — especially as Miami looks to get back on track when it tries to snap a three-game losing streak with a win over Norfolk State on Saturday at the BankUnited Center.

"He's only played four years. He's not a kid that started playing when he was 8 or 10 years old and learned the nuances of the game," said Miami coach Jim Larrañaga. "Tonye is one of those guys that he's learning. I'd like to say he's improving, but this is the first year he's played full time and he's out there 25, 30 minutes...he's learning, but he's still got a lot to learn."

Jekiri's first exposure to basketball came four years ago when a coach in Nigeria suggested that his 7-foot frame was better suited to the hardwood than the soccer fields on which he'd grown up playing.

Jekiri was skeptical, but he opted to give basketball a try, attending a camp with 500 young promising athletes. He quickly emerged as a natural and before long, his new skill set led him to another basketball camp, this one in the United States.

Eventually, he enrolled at Champagnat Catholic in Hialeah and began playing with Team Breakdown, one of South Florida's top AAU programs. His years as a soccer player meant his footwork was already solid and he was already conditioned for the rigors of running up and down the floor.

He became one of the nation's top-rated centers as a high school senior earning All-State honors while averaging 20 points, 12 rebounds and 5 blocks. Some of the nation's top programs including Alabama, Vanderbilt, Florida State, Clemson and Virginia Tech came calling before Jekiri finally settled on Miami.

Last year as a freshman, he came off the bench during Miami's NCAA Tournament run and continued learning behind the Hurricanes' talented, experienced starters.

"We had a good season last year. It was fun and it really taught me a lot of things," Jekiri said. "I really found that this conference was the best. There's no team that you're going to say it's easy to beat. You never know what's going to happen and I'm happy playing here."

But it's now, after Miami lost its entire starting lineup from last year's ACC championship team, that Jekiri has seen his role in the Hurricanes offense increase. It's been an exciting opportunity, but one that Jekiri is still growing into.

The sophomore is now averaging 3.7 points and 4.9 rebounds in 20 minutes of action per game. He's second on the team with 16 blocks, but one area he and Larrañaga concede needs continued improvement is managing his physicality. Jekiri, one of Miami's top defenders, has fouled out of four games this season. He wants that to change, especially as Miami continues moving deeper into its ACC schedule. Tipoff for Saturday's nonconference

matchup with Norfolk State, a key chance to build positive momentum, is at 4 p.m.

"I'm a pretty aggressive player and [Larrañaga] told me he doesn't want that to go away," Jekiri said. "I should just stay and keep my head straight."

Lecomte determined to continue improving for Canes

Sun Sentinel
Christy Chirinos
Jan. 24, 2014

Manu Lecomte didn't get to watch much college basketball in his native Belgium.

Most of his exposure to the American game came via YouTube, where the majority of the highlights and games he came across featured ACC powers such as Duke and North Carolina.

So when given the chance to play at Miami, to face ACC competition, the 5-foot-9 point guard jumped at the opportunity. Wednesday night, Lecomte got his first exposure to Duke, managing a meager four points in the Hurricanes' disappointing 67-46 loss.

But the freshman and his Miami teammates have had no time to dwell on what happened against the Blue Devils, not with No. 2 Syracuse coming to the BankUnited Center on Saturday afternoon for another nationally televised showdown against the Hurricanes. And as so many of the games before this have been, it's one more opportunity for Lecomte to continue his growth and his adjustment to the American game.

"Manu has now played at Syracuse, at Carolina. He's pretty much gotten his feet wet," said Miami coach Jim Larrañaga said earlier this week before the Hurricanes' game against Duke. "He's pretty much indoctrinated into the college game, so I think he'll be ready. He's playing very, very well right now. His confidence is at an all-time high."

Lecomte's confidence may have been shaken by his six turnover performance against Duke, but this season, he's worked his way into Miami's starting lineup. He had a career-high 16 points against Georgia Tech a week ago and is averaging 8.0

ppg with 20 assists on the season. And he's earned praise from his teammates and legendary Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim, who watched as Lecomte helped slow the tempo and finished as one of Miami's leading scorers when the Hurricanes nearly upset Syracuse earlier this month at the Carrier Dome.

"He's a good player. He handles the ball well, he looks for people and he's scoring now," Boeheim said.

"I've said from watching Miami against us and how they played, they're a very, very good basketball team. What they did early in the year doesn't matter. They were playing more man than. They're in their match-up now and it's a tremendous defense and they've improved on the offensive side as well with the freshman point guard."

Added Miami guard Rion Brown: "He came in not really knowing what to expect never playing college basketball ... just learning exactly what Coach L wants from him and expects from him, how to play the game and get everybody involved and still be aggressive at the same time. I think he had a problem earlier in the year. He was a little too passive. He thought that meant, 'I don't need to score,' but being aggressive is looking to score. If somebody steps up or somebody's man helps, you're making the right pass. He's getting a lot better with that."

After Wednesday's loss to Duke dropped the Hurricanes to 2-4 in ACC play, Larrañaga said he was surprised by his team's effort and wondered if they'd been distracted by the buzz surrounding the Blue Devils visit to Coral Gables.

For his part, Lecomte says he's determined to continue working on his game and the Hurricanes could use another strong effort from him Saturday.

"This is what I expected," Lecomte said. "I work hard every day in practice and listen to coach. Coach always tells me not to run the offense, but play the offense, be aggressive. I'm trying to improve with that."

Fine still has plenty of friends in basketball

Syracuse.com
Mike Waters
Jan. 24, 2014

Syracuse, N.Y. — The mid-December luncheon in Boca Raton had attracted a huge crowd; somewhere between 500 and 600 people, all originally from the New York City area who were now living in Florida.

All with basketball backgrounds.

That's where Jim Larranaga, the head coach at the University of Miami, ran into an old friend — former Syracuse University assistant Bernie Fine.

"He asked me for tickets to the Syracuse game," Larranaga recalled. "I said 'Yeah, but I'd like to pick your brain. I'd like to talk to you a little bit about zone defense.'"

Larranaga and Fine went way back. Fine had grown up in Brooklyn and graduated from Erasmus Hall. Larranaga had gone to Archbishop Molloy in Queens before playing at Providence College from 1968 to 1971.

"I told him we were working on implementing some zone defense," Larranaga said. "I invited him down to meet my staff and watch video."

So on Sunday, Dec. 29, Bernie Fine drove from his home in Boca Raton to the University of Miami's campus in Coral Gables and met with Larranaga and his assistants for about two hours.

Larranaga had assigned his assistants to study zone defenses last summer in anticipation of Syracuse's arrival in the ACC along with that of Louisville next year. In addition, Miami had lost all five of its starters and Larranaga envisioned the need to play some sort of zone himself.

"I had my video coordinator bring up some of the games that we'd been using to study Syracuse," Larranaga said. "We watched Syracuse vs. Louisville. We were looking at both teams. We discussed the differences in their zones and the differences in defensive philosophy. Our coach-

es asked him questions."

Larranaga said Fine didn't reveal any secrets.

"There are no secrets in college basketball," Larranaga said. "The things we talked about are things my staff and I had already talked about and knew. It was just nice to talk to someone who had more experience and familiarity with the defense."

Larranaga had also sought out Ralph Willard, a Syracuse graduate assistant in 1987 who had spent years with Rick Pitino at Louisville in addition to being the head coach at Pittsburgh and Holy Cross. Willard is now a scout for the NBA's Oklahoma City Thunder and he lives in Naples, Fla.

"In Ralph, we had a head coach who had combined experience with Syracuse's zone, Louisville's zone and his own zone," Larranaga said. "Ours is more like what he was doing at Holy Cross."

The Holy Cross version of the zone fit Larranaga's needs because, like Willard at Holy Cross, Larranaga didn't have the 6-9 forwards that Boeheim recruits to play his zone.

"The zone cuts down preparation," Willard said. "I learned that from being with Jim Boeheim. The opportunity not to spend hours and hours preparing for next opponent in the middle of the season is a huge advantage. Teams don't run 10 or 15 zone offenses. They usually don't run more than one or two.

"Jim Larranaga had a young team and the matchup would cut down on his preparation and make his team a special preparation."

Fine's meeting with Larranaga and his staff lasted two hours, ending at noon. Fine never saw the practice floor. He never talked with the Miami players. After the coaches' session ended, Larranaga took Fine to lunch.

"I'm a teacher," Larranaga said. "I don't want the big picture. I want the small parts. How do you drill this? How do you

teach your team to play the zone better? We had the zone in. We haven't changed anything that we were doing in games, but now, instead of working on man-to-man drills, we're working on zone drills."

Miami's basketball zone

Syracuse.com
Donna Ditota
Jan. 23, 2014

Jim Larranaga gave his staff a project last summer. With Syracuse joining the ACC, Larranaga wanted to be prepared for one of the nation's most stultifying, most mystifying defenses.

Initially, the Miami coach wanted to investigate ways to attack the zone from an offensive perspective. But tangentially, he wondered if zone might mitigate what would be construed as a rebuilding year for his own Hurricanes, a team that had lost the bulk of its scoring to graduation or early NBA entry.

His instructions, triggered too by the idea that the Hurricanes had not played more than 20 minutes against zones all of last season, eventually evolved into a new defensive philosophy.

"We decided to implement both a 2-3 zone and a 1-2-2 zone," Larranaga said. "And when our man-to-man defense was not as good as it has been in the past, we decided to try the zone a little bit more. We had a little more success with it. Our guys developed a little more confidence in it. And we've been playing it better and better."

Syracuse will see that defense, primarily a matchup 1-2-2 configuration, for the second time Saturday at 1 p.m. in Miami. The last time the teams met on Jan. 4, the Orange scraped out a 49-44 victory in the Carrier Dome.

Syracuse shot 36 percent in that game. Trevor Cooney was 2-of-12 from 3-point range. SU's top two scorers — Cooney and C.J. Fair — shot a combined 8-of-28.

"The matchup has made a huge difference," SU coach Jim Boeheim said. "It's a difficult defense because they have great size at every position and they've got a really good shot-blocker. I think Miami is as good defensively, or better, than any team in our league."

Larranaga used a resource familiar with zone defenses to augment what he and his staff had already learned. The Miami coach met former SU assistant Bernie Fine at a luncheon, discussed his plan to implement more zone this season and invited Fine to share what he knew about the defense. The two met for about two hours in Miami, where they watched video and compared notes, Larranaga said.

"Quite honestly, the things we talked about are things my staff and I had already researched and knew," Larranaga said. "It's just nice to have a discussion with someone with so much familiarity (with zones)."

Syracuse players hope to be more familiar with Miami's brand of defense on Saturday. Fair and SU point guard Tyler Ennis said the Hurricanes' matchup relies heavily on help and sometimes disguises its methods of coverage.

In typical matchup zones, a defender guards an opponent in his area, but once that opponent vacates a space, he is no longer that defender's responsibility. Sometimes, Miami adheres to that principle; sometimes it does not.

"They get more help," Ennis said. "Sometimes they might follow guys through, whereas a matchup I've seen before they would stay in one spot. I think they just adjust to the way the other team is playing."

Fair said the defense reminds him of Louisville's scrambling matchup zone, a defense that has flummoxed the Orange in the past. Fair would prefer, he said, to face a more typical zone rather than subject himself or his team to the matchup brand.

"I think it's harder. It's basically man-to-man, but they basically switch on everything," Fair said of the Miami zone. "They followed me until they bumped me off to somebody else. It's man-to-man but they play an area. The main thing is if you get a lot of movement, that's when they can kind of lose track of you. That's when you can kind of find open areas."

Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton, whose team beat Miami 63-53 earlier this year, said the presence of savvy playmakers aids the ability to attack the zone. He, too, spoke of the shifting strategy of following cutters through the zone in various situations.

Larranaga is banking on the confusion to slow down opposing offenses and allow his low-scoring Hurricanes a chance. Nobody plays at a slower tempo this season than Miami, which Larranaga believes keeps the Hurricanes close to their competition.

For Ennis, Miami's players exert more impact on the game than the type of defense they play. Aside from 5-foot-11 point guard Manu Lecomte, the Hurricanes employ a steady stream of players in the range of 6-5 or 6-6.

"It's their length. They have a bunch of guys who are really long, so they guard a big space," Ennis said. "You may be able to beat one guy, but they have a couple big men who come over to help. The zone might give up open shots sometimes, but the matchup is one guy is playing man and the other guys are kind of trying to help as much as possible."

Ennis and Fair said the Orange adapted better as the Miami game earlier this month wore on. They're hoping familiarity with the Hurricanes helps this time.

"We shot bad in that game, too," Ennis said, "so I'm hoping we shoot better and that will open up other possibilities."

Freshman Lecomte Gaining Confidence

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Jan. 22, 2014

The freshman point guard from Belgium scored a career-high 16 points in 37 minutes in a win over Georgia Tech on Saturday.

"I'm feeling more confident," Lecomte said. "I tried to stay aggressive the whole game."

Lecomte has started the last two games after being relegated to a reserve role after starting the first six.

"I work hard if I'm starting or not," Lecomte said. "I'm going to work the same way every day. That's great that now I'm back in the starting lineup. But it doesn't matter to me. I'm going to play the same way if I come off the bench or not."

Lecomte is averaging 7.5 points, 2.7 assists, and 2.2 rebounds in 17 games, making eight starts, while shooting 38.5 percent from the field.

He's been adjusting to the college game in the United States since his arrival.

"In ACC, the game is way faster," he said. "We got a lot of athletic guys. In Belgium, it's more slow-tempo, play-to-play."

The coaches have been preaching to Lecomte, who is skilled, to be more aggressive on the court.

Manu Lecomte

"Coach is always telling me you've got to be aggressive all the time, not sometimes," Lecomte said. "So I've got to be aggressive."

Overall, Lecomte has enjoyed his experience at Miami for the 10-7 Hurricanes.

"This is what I expected," he said. "I work hard every day in practice and listen to coach. Coach always tells me to not run the offense, but play the offense, be aggressive. And I'm trying to improve with that."

Miami hosts No. 18 Duke (14-4, 3-2) on Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

"When I was young, I only knew Duke, North Carolina and that was it," Lecomte said. "That's a dream now to play against them. That's why I came to Miami and the ACC, to play against that kind of teams."

Lecomte watched Miami's 90-63 victory against Duke last January at the BankUnited Center.

"I didn't expect that, they just killed them," Lecomte said. "That was a great game. I was happy for the team."

But like many of the Hurricanes believe, Lecomte says that was last year:

"I'm more focused on what's going to happen (Wednesday). Last year was last year. We've got a new team. So I'm ready for (Wednesday)."

Head coach Jim Larranga thinks Lecomte's experiences at Syracuse and North Carolina will help him against another perennial power.

"He's pretty much indoctrinated into the college game," Larranaga said. "So I think he'll be ready. He's playing very, very well right now. His confidence is at an all-time high and quite frankly everybody on our team knows, every coach knows, and everybody in this room knows that Duke is a major challenge for us."

Duke junior point guard Quinn Cook is averaging 13.1 points and 5.7 assists a game.

"Quinn Cook is a very good point guard," Lecomte said. "I think it's going to be fun. He's a great point guard. I think he's a junior. It's going to be great to play against experience and a very good point guard."

And Lecomte is well aware of Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski, who is the winningest collegiate coach of all-time.

"Coach K is a legend," Lecomte said. "It's going to be great. But when I'm focused on the game, I don't think about that."

Miami among latest programs to join “You Can Play”

Sun Sentinel
Christy Chirinos
Jan. 19, 2014

When Katie Meier heard the Miami athletic department wanted to celebrate the diversity of its athletes, she was more than willing to have her team be at the forefront.

So on Sunday, when Miami launches its “You Can Play” initiative, it will do so before the Hurricanes women’s basketball team hosts NC State at the BankUnited Center.

“I think that Miami, the community and the university, the diversity is something I’m quite proud of,” Meier said. “There’s a lot of different cultures, people are raised in different ways and there’s a real blending of all our differences. If someone’s from a different country, it’s nothing to judge. Whatever their sexuality is, it’s nothing to judge. Race, religion, all of that, we’re going to be a place that welcomes you and celebrates it.”

Miami’s first step in getting its message of tolerance out there was enlisting the help of its coaches and athletes for a video as part of the You Can Play Project, a movement designed to show that lesbian, gay bisexual and transsexual athletes are welcome in locker rooms and on sports teams across the country.

Several major college programs including Georgetown, Duke, Stanford, Cal, UCLA and Ohio State have participated in the project, as have several high schools. Even professional athletes, including San Francisco 49ers tight end Vernon Davis and former Giants pitcher Barry Zito are featured in a special You Can Play video along with several other athletes from the Bay Area on the project’s website.

While the primary focus of You Can Play focuses on outreach for LGBT athletes, school officials at Miami wanted to take the message further, focusing also on race, ethnicity, religion—all things that make both the campus and the South Florida community as a whole different.

“I think the more you can talk about these issues and bring awareness to them, at the end of the day, people are people,” said Miami senior associate athletic director Jennifer Strawley, who helped organize the school’s You Can Play effort. “And 18-22 year-olds are more open than people give them credit for. I think it’s sometimes coming out and having the courage to say ‘This is who we are as a department...and we love all of you regardless,’ and giving them the ability to feel that way too.”

Administrators including Strawley, athletic director Blake James and school president Donna Shalala are featured in Miami’s three-minute You Can Play video. Athletes and coaches from all of the Hurricane programs contributed as well, including Meier, football coach Al Golden, men’s basketball coach Jim Larrañaga and baseball coach Jim Morris.

Basketball player Rion Brown said for him, participation was a given considering some of the high-profile bullying incidents that have made headlines in recent months.

“I think it sends a great message,” Brown said. “If you look at the past, where we’ve come from from the early ‘90s and having all white teams or all black teams, you can see the boundaries that have been broken down. I think it’s great for the university to say ‘I don’t care who you are or what you look like, if you can do the things we need you to do, we want you here. You’re not going to be treated differently.’ For a school to put that out, I think it’s a great message.”

Brown hoping for good showing against dad's alma mater

Sun Sentinel
Christy Chirinos
Jan. 17, 2014

So many of Rion Brown's early basketball memories involve Georgia Tech.

That's to be expected when your father is a Yellow Jackets legend who made it a point to watch as much Tech basketball as humanly possible, whether in person or on television.

But despite his background and pedigree, Brown initially shied away from the sport his father loved.

Instead the younger Brown opted to play football and his father, Tico, was happy to let him forge his own path—until Rion's tall, lanky frame seemed out of place on the gridiron.

Worried about his son's safety, Tico Brown asked Rion to reconsider—play one year of basketball, he asked, and if it doesn't work, go back to football.

That's all it took—one year—for 12-year old Rion to become a recreational league all-star and Saturday, he'll take the floor at his father's alma mater as Miami's leading scorer when the Hurricanes look to get back on track after a heartbreaking loss to in-state ACC rival Florida State earlier this week.

"It always feel strange to go to [Georgia Tech] as an opponent," said Rion Brown, who is averaging 14.2 points and 6.7 rebounds. "Every game that was televised, we watched. They're in a new building now, but I still get the same feelings, the same butterflies when I go in there. It's always fun going back home where my dad played...I'm looking forward to having a great one, especially with it being my last time playing there."

As odd as it may feel for Brown to walk onto Georgia Tech's court as a visitor, he's put together some of the best games of his Miami career not far from where his father's retired jersey is on display.

Last season with nearly 80 family members and friends in attendance, Brown had a team-high and then-career high 22 points in Miami's 62-49 win over the Yellow Jackets at McCamish Pavilion. When the Hurricanes visited Atlanta during his sophomore season, he had 10 points.

His father, who makes it a point to wear neutral colors while cheering for his son in Atlanta, admits those numbers and performances tug at his heartstrings.

"It was a little tough, especially the first couple years basically cheering against Georgia Tech," joked Tico Brown, who led the Continental Basketball Association in scoring with 8,538 points when he retired. "It's a little conflicting at times. I used to tell him when he was growing up, even if you play for a team other than Georgia Tech and you play against Georgia Tech, I want you to do really well...as long as you score 40 and Georgia Tech wins, I'll be happy. But it's not working out that way."

If Rion Brown has his way tomorrow, things will continue going in Miami favor against the Yellow Jackets. The Hurricanes (9-7, 1-3), who have lost three of four conference games and have matchups against Duke and Syracuse looming next week, could use an ACC road win.

His coach is hopeful one last visit to Tech (10-7, 1-3) will prove memorable.

"Last year when we played Georgia Tech, he was on fire. No question he helped us win that game," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said. "This year, his role has com-

pletely changed...he has to do a little bit of everything and a lot of some things. I think it's exciting for him to go back to his home state."

Larrañaga's implementation of zone defense paying off

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
Jan. 17, 2014

It's not too often a 64-year-old basketball coach in his 42nd season of teaching the game shows up with a new lesson plan. Last month, Jim Larrañaga did just that.

The Hurricanes coach knew something needed to change when he saw his team allowing "too many easy baskets." So he called a couple coaching friends, did his homework and installed a new defense that has turned the rebuilding Canes into a team the ACC is taking seriously.

After nearly taking down No. 2 Syracuse and upsetting North Carolina on the road in its last two games, Miami (9-6, 1-2 ACC) heads into Wednesday's 9 p.m. game against rival Florida State with the reputation of having a tough defense.

"The zone they play is very challenging, especially if you don't understand what they're doing," Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton said. "They are a team to be reckoned with, especially at home."

Not long ago, those compliments weren't coming to UM. It looked like it would be a long season when the Hurricanes, who lost the top six scorers from last year's ACC championship team, lost their most gifted scorer, true freshman Deandre Burnett, to a wrist injury in the preseason.

Knowing scoring would be a major issue, Larrañaga sought to slow things down and play stout defense.

After Monday's games, UM ranked 41st nationally in points allowed per possession and is one of the nation's slowest-paced teams. The Canes rank 346th out of 351 Division I teams in offensive possessions per game.

After Miami lost to Virginia Tech on Dec. 8, Larrañaga decided his man-to-man defense wasn't working. He called former Pittsburgh coach Ralph Willard, now retired in Naples, and former Syracuse assistant Bernie Fine. Both men spent a

day each teaching UM coaches the finer points of a matchup zone. Armed with that knowledge, Larrañaga and his staff passed it to their players.

Miami is 4-1 since then. The Canes held Syracuse to 44 points on 36.2 percent shooting in a five-point loss, then limited North Carolina to 30.8 percent shooting in a 63-57 win.

Next up is Florida State, which might have an even better defense than Miami. Using lots of length and athleticism, the Seminoles (11-4, 2-1 ACC) rank ninth in points per possession and have held all three of their ACC opponents to 33 percent shooting or worse.

They caught fire offensively in Sunday's 85-61 win over Maryland, making 16 3-pointers, 13 of which were closely contested, and shooting 66 percent from deep. Hamilton, who led UM to its first Sweet Sixteen appearance in 2000 and has been at FSU since 2002, wasn't surprised to see the Hurricanes doing well.

"They have a new team, but they have guys who were in practice last year, who understand the system," Hamilton said. "It's a matter of them developing a style where they can be competitive."

They'll be more competitive if they can score. The Canes rank a meager 254th nationally in offensive points per possession. FSU, meanwhile, is 160th.

"We have confidence in our zone," said UM senior Rion Brown, who leads UM in scoring (13.7) and is second in rebounding (6.5). "We know we can stop people. It's just a matter of us executing our offense." Looks like both teams will have a tough time doing that in Wednesday's game at BankUnited Center.

"It's a rivalry game," UM senior forward Erik Swoope said. "It's going to be physical. It always is. There's going to be a lot of energy in the crowd. It's going to be a grind-it-out game."

Editors Note: This story has been updated to clarify that the coach who worked with

UM coach Jim Larrañaga and his staff to teach them the zone defense did not have contact with UM players. That could be a violation of NCAA rules.

Perseverance pays off with UM scholarship

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Jan. 13, 2014

It's not about the stats.

How could it be? If Justin Heller fretted over his career totals — two points in 18 minutes of action over three seasons — he would have turned in his Miami Hurricanes uniform many months ago.

It's about the moments, the little pieces of themselves people give, which make Heller's effort worthwhile.

Like the parade of calls, texts, tweets, handshakes and hugs that came his way last week after an unforgettable few minutes he spent with his coach, Jim Larrañaga.

The day before UM departed for its Jan. 8 trip to North Carolina, the walk-on guard was told Larrañaga wanted to see him in his office. Topic of conversation: unknown. Stress level: elevated.

"I was nervous," said Heller, a senior who walked onto the team after playing at West Boca Raton High.

Behind the large, wooden desk that sits in his large, memorabilia-filled office, Larrañaga looked down at the papers on his desk in silence. Heller became increasingly aware of his heart's pounding.

Larrañaga began to speak about the contributions Heller made to the team: how he pushed his teammates in practice, kept a positive attitude and, despite his meager stats, how he meant just as much to the Hurricanes as any player.

This was not a change in tone from the coach.

After all, without Larrañaga, Justin Heller, No. 12 for the Hurricanes, would have simply been Justin Heller, UM finance major and hoops fan.

After walking on in 2011, Heller traveled a tough road under former coach Frank Haith. He dressed for games sporadically and didn't travel. He played zero minutes. He felt less like a player than a piece of

furniture.

After the year, Heller told his friends and family he was done with basketball and would instead focus on school. Which was fine, because he had always had his heart set on UM, his parents' alma mater.

"I've always been a diehard Hurricane fan," he said. "Coming out of high school, the only school I wanted to go to, with or without basketball, was Miami. It was the only school I applied to."

He was ready to go without hoops, but Haith left for Missouri and Larrañaga brought a new approach.

"The first thing he said to Justin was, 'If you're on the team, you're on the team.' He treats everyone the same," said Heller's father, Neal, of Boca Raton. "His actions have always matched his words. Always." He was now allowed to dress and travel. Every big shot, Heller celebrated from the bench. Every big win, like last year's ACC championship and last week's victory over North Carolina in the Dean Dome, belonged just as much to him as the rest of the team. His teammates last year erupted when he scored the only basket of his career, Dec. 14, 2012 against Charlotte. That game also prompted a day-after call from Larrañaga to Heller's father, something Dad won't ever forget.

"There's certainly times as a walk-on you wonder, 'What the heck am I doing this for?'" Neal Heller said. "I could be relaxing. I could be hanging out. But those moments ..."

An unforgettable moment came last Tuesday in Larrañaga's office, when the coach broke the news: UM had an extra scholarship for the spring, and was awarding it to former walk-on guard Justin Heller.

It was an honor. But scholarship or not, Heller wouldn't trade the last three years for anything.

"For me, it's really about having a family," he said. "It's a family atmosphere. The friendships I make and continue to make

are amazing. Being a part of all the success the team has had is amazing. Being able to help any way I can is what it's all about."

Kelly knows role of underdog

Miami Herald

Michelle Kaufman

Jan. 4, 2014

Hoping to inspire his University of Miami basketball team for Saturday's daunting road game against No. 2 undefeated Syracuse, coach Jim Larrañaga took players and staff to see the movie, Nelson Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom on New Year's Eve afternoon.

"It was very meaningful for our players to see what people are willing to sacrifice for their principles," Larrañaga said. "I think he was an incredible leader and person, had a great impact on society, and is a great role model for all of us. Hopefully, it helps us as a team, reminding us the importance of sticking together."

Larrañaga has made a career of taking underdogs to heights they never thought they could reach. He led unheralded George Mason to the 2006 Final Four. Last season, a UM team predicted to finish middle of the pack wound up winning the ACC and making a Sweet 16 run.

On Saturday, he will try to convince his collection of inexperienced Hurricanes (8-5) that they can fight through the Orange's vaunted 2-3 zone at the 49,000-seat Carrier Dome, and beat a 13-0 Syracuse team, one of just seven unbeaten teams in the nation. He will remind them that anything is possible with faith and hustle.

That message rings particularly true for forward James Kelly. On a team of underdogs, he is one of the biggest underdogs of all.

As of four years ago, Kelly had never played organized basketball. He was a wayward kid in Ann Arbor, Mich., had gotten "in big trouble" at age 11, hung out with the wrong crowd, liked to sneak away from home, and didn't feel any incentive to excel as a student or an athlete.

"I was just a regular kid, sitting around watching TV, didn't really think I had any talents," Kelly said.

Then, he caught the eye of Ann Arbor Pioneer High coach Rex Stanczak.

"I'll never forget the first day I saw James play," said Stanczak. "It was his sophomore year and we had open gym one morning and our JV coach called me and said, 'You've got to come see this kid. He doesn't know what the heck he's doing, but he's special.'"

Kelly was attending Roberto Clemente Student Development Center at the time, a small alternative school for students who need extra care. That school had no basketball team, so he was allowed to try out for the team at Pioneer. Kelly, who was already 6-7 and boasted highlight-reel dunks, made the team with ease.

But his grades were poor, and he was academically ineligible. With Stanczak's prodding, and the nurturing of teachers and administrators at the Clemente school, Kelly picked up his grades. He joined the team midway through his junior season, and in his first game scored 24 points and grabbed 12 rebounds.

His grades slipped again toward the end of the semester, and he was ruled ineligible for the playoffs. He got serious his senior year, and earned a scholarship to Owens Community College in Toledo, Ohio.

There, coach David Clarke took over the project. Kelly was raw, had no post moves, and poor fundamentals. With a lot of hard work, Kelly excelled, averaged 18.2 points and 10 rebounds, and was wooed by Miami, Michigan State, Minnesota, Nebraska, and New Mexico.

"In all my 25 years as a coach, I have never been more proud of anything as I am about seeing James Kelly at UM, playing in the ACC," Stanczak said Thursday by phone. "If you had told me his junior year of high school that he'd one day be playing in the Carrier Dome against Syracuse, I'd have said, 'No way.' That was not even in the realm of possibility. It is amazing the miles he has come, as a player and a person. This is why you coach, for guys like James Kelly."

Stanczak said that when he first started working with Kelly, the kid acted "like a really, big 10-year-old rumbly, tumbly boy. Very immature. It definitely was not an

overnight fix. It took a lot of people and a lot of patience. Hillary Clinton said, 'It takes a village' to raise a child. Well, it took a village with James Kelly. All hands on deck. His parents loved him very much, but didn't have the resources or experience to know what to do with him.

"It was a couple steps forward, a step back, for a while, but we grinded through it together, and look at him now."

UM coaches have been stunned by Kelly's progress, particularly his strength.

"When he got here, he had never lifted a weight a day of his life," Larrañaga said.

"He still tested very strong, 215 pounds on the bench press, and within four months he was benching 315. That improvement is unheard of. Normally, you improve five pounds a month. He improved 100 pounds in four months."

Teammates have come to depend on his sense of humor and athleticism. Kelly has started nine games, is the team's most accurate shooter at 53.8 percent, and averages 9.2 points and 5.5 rebounds.

"He can knock down short and mid-range shots, catch lob passes, put back dunks, rebound," guard Davon Reed said. "He does a lot of the dirty work we need without asking him to. And he's always laughing, non-stop."

That smile wasn't always there.

"I wasn't sure I had what it takes, felt like an outcast sometimes, but I fell in love with basketball and it changed my life," he said. "I'm not scared to play at Syracuse. I'm excited."

Larrañaga has Hurricanes in a zone

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 15, 2014

Jim Larrañaga has been coaching basketball for 37 years, but he is the first to admit he doesn't have all the answers. He never is too proud to seek guidance.

He relies on advice from his assistants and sons, searches through books and movies for inspiration, and when he decided to switch from man-to-man defense to zone this season for the first time in his career, he went straight to his lengthy contact list for pointers.

The University of Miami basketball coach reached out to Ralph Willard, a former Rick Pitino assistant at Louisville who lives in Naples. He also called on Bernie Fine, a former Syracuse assistant of Jim Boeheim's who lives in Fort Lauderdale. If anyone knows the intricacies of the zone, it is Willard and Fine. Both spent time with UM coaches and gave them a crash course.

"I saw us giving up a lot of easy baskets in our man-to-man and decided, 'It doesn't look like this is going to be our bread-and-butter defense,'" Larrañaga said. "It was kind of out of necessity."

So far, looks like it was a good move.

The Hurricanes, who host rival Florida State on Wednesday night at 9, have won four of their past five games, including a statement win over North Carolina at the Dean Dome last week. They held the Tar Heels to 30.8 percent shooting, and it was the fourth time in a row Miami beat Carolina after going 2-18 against the perennial power. UM (9-6, 1-2 ACC) also put quite a scare into undefeated No. 2 Syracuse at the Carrier Dome before losing by five.

Miami's restyled defense has allowed 60 points or less in the past nine games, and the Canes held Syracuse and North Carolina to more than 20 points below their season average. One key has been the insertion of 6-6 freshman guard Davon Reed into the starting lineup. His long arms help with perimeter defense.

"With Davon, the three guys at the top of the zone are all 6-6 with long arms," senior Rion Brown said. "That's tough out there trying to pass or shoot over."

The zone will be tested against the Seminoles (11-4, 2-1), who made a school-record 16 three-pointers in a win over Maryland on Sunday.

"If they're shooting it like they did against Maryland, no one can beat them," Larrañaga said. "They were awesome."

The FSU defense is tough to penetrate, a trademark of coach Leonard Hamilton, who built up the UM program in the 1990s. The Seminoles rank seventh nationally in field-goal percentage (.363) and are tied for eighth in blocks (6.7)

The Canes are expecting their most spirited crowd of the season. Classes resumed Monday after winter break, and the team went dorm storming Monday night to drum up support

"It's a rivalry game, and the records don't matter," said UM senior forward Erik Swoope, who is coming off a career-high 14 points against UNC. "It's going to be physical. It's the pride of being the best team in Florida."

Read more here: <http://www.miami-herald.com/2014/01/14/3871216/um-mens-basketball-coach-jim-Larrañaga.html#storylink=cpy>

Hurricanes' defense getting in the zone

FOX Sports

Christina De Nicola

Jan. 13, 2014

One month ago, University of Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga went against his 40 years of coaching experience.

After running a man-to-man defense at each place he worked -- from Davidson College to George Mason University -- Larrañaga knew a change needed to be made when the Hurricanes started the season 5-5.

"I saw us giving up a lot of easy baskets and decided this wasn't going to be our bread-and-butter defense," Larrañaga said. "It was out of necessity."

Larrañaga called Ralph Willard, a longtime assistant of Rick Pitino, for advice. Willard, who resides in Naples, spent a day with the team teaching zone fundamentals. Bernie Fine, a former associate head coach at Syracuse, drove down from Fort Lauderdale and worked one morning with Larrañaga and his coaching staff.

The change in philosophy seems to have paid off.

After nearly handing undefeated Syracuse a loss Jan. 4, Miami (9-6, 1-2 ACC) rebounded to take down North Carolina for the fourth consecutive time.

Miami held the Orange (74 points per game) and the Tar Heels (79 PPG) to 49 and 57, respectively. UNC managed just 31 percent shooting (24 percent from 3-point range).

According to Larrañaga, the Hurricanes rank near the top 30 nationally when it comes to points per possession allowed.

Seniors Rion Brown and Erik Swoope said the team has not played man-to-man since the Dec. 22 game against La Salle, and that lasted for only 2-3 minutes.

When Brown, freshman Davon Reed, graduates Donnavan Kirk and Gariius Adams and junior James Kelly start, the lineup consists of guys at least 6-foot-6. In Brown and Swoope's opinion, the zone works well because of each player's length and athleticism.

"We have confidence in our zone, so it gives us a lot of energy," Brown said. "We know we can stop people -- it's just a matter of executing our offense. ... It definitely gives us confidence going forward that our defense can win games."

And the timing is eerily familiar.

The victory over North Carolina arrived two days before the one-year anniversary of the Hurricanes' rewriting of Atlantic Coast Conference basketball history.

On Jan. 10, 2013, Miami arrived at the Dean Smith Center in Chapel Hill, N.C., and claimed its first 2-0 start in ACC play, besting UNC 68-59. It marked the third time overall and first since 2006 that the Hurricanes beat the Tar Heels.

Miami would rattle off 13 straight conference victories en route to becoming the first program outside the state of North Carolina to capture both the ACC regular season and tournament championships.

Fast forward to Jan. 8, 2014: The visiting Hurricanes -- without a returning starter from last year's Sweet 16 squad -- still managed to upset UNC 63-57.

Larrañaga remembers his son Jay being in disbelief when his father hadn't yet made a decision to coach UM's program. Jay re-

minded Jim how exciting it would be to try and outsmart the country's top coaches at historic arenas.

"'It's only fun if you can win,'" Larrañaga told his son. "That was my mindset. All this is about winning and trying to prepare your team to be the best it can be."

Entering Wednesday night's ACC home opener against Florida State (11-4, 2-1 ACC), the Hurricanes continue to search for consistency.

In four of its six losses, Miami led late in the second half yet couldn't finish down the stretch. The Hurricanes were able to correct that by holding off a pair of Tar Heel rallies.

"It'll be a new test for some of the young guys," Swoope said. "They're still getting used to the way the ACC works and how each team is radically different."

All but one of their 16 remaining games will be against ACC teams. Nine of those will take place at BankUnited Center, including Duke and Syracuse next week.

It's an open conference race with only three undefeated teams left in the standings. Four of Miami's first six games of 2014 are against teams ranked in the polls.

"I think we'll know by the end of January what kind of defensive team we have," Larrañaga said. "If we are really good that'll give us a chance to win a bunch of games in February."

Forget freshmen, transfers are the new prized recruits

SI.com
Pete Thamel
Jan. 9, 2014

WASHINGTON -- A few blocks from the United Nations D.C. offices on K Street, George Washington University has emerged as the free-market face of college basketball. A program picked 10th in the 13-team Atlantic 10 has catapulted out to a 12-2 start and is on the cusp of the program's first NCAA Tournament bid since 2007.

The dim expectations appeared justified. The Colonials stumbled to a 13-17 record last season, and two of their top players transferred -- Lasan Kromah to UConn and David Pellom to Memphis. But thanks to Indiana transfer Mo Creek and former Villanova captain Isaiah Armwood, George Washington has defeated Creighton and Maryland and become an archetype for building a modern college basketball program.

"We're Transfer U," said GW assistant Maurice Joseph, who fittingly jumped from Michigan State to Vermont as a player.

Pick a program that's leapt out to an eye-opening start this season -- UMass, Iowa State, Oregon, Villanova, Toledo -- and transfers are indelibly intertwined in their uprisings. More than a dozen coaches SI.com interviewed for this story agreed that transfer recruiting has become as integral, if not more so, to a program's success as traditional high school recruiting.

"I don't know if it's more important, but it's as important," said LaSalle coach John Giannini, who led a transfer-filled team to the Round of 16 last season. "I think you're foolish if you don't try and get transfers, and you're foolish if you don't try and get good freshmen. It's all the same now. It's a totally mainstream thing, from Duke to Florida."

The Most Outstanding Player in the NCAA Tournament last season, Louisville's Luke Hancock, transferred from George Mason. Duke named Rodney Hood, a transfer from Mississippi State, a captain this year before he'd ever played a game for the Blue Devils. Top-ranked Arizona starts a Duquesne transfer, T.J. McConnell, at point guard.

Call it free agency. Call it the waiver wire. Or even call it an epidemic. But don't dismiss it, as the model of building through transferring is here to stay. In the latest official data available from the NCAA, nearly 12 percent of players transferred in 2011-12.

Of the 1,039 Division I men's basketball freshmen to enroll in 2010, 412 of them have transferred or left their initial school. That's a 40-percent clip. While four-year transfers have increased less than three percent since 2004, the caliber of players readily available has overhauled the traditional recruiting model in college basketball.

And that's why the George Washington coach Mike Lonergan found himself attending a flurry of holiday basketball tournaments around Washington, D.C. He was as hopeful to hear about a 4-man interested in transferring back home as he was finding one to recruit. With the D.C. grassroots scene often over-recruited, GW offers a bounce-back home to kids who aren't happy with where they ventured.

"If you had told me 10 years ago I was doing this, I'd tell you that you were crazy," Lonergan said.

"But I don't feel like I'm a used car salesman. For an area kid, and most families here, the player has a great little set up."

Both Creek and Armwood have found exactly what they wanted in Foggy Bottom. Each desired to win, and found a talented young core, led by sophomore star Kethan Savage (13.8 ppg), that provided a strong foundation.

They also had individual goals. Creek couldn't get on the floor consistently at Indiana after injuries set back his career. He sought a fresh start as a one-year graduate transfer and is averaging 16 points per game, returning to the form he showed before his freshman season at Indiana (16.4 ppg).

Armwood wanted to do more than screen and rebound in Villanova's guard-centric offense. Armwood said he "loved" his time at Villanova, but the former Top 50 recruit didn't want to be a career grunt.

"I wasn't satisfied with my role on the team," he said. "I felt like if I had continued there, it would not have expanded the way that I had expected it too."

And in the free-market college basketball world, if a 6-foot-9 blue chipper wants a bigger role, there are plenty of places willing to take him.

The Evolution

Back when he coached at Delaware from 1995 to 2000, Mike Brey took so many transfers that then-Washington coach Bob Bender came up with a running joke. He teased Brey that his recruiting philosophy revolved around going to games at Villanova and Rutgers, standing on the baseline in Delaware gear and batting his eyes at the former blue chip recruits who weren't playing.

"He'd say, 'You do the July stance on the baseline during January games,'" Brey recalled with a laugh. "I joked with him, 'I haven't done that yet, but it's a good thought.'"

Giannini recalls early in his career when taking transfers was reserved for rogues like Billy Tubbs and Jerry Tarkanian. But Brey, who transferred to George Washington from Northwestern State as a player, never worried about the stigma. He inherited Ryan Humphrey (Oklahoma) when he got the Notre Dame job and has dotted Irish rosters with transfers ranging from Dan Miller (Maryland) to Scott Martin (Purdue) to Ben Hansbrough (Mississippi State) to starting center Garrick Sherman (Michigan State).

"It's a completely different game now," Brey said. "It's as competitive, if not more, for a solid transfer than a recruit. I think everyone has become a believer in it."

So what's changed? Coaches point to a confluence of factors, from the impact of social media to the increasingly corrupt nature of high school recruiting to the sporadic enforcement of NCAA transfer rules. Players are more willing to leave schools as well. Low-major coaches privately admit that they'll sit their leading scorers at the end of games in an attempt to "hide their stats" and supposedly make them less likely to be poached.

From Facebook to Twitter, players are inundated with opinions and expectations. The result has been high-profile recruits fleeing situations when minutes and statistics don't come instantly. According to data compiled by SI.com's Luke Winn, the number of Top 100 players who transferred

rose to 34.3 percent in the 2010 class from 26.5 percent in 2007. The best players need immediate gratification.

"It's a very dysfunctional culture these kids belong to," said the Louisville coach Rick Pitino. "They're starved for attention. If I take away Twitter or their phones, it's like an addictive drug. They need constant recognition. It's very sad."

From his years of fishing around the transfer market, one of the biggest adjustments Brey said he's made in recent seasons is constantly monitoring his own roster. He said it's important for coaches to not complain about the current environment, but rather focus in on the players they have.

"It's hypocritical," said GW associate head coach Hajj Turner of the current environment. "You don't want your guys to transfer, but at the same time you keep an eye out."

Brey constantly brings up the mental state of his current players in staff meetings, always probing his assistants for a pulse. From dealing with so many transfers, he knows what to look for.

"I'm very paranoid about that," Brey said. "So and so didn't play much last night. How's he doing? How's his head? A lot of times you're the last guy to know."

A few days after saying this, Brey lost sophomore Cam Biedscheid, a former Top 50 recruit, to mid-semester transfer. The transfer game works both ways.

The Trickle Up

Rhode Island coach Dan Hurley knows exactly why transferring has become intertwined with the culture of college basketball. He saw players doing the same things while a high school coach at St. Benedict's in Newark from 2001 to '09. Hurley laughs when recalling how frequent it became to face an opposing player on two different teams during a season.

The college recruiting environment also proved unstable. There was a list at the security desk at St. Benedict's of Division I colleges that were not allowed in gym. (Hurley politely declined to name names.) Hurley went 223-21 at St. Benedict's and dozens of his players earned Division I scholarships. Year after year, however, players and handlers made poor college choices.

"I saw so many kids in my nine years make so many mistakes on why he selected a school or someone else selected a school for him," Hurley said. "Not enough decisions are made on substance."

The transfer culture begins in high schools, where transfer rules are especially lax at private schools, prep schools and the fly-by-night schools that appear and disappear from the landscape each season. It's not uncommon for a high school player to be thrown out of a school for disciplinary reasons and find himself in uniform for another school within 48 hours.

And there are no rules for AAU programs, where players change teams week by week, often depending on who can offer them more gear or perks. The lesson becomes obvious in high school: If you are tall and talented, there's always greener grass or a second chance.

"It's definitely out of control," said Chris Sparks, the coach at Wilbraham & Monson Academy, a prep school in Massachusetts. "I think transferring

Prized recruits (cont.)

is at a point right now where it's condoned."

And after leaving a transient high school environment, players have found themselves in a college atmosphere where transfer rules have evolved into suggestions and loyalty and patience are as en vogue as Filas.

NCAA rule changes have helped increase the number of transfers. In 2006, the NCAA passed the graduate transfer rule, which allowed players who graduated to transfer and become eligible immediately as long as the school they were going to had a graduate program that their old school didn't offer.

"What I've been surprised about is the fifth-year transfer is probably the most sought-after recruit in the country," said Miami coach Jim Larrañaga. "Even greater than a McDonald's All-American."

The other rule is the controversial transfer waiver rule for a sick relative. This allows a player to transfer closer to home and be eligible immediately if he can prove someone close to him is ill. This led to a flurry of sick relatives when a player didn't put up big numbers and eye rolls around the sport. In men's basketball in the 2011-12 season, the NCAA granted 34 of 52 waivers, prompting many coaches to ask for clarity or a change.

"Make it open season where everyone gets a chance to play right away," said Oregon State coach Craig Robinson. "Not just the people willing to do the shenanigans."

Multiple coaches also pointed to a polluted high school recruiting environment, which the NCAA has been both hapless and helpless in stopping. Coaches say that it's virtually impossible to recruit an elite high school player without compromising ethics. When asked if corrupt high school recruiting has led to the transfer market being more attractive, Larrañaga said, "I would say that's very true." Larrañaga added that the NCAA has set rules in recruiting, but not everyone follows them. "The problem with our society in general is that we're so driven to win and succeed that the temptation to circumvent the rules or bend them is too tempting," he said. "Especially when the reward is so great. I don't think the risk is worth the reward. Other coaches may feel differently."

What perhaps sped up the trend is the NCAA's elimination of the spring evaluation period from 2009 to '11, which robbed coaches of valuable windows to evaluate players. That led to schools and players making ill-informed choices, and hence more transfers.

And with so many players available, Atlantic 10 coaches like Hurley are now competing with blue blood schools for transfers.

This month, Alex Murphy picked Florida over Rhode Island after deciding to leave Duke. A decade ago, elite programs like Florida rarely ventured into transfer recruiting.

But they're here to stay now. In the last six years, Florida coach Billy Donovan has taken former blue chippers such as Vernon Macklin (Georgetown), Mike Rosario (Rutgers) and Dorian Finney-Smith (Virginia Tech). He finds the players mature and refreshing to coach.

"There's a little bit more of an ownership they take the second time around," Donovan said. "You're getting a guy who is a little bit more caloused and hardened."

As a player at Seton Hall in the 1990s, Hurley considered transferring and he remembers telling the Newark Star-Ledger that he was considering going to Notre Dame or should have gone there. He said Seton Hall fans turned on him and viewed him as disloyal. "Back then it was looked at different," said Hurley, who didn't transfer.

How different is it? Hurley took three transfers at URI when he arrived there from Wagner two years ago, and he acknowledges that the environment won't change anytime soon. He said the numbers will continue to increase because every Top 20 recruit expects to be one-and-done. Combine that with so many early commitments leading to uninformed decisions and regrets are inevitable.

"As long as those two factors are in place," Hurley said, "to me that number is always going to be high."

Who is next?

A basketball recruit dies. At the pearly gates, he's greeted by God and the devil.

God: We're going to allow you to make a decision on what you'd like to do.

Recruit: Really? I know what I want to do.

God: You have to check out each place.

The recruit goes with the devil to hell. It's absolutely awesome. Guys are playing ball every day in front of packed arenas. There's eating, drinking and partying with pretty women.

Recruit: If this is hell, I can't wait to get to heaven.

He goes to heaven. It's sedate, not much going on. His family, friends and dog are there. But it's pretty quiet.

God: So what do you want to do?

Recruit: I've made my decision, I'm going with the devil.

He goes with the devil, walks into the gates of hell. It's fire and brimstone and everyone is screaming. It's the worst thing he's ever seen.

Recruit: Wait a minute? What happened to all the ball playing? And food? And women? And partying?

Devil: That was your official visit. This is what it's really like.

Larrañaga punctuates the punch line with a slap of his knee. He gives credit for the joke to Miami baseball coach Jim Morris, but the Hurricanes are poised to be the again be the face of Transfer Nation in 2014-15.

The current flux of the Hurricane program -- a year of purgatory between ACC title contention -- reveals a portrait of a modern program in the transfer era.

Miami won the ACC title with three transfer starters last season -- Shane Larkin (DePaul), Trey McKinney Jones (UMKC) and Kenny Kadji (Florida). They'll be in contention for it again next season thanks to transfers Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas), both of whom are sitting out.

"They practice on the same team every day and beat the white team a lot," said Larrañaga, referring to the current starters.

Miami's white team has lost to St. Francis (Brooklyn), UCF and Nebraska. An injury to promising freshman guard Deandre Burnett, who is redshirting this season, has left the Hurricanes bereft of scoring options. While Rodriguez and McClellan

hate watching their new teammates struggle, they are confident they made the right move. They'll have two years of eligibility left, and both will be 23 year-olds poised to dominate the ACC as seniors. For now, they discuss their plight while riding bikes on South Beach.

"I'm just so happy as a person right now," Rodriguez said. "There's so many times that we just talk to each other and say, 'Wow, we're really happy about what we're doing. We're getting after it.'"

Yes, the social scene for Rodriguez is upgraded from Manhattan, Kansas. He grew up in Puerto Rico and attended high school in Miami. But contentedness also stems from an opportunity to improve his body and refine his game.

Rodriguez, who averaged 11.4 points and made the Big 12 second team last year, used the past few months to heal his balky left knee. He said he played at 60 percent last season and it hurt from the moment he woke up until he went to bed. Rodriguez credited trainer Wes Brown for getting it to 90 percent this year with far less pain. Rodriguez has expanded his game, which he said had been limited to three-pointers and drives to the hoop. He credited assistant Chris Caputo for adding a floater and mid-range shots through relentless drilling.

"You can really dive in," Caputo said, "and try and help a guy to make improvements."

Miami coaches called around the Big 12 to find out what each player needed to work on. The focus for McClellan, who averaged 13.5 points per game in Austin, has been on the defensive end and three-point shooting. McClellan shot just 27 percent from three-point range last year, which has led to subtle footwork adjustments. He's also enjoyed a one-on-one drill in the lane where there's a close out defender and a manager with a pad that ensures he finishes with contact. He's put on five pounds of muscle from a weight training regiment he found much tougher than the one at Texas.

"I could never see myself sitting out a year," McClellan said. "I used to question why people transfer all the time. In the end, when I think about it, we're getting better every day."

And next season, when Miami bursts out to a hot start like George Washington, Iowa State, Oregon, Toledo or UMass did this season, no one should act shocked. The balance of power in college basketball has transferred to those savvy enough to collect and develop top transfers. And it's not changing anytime soon.

Miami's methodical offense took the ball away from Syracuse's efficient offense

Syracuse.com
Mike Waters
Jan. 4, 2014

Syracuse, N.Y. — Time of possession is a football statistic. It's not usually associated with the game of basketball.

But Miami coach Jim Larrañaga invoked the time of possession phrase after his team's near-upset of No. 2 Syracuse at the Carrier Dome on Saturday.

Miami held Syracuse to a season-low 49 points, far below the Orange's season average of 76.2 per game. The Orange won, 49-44, but it was the Syracuse's lowest point total in a win since the 2003-04 season.

"You don't get to play offense, if you're on defense," Larrañaga said of slowing down Syracuse's offense by making the Orange play defense for longer stretches. "You don't get to use all that offensive skill."

Larrañaga said he and his staff pay attention to the advanced stats of Ken Pomeroy, whose numbers rank Syracuse as the No. 2 most efficient offensive team in the country for points per possession. For that reason, Larrañaga wanted to keep the ball away from the Orange the same way NFL coaches want to keep the ball away from Peyton Manning and the Denver Broncos offense.

"If you're that good offensively and you're going to score at that high a rate," said Larrañaga, "the one thing you don't want to do is give them a lot of opportunities to score."

The Syracuse players said it was frustrating to play defense for so long.

"They made us work on defense and then we'd come down and take a quick shot

and then they're right back on offense," SU senior C.J. Fair said. "You can't get any rhythm like that."

Syracuse made just 36 percent of its field goal attempts. The Orange went 3-for-15 from 3-point range.

But Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim said he was happy with the quality of the Orange's shots.

"Their defense was the problem," Boeheim said of his team's offensive struggles. "Their defense was very good. We've played teams that have taken the whole 35 seconds many times this year and our offense has been good."

Other teams have tried to slow down the game against Syracuse this season, but none were as successful at it as Miami was on Saturday. The Hurricanes would eat time off the clock and still get a good shot with only seconds left on the shot clock. Miami made 42 percent of its shots, including 7 out of 19 3-pointers.

"They did a good job of it," Syracuse guard Trevor Cooney said. "They took it down and got a good jump shot or make a three. It takes a lot out of you. You think you're playing good defense for 30 seconds and then in the last five they hit a three."

Miami hurt its game-plan with 15 turnovers.

"The one thing we didn't want to do was turn the ball over," Larrañaga said. "I told the team they're like the Miami Heat. If you turn the ball over against them, they shoot a layup or a three."

Syracuse also played terrific defense in the game's final six minutes. The Orange trailed 40-35 with six minutes left in the game, but the Hurricanes would score just

four points the rest of the way. And the final two came with nine seconds left in the game.

"I think we've seen it once or twice this season, but I feel like we're going to see it in the ACC," Cooney said. "Teams are going to hold the ball and make us defend in the 2-3 and really get out to their shooters and really defend. It's tough to do. It really takes a lot out of you. But when it got to the end of the game, we got the stops we wanted. We made them make tough plays and got turnovers."

Checking in with Huger as UM Enters ACC Play

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Jan. 3, 2014

Entering the new year and the heart of a very difficult ACC schedule, the new-look Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team have had a third of the season in the record book to answer questions about what the team's identity will be after losing so much from last year's Sweet 16 team. At 8-5 overall (0-1 ACC), there are still more questions than answers. SOTU had the opportunity to chat with assistant coach Michael Huger about where the team is now, and where he hopes it is heading for the rest of the season and beyond.

"The main thing is we've got to get better in all phases of the game," Huger said. "When you have multiple things you've got to correct, it makes it a little more difficult. We're not far away but we still have a lot of things to work on."

The Hurricanes struggles have been particularly noticeable on offense, where the team has posted an Offensive Rating (points per 100 possessions) of 102.4, which ranks 227th of 351 Division 1 teams, and is averaging only 65.0 points, good for 307th. One major reason is that freshmen Davon Reed and Manu Lecomte have been splitting time at the point. Though both are doing an admirable job, it's a change from the steady leadership of NBA 1st-round pick Shane Larkin the last two years. The team also lacks a natural three-point bomber - four Hurricanes from last year's team had career percentages higher than Rion Brown's 33.3 percent, which leads all returnees. Reed (37.5 percent), Lecomte (38.1), and junior college transfer James Kelly (45.0), but only Reed shoots at the volume of seniors Brown and Garrius Adams from outside.

That the Hurricanes are out of sync at times is no surprise. Some players prefer the ball in different spots on the floor or from different types of passes. Huger says that is a matter of getting the players used to each other and developing the chemistry that comes with years of playing together.

"When you have guys that haven't played together, it's tough to get them to gel and think as one," Huger explained. "Right now, we have individual thinkers and not collective thinkers. Once we get it together and those guys start to play as one, everything will change and some of those close games, we'll win, which helps their confidence."

On the defensive end, the team has been surprisingly effective - with a huge caveat. Known for playing tight man-to-man defense and mixing in full-court pressure with his scramble defense, Coach Jim Larranaga has the Hurricanes playing more 2-3 zone than any of his teams at any point in his career. This has taken advantage of a long and lengthy team, where Lecomte is the only available scholarship player listed below 6'5", and preserves a thin team that has only nine available scholarship players. The Hurricanes have a defensive rating of 95.3 (points allowed per 100 possessions), which is 53rd in Division I, and their 60.3 points per game allowed ranks 12th out of all teams.

More than solving those specific challenges, the Hurricanes coaching staff is looking to see someone step up into a leadership role. Though this is a team with five seniors, they are all playing very different roles for the first time in their career. Brown has perhaps made the most impact, with his hustle setting an example for other players as he is leading the team in points and assists, while placing second in rebounds and steals. Garrius Adams has made a major impact as he returns to the

court after almost two years away. But neither of them has stepped up to the mantle of clear leader at this point.

"We have to find that leader," Huger said. "It seems like Davon Reed is trying to emerge as that guy, but he's not experienced enough to get there yet. He's a freshman but he's trying."

The Hurricanes are on a three-game winning streak, after solid wins against La-Salle and Loyola (MD) at home and a road win over Savannah State. While the improvement has excited Canes fans, it may be short-lived, as the team is walking into a buzzsaw of an ACC schedule that starts with games on the road versus Syracuse (January 4) and North Carolina (January 8).

Huger said that the change has been noticeable in practice as well as in the results of games.

"We have been practicing better," Huger told us. "We pay attention to the details in our scouting reports and overall we've been working much harder." The team has been communicating better and learning each others' playing styles, leading to more easy baskets and a reduction in turnovers.

The Hurricanes will need to continue to make strides in all aspects of the game and establish consistency to remain competitive the rest of the way.

Author's note: As usual SOTU's hoops consigliere Josh Frank added his input and editing skills to this piece and for that this writer is grateful.

After many stops, Kirk finds stride leading Canes

The Daily Orange

Tyler Piccotti

Jan. 3, 2014

Miami Hurricanes forward Donnavan Kirk feels very much at home when he's in the kitchen.

Whether he's making a plate of fettuccine Alfredo or a tray of blueberry muffins, he isn't afraid to roll up his sleeves and get to work.

"I like to eat good, and the best food is the food you make," Kirk said with a laugh.

Before this season, finding that same comfort level on the basketball court wasn't as easy for the fifth-year graduate student. After two college transfers and four lackluster seasons, though, Kirk is making the most of his final year of eligibility.

The 22-year-old has emerged as Miami's (8-5, 0-1 Atlantic Coast) best two-way player this season. He leads the team in rebounds and blocks, and a personal-best 9.6 points per game. But on Saturday, Kirk's newfound comfortability will be put to the test in the Carrier Dome against No. 2 Syracuse (13-0) at 2 p.m.

"I'm always aiming to come out and get double-doubles and do my job completely," Kirk said. "But I can't do that without my teammates, and our mindset on Saturday will be to go out and get a win."

Kirk is fully at ease with his teammates and the weather in sunny Coral Gables, but his journey there had many different stops.

The first came after the Michigan native played one season as a star freshman at Notre Dame Prep. Frustrated after being consistently double and triple-teamed by opponents, Kirk transferred to Detroit Country Day (Mich.) High School.

After he was forced to forego his sophomore season, Kirk played there for two years. Kurt Keener, his coach at Country Day, said that Kirk was one of the most intelligent players on the squad.

No longer the unquestioned superstar of his team, Kirk's status as a role player allowed him to thrive and become one of the top high school recruits in Michigan by his senior year.

"He came in and was the missing piece of a very talented group," Keener said. "I remember him after a few games saying, 'This is wonderful. I haven't had a double team yet, and I'm free to do my thing.'"

Kirk chose to attend Miami over Michigan State, Iowa and USC. After redshirting his freshman season after four games due to injury, Kirk played in only 13 games during his second season under head coach Frank Haith.

Frustrated once again, he transferred to DePaul in search of more playing time and to reconnect with his family.

"That was such a big positive for me," Kirk said. "They would come down to the games, and I could be more supportive with my granddad being pretty ill."

After the Blue Demons sputtered through two losing seasons, though, Kirk opted to use his fifth year of eligibility elsewhere.

Many schools were interested, including the one where he started his college career. His familiarity with the city and campus steered him back to Miami.

"That process was much crazier than my high school recruitment," Kirk said. "It was a wild, wild ride."

Current Hurricanes head coach Jim Larrañaga called the recruitment of fifth-year students the "new rage in college basketball." He said many teams would rather have an experienced player than wait for a young freshman to develop. Miami fit that bill perfectly, after the team's top six scorers departed through graduation or the NBA Draft.

Although Kirk is new to Larrañaga's system, his transition has been much easier than expected.

"You can see where there would be resentment towards the new player in many cases," Larrañaga said. "But for Donnavan, he already knows the other seniors from his first time here. They're OK with each other."

The Hurricanes still stumbled out of the gate, but one of the bright spots in their recent 5-2 stretch has been Kirk, who came down with at least nine rebounds in four of those contests.

"We weren't ready to be a competitor when the season started," Larrañaga said, "but he's helping us get there."

Now on a three-game winning streak, the Hurricanes are finally starting to find the recipe for success.

In returning to Miami, Kirk has found a home and eased the Hurricanes' otherwise back-breaking transitional period. Against Syracuse on Saturday, both Kirk's comfortability and Miami's stability will be tested.

"For me," Kirk said, "this game is a great test to put yourself out there against some of the best players in the country and try to come out on top."

Rebuilding Miami hopes slow and steady limits growing pains

Syracuse.com
Patrick Stevens
Dec. 31, 2013

Jim Larrañaga is among the sharpest basketball coaches out there. His construction of George Mason's program (complete with the 2006 Final Four run) illustrated that. His ability to coax ACC regular-season and tournament titles out of Miami (where basketball historically is a relative afterthought when it is permitted to exist at all) last season demonstrated it as well.

Those Hurricanes should have been taken more seriously, if only because of their clever coach and collective experience. This year's bunch still has the coach but virtually none of the experience. It's been a bumpy ride so far.

But give Larrañaga this much: He's extracting what he can, which sure didn't look like it would be much when Miami opened with a loss to St. Francis Brooklyn and an overtime escape against Georgia Southern. The Hurricanes have done what a limited team should: Shorten the game.

Ranked 349th out of 351 teams on KenPom.com in adjusted tempo, Miami is making it clear it will play at a plodding pace because it provides the best chance to win. The rest of the ACC, you have been warned.

Record: 8-5 (0-1 ACC)

Best victory: The Hurricanes upended Arizona State 60-57 at the Wooden Legacy on Dec. 1, one of two losses suffered by the Sun Devils this season.

Worst loss: Based on the RPI today? That would be the 63-58 setback against Central Florida on Nov. 21. At year's end? The opening-night loss to St. Francis Brooklyn will be a contender. So, too, could the 61-

60 defeat against Virginia Tech on Dec. 8.

Pleasant surprise: It's an inexact science trying to figure out how junior college transfers will translate to the Division I level. James Kelly was going to get the chance to play, simply because Miami needed some interior players. But Kelly has been more than serviceable, averaging 9.2 points and 5.5 rebounds while shooting 53.8 percent.

Biggest disappointment: Deandre Burnett's injury. Miami was going to take some lumps regardless, but it really could have used Burnett's scoring prowess. Instead, the freshman suffered a wrist injury in practice before the season started and is redshirting this season.

Key in conference: Avoiding injury. Miami isn't exceptionally talented, but between a plodding pace, smart play and a shrewd coach, it will be able to steal a few games against ACC opponents. That won't be the case if a thin roster is further eroded.

Meetings with Syracuse: Jan. 4 at the Carrier Dome and Jan. 25 in Coral Gables.

Most compelling storyline: Will Miami finish .500 or better? That would qualify as a highly successful season given the attrition from last year's ACC champions. It's going to require at least eight and perhaps nine victories (depending on whether an ACC tournament win is tossed in there), and that isn't going to be an easy task.

Preseason conference pick: 12th.

Revised conference forecast: 13th. Things will be different next year. Burnett will be healthy, Davon Reed (who is averaging 8.8 points as a freshman) will be a year older and transfers Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas) will be eligible.

For now, though, Miami is stuck in a transition season with a roster filled mostly with freshmen and career reserves. Larrañaga's enjoyed 15 consecutive winning seasons dating back to his first year at George Mason, but it's a streak very much in peril.

Improvement Key For C Jekiri

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Dec. 27, 2013

This season has not gone the way Tonye Jekiri envisioned.

He was supposed to be poised for a breakout season after being a key reserve on last year's ACC Championship team as head coach Jim Larrañaga and many teammates raved about his improvements in the offseason.

With the graduation of three post players, Jekiri, a 7-foot center, was expected to shine this year, but that hasn't happened as he struggled from the onset and has lost his starting job while averaging 3.6 points and 4.2 rebounds in 17.4 minutes a game.

"For me I'm staying positive and Coach L talked to me, he didn't just move me out of the starting lineup and talked to me about how James (Kelly) has been scoring and he told me he loves my defense, rebounding, running the floor, and bringing energy on defense and I really respect that," Jekiri said. "I'm still looking for my breakthrough on offense."

Jekiri struggled offensively in the first three games as a starter averaging 4.0 points on 5-of-17 shooting (29.4 percent) from the field against St. Francis (NY), Georgia Southern, and Texas Southern.

"On the offensive end, I noticed some things that were really my fault as in not asking for the ball that much and ball-screening and expecting a lob," Jekiri said. "In the beginning of games we've had we didn't share the ball a lot so there was less touches for the posts, but I didn't really blame anybody—I blamed myself because I felt like most of the time if I posted up strong, build up that confidence, then I could score on anybody. I really worked

in the off-season. The other thing with my offensive game, which I am still trying to step up is shooting the ball with a lot of confidence and grab offensive rebounds and make some put-backs."

He was removed from the starting lineup in favor of Kelly after his slow start and re-inserted in against George Washington, but scored just two points and had one rebound in 21 minutes prompting a return to the bench.

"It was really frustrating, but I just put everything behind me because as a basketball player, this is my fourth year playing ball and I know I need to understand more about the game and I'm playing hard every day," Jekiri said. "I'm still learning and I put everything that happens behind me and I learn from my mistakes."

Larrañaga, who told reporters before the season that Jekiri is a potential first-round NBA draft pick, has delivered a message to his sophomore center about improving:

Tonye Jekiri

"My message to Tonye has been you've got to get in the gym on your own. You've got to spend more times. It's about hours. You lack a lot of experience."

Larrañaga has been informing Jekiri learn what he needs to do to improve.

"Every game we play he talks to me about issues and mistakes and lets me know and I really appreciate that," Jekiri said. "If somebody doesn't tell you about your mistakes then it seems like you're doing the right thing. He has seen some things and talked to me about seeing me have a lot of energy on the floor or the little minutes that I play I really take advantage of it. He tells me to spend more time in the gym and try to improve on my offensive game because that is the area that I'm really lack-

ing and it's something I really want to do too."

Jekiri came to UM as a defensive specialist and is still concentrating on the defensive end of the court while his offensive game is a work in progress.

"Defense is a big key of every game and every play," he said. "I really don't get worried about a missed shot, but I really enjoy playing defense and rebounding the ball. I just try to make sure each night even if I'm going to have two points, four points, I should, at least being the tallest or second-tallest on the floor, I should have at least have eight, nine, or 10 rebounds each night. That has been my key focus and defensive has been the key for every team playing basketball."

Jekiri had his most productive game of the season on Sunday—a nine-point, seven-rebound showing in a win over La Salle. The nine points were the most he's scored in his 46 games at UM and hoping is a sign of things to come for UM.

He'll look to continue his solid play on Dec. 30 against Loyola (MD).

Burnett Staying Positive While Out

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Dec. 23, 2013

Burnett broke his left wrist in practice after the exhibition game in November, which required surgery ending his season.

"I was devastated obviously," Burnett said. "But the team needs positive energy so I just can't be down because I'm hurt, I have to stay positive and bring energy to the team."

Teammates Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan, who are also sitting out this year due to NCAA transfer rules, have helped Burnett with the process.

"They just tell me to stay positive and that we're going to come back strong and even better when we get back," Burnett said.

Burnett committed to Miami in March 2012 during his senior year at Carol City, but spent a year at Massanutten (Va.) Military Academy before enrolling at UM. He was expected to be one of Miami's top scorers this season and had a strong showing in the exhibition game scoring 16 points in 22 minutes.

"It's something that you can really build on," Burnett said. "I know how it feels under the lights when it's time to play. I got that out of the way, that feeling, so it won't be anything new for me next year."

Burnett had surgery last month and still has a cast on and is unsure when he will get it off. The next stage will be to strengthen the wrist before resuming basketball activities.

"When I come back I'm going to be in tip-top shape and it'll just be the basketball part that I'll have to get back," Burnett said.

He injured his wrist during practice when driving to the basket. There was a collision at the rim and Burnett fell on his wrist. When he comes back, he believes he's going to change his game a bit.

"At every level you've got to adjust so I feel I'll have to adjust my game to the college game and start shooting more pull-ups and stuff like that instead of going all the way to the basket and knowing when to go all of the way to the basket," he said. "I feel like I will have to adjust to I want fall as much. But it's basketball, you're going to fall."

Burnett has been traveling with the team, which has been beneficial to him as well as the team.

"He's doing great as a sideline reporter," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He sits there on the side, is very into it, and is trying to figure things out."

Seeing the environments on the road has also been helpful.

"I think it's really good for me because I get to see how the arenas are going to be, the environment, how refs officiate games on the road, and you can't let the crowd affect you," Burnett said. "You have to mentally focus when you're on the road."

The Hurricanes are 7-5 after their win over La Salle on Sunday with three of their losses by five points or less.

"No matter what, win or lose, the team stays positive," Burnett said. "Everybody has the right mindset to get better each day. We know we're building, we're a new team and I think they'll get back on track."

With the additions of Burnett, Rodriguez, and McClellan for next year's team, there is a sense of excitement around the program.

"It's going to be a great season," Burnett said. "I think they're going to finish strong this year, I still have faith that Coach L is going to get them on track—but I think next year we'll have the right chemistry, the pieces will be together and the sky is the limit."

Larrañaga waiting for leaders to emerge

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Dec. 22, 2013

Wanted: gym rats and quarterbacks.

Eleven games into the season, University of Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga said he wishes more of his players spent their free time in the gym, and that somebody would "be a quarterback, calling out plays and barking out orders."

The Hurricanes (6-5) are coming off a 68-51 road win at Savannah State, and although Larrañaga was happy with the victory, he wants to see more passion from his players. Last year, guards Shane Larkin and Durand Scott and fifth-year senior Julian Gamble were the vocal leaders, the ones who rallied the troops whenever things got tense.

This year, freshman guards Davon Reed and Manu Lecomte are starting to get comfortable with that role, but their inexperience shows. Fifth-year guard Garrius Adams has plenty of experience, but he's a quiet guy. And senior Rion Brown is still evolving as an on-court leader.

Larrañaga said when UM's lead was cut from 24 points to 12 against Savannah State, he saw the opposing players huddle, but his players were each walking around alone. "Each guy was probably thinking, 'Oh, I made a mistake.' They are in their own mind, rather than pulling together at that time."

He also thinks many of the players are not spending enough time honing their skills before and after practice. He told the story of former Providence and NBA player Ernie DiGregorio, who lived in the gym, and even paid kids 10 cents to try and guard him.

"Until a player makes a total and unconditional commitment to being the best that he can be, it's very hard to improve as much as you would like because it takes hours and hours and hours," Larrañaga said. "The players I've coached in the past that have enjoyed the greatest success are the gym rats, the guys who are always in the gym, love being in there."

He said he has a few players who fit that mold, but they are ineligible this year, likely referring to transfers Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan. He said Rodriguez has shown great leadership skills from the sideline, and is mentoring Lecomte.

He said one player who is giving his all — and then some — is freshman walk-on guard Michael Fernandez, a Belen graduate. The coach uses him as an example.

"My message to the team was we need to play as a team the way Michael's practicing, with great effort and enthusiasm. It's amazing the results you get when you do."

UM men missing five dynamic players

Miami Herald
Walter Villa
Dec. 14, 2013

The University of Miami men's basketball team could put together a pretty good starting lineup comprised of UM players who are, for various reasons, unavailable to coach Jim Larrañaga.

Junior guards Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas) have to sit out this season because of NCAA transfer rules. Freshman guard Deandre Burnett (surgery on left wrist) is redshirting. Freshman guard Corn Elder was injured playing football this season, and forward Derrick Griffin is reportedly at a prep school for academic reasons.

How good are those five?

Rodriguez made All-Big 12 second team as a sophomore; McClellan averaged 13.5 points as a sophomore; Burnett averaged 30-plus points in prep school; Elder won two consecutive state titles and was named the Player of the Year by The Tennessean newspaper; and Griffin had 26 points and 13 rebounds in the final to lead his team to a Texas state title.

Next season, assuming those five players are all available, the Canes' talent would get a major boost.

Rodriguez, McClellan and Burnett would seem to be the front-runners to start in a deep and talented three-guard lineup. Then there's Elder and current freshmen Manuel Lecomte and Davon Reed and incoming recruits Ja'Quan Newton from Philadelphia and James Palmer of Washington, D.C.

Of those guards, the highest rated by Rivals.com are four-star players Burnett, Newton and Reed.

Meanwhile, Lecomte, who opened this season as the Canes' starting point guard, is now coming off the bench.

Larrañaga, though, said he does not view it as a demotion.

"What happened was that our man-to-man defense has not been as good as it needed to be, and we had to switch to a zone," he said. "Davon is bigger. So we went with Davon at the point to give us a better chance of defending."

Lecomte is averaging 7.0 points and is making only 38.5 percent of his field goals. Reed is averaging 9.0 points on 36.9 shooting.

Another Canes player who lost his starting job this season is 7-0 sophomore center Tonye Jekiri. In the preseason, a few Canes mentioned him as the team's most improved player.

So far, though, Jekiri is averaging just 3.0 points and 4.2 rebounds on .350 shooting, which is especially low for a big man.

Larrañaga said the early hype regarding Jekiri was justified because of how well he played in the preseason.

"But when we got into games, things changed," Larrañaga said. "The way people [defended him changed]."

Jekiri, who was replaced in the lineup by James Kelly, has struggled with his shooting.

"[Missing shots] weighs heavily on your confidence," Larrañaga said. "And right now, he is not as confident a player as we'd like him to be."

Hoops team hoping to get in sync as ACC play begins

Sun Sentinel
Christy Chirinos
Dec. 7, 2013

Jim Larrañaga expected his young Miami team might have trouble scoring this season.

And through their first nine games, the Hurricanes have, struggling on some nights and shooting 41 percent on the year.

But now, as Miami prepares to begin ACC play on Sunday with a home game against rival Virginia Tech at the BankUnited Center, the Hurricanes understand the stakes get a little higher and it's time to try and find some consistency.

"Every game is a big game. That's one thing that Coach L focuses on," said freshman Davon Reed, who has worked his way into the starting point guard role and is averaging 8.9 points. "We have to approach this just like we do every other game and we definitely have to get the win. Being that it is ACC play now, or the first ACC game, we need to take care of business."

Miami opens conference play coming off one of the toughest performances of the year, a 60-49 loss at Nebraska as part of the Big 10/ACC Challenge. The Hurricanes (5-4) managed just a season-low 13 points at the half but were still able to pull within five in the second half.

Nebraska answered with a 19-9 run and its defense held the Hurricanes under 50 points for the second time this season. While all of those ugly numbers may have been disappointing on their own, they were especially frustrating after Miami notched a 60-57 upset win over Arizona State three days earlier.

Still, despite the challenges, Larrañaga can still smile when candidly describing the ups and downs his team has endured through the early part of its season.

"Offense is like dancing. It's a rhythm," Larrañaga said. "When two people know how to dance, they're in sync all the time. If you've ever seen a marching band ... the only thing you hear is all of them. It's not about one. They're all playing together and it works really well together, but if one person is out of sync, oh, the music stinks. And what we're finding is we're trying to get everybody to play in sync, to dance together. You're not out there doing a solo. How you perform affects how everyone else performs and that's important."

Miami's struggles mean Larrañaga has had to make adjustments to his lineups and his players concede the Hurricanes are still trying to find their way. Their 10-day, four-game road trip may have helped in terms of team chemistry, but a win over Virginia Tech would go further, especially since Miami won't play another conference game until Jan. 4 when it travels to Syracuse.

While Miami has struggled, the Hokies (6-3) come to the BankUnited Center riding a three-game win streak. Tech's Jarell Eddie is averaging 18.8 points and 6.9 rebounds to lead four Hokies averaging double figures while Miami can claim just two players — Rion Brown and Garrius Adams — that are doing the same.

Defensively, the Hurricanes will have to find a way to contain Tech's solid perimeter game. The Hokies are shooting 46 percent from 3-point range, something Larrañaga believes could be a factor.

"Adam Smith we recruited at George Mason ... and Jarell Eddie has been on fire from three," Larrañaga said. "And when you have a two-guard and a three-man

both shooting the ball extremely well from three, it opens things up for your big guys."

Larrañaga zones out with his Hurricanes

Examiner
Paul Borden
Dec. 7, 2013

More college basketball teams are going to zone defenses in the early season to counter the increase in the number of fouls being called under the new rule changes, but University of Miami coach Jim Larrañaga has gone to more zone for a slightly different, more basic reason.

His Hurricanes simply aren't getting the hang of the man-to-man defense Larrañaga prefers them to play.

The Hurricanes used a basic 2-3 zone for their primary defense in their last game, a 60-49 loss at Nebraska Wednesday, after expanding its use in the John Wooden Legacy tourney the week before. They won two of three games in that event, including a win over Arizona State.

They likely will be in it for a while, including their Atlantic Coast Conference opener Sunday afternoon against Virginia Tech, at least until Larrañaga is satisfied they can be effective in the man-to-man.

As the veteran coach explained it at a press briefing Friday, the fundamentals of the man-to-man defense requires the defender to not only keep his eye on the man he is guarding but also keep track of where the ball is on the court.

"This group found that very challenging," Larrañaga said of his Hurricanes. "They would stay with their man and lose sight of the ball regularly."

That led to many uncontested layups because the "help" defense simply wasn't there. If the opposing ball handler beat his Miami defender, no Hurricane teammate was coming over to pick him up.

"We were giving up a lot of straight-line drives and opportunities at the rim," Larrañaga said. "That's how Central Florida beat us."

Switching to the zone, however, has helped the Hurricanes pay a little more attention to where the ball is when they are on defense in addition to keeping track of the man in their area, Larrañaga said.

"Hopefully," he added, "before this season is over we'll be able to do both. But right the most important thing is helping each other."

Forward Donnavan Kirk, who played the last two seasons at DePaul before returning to Miami as a graduate player, said some adjusting has been required for the Hurricanes, who started the season playing primarily man-to-man.

"Zones have their pros and cons," Kirk said. "For us, it forces us to communicate and give help to our positions. But zones have to be constantly pro-active."

"Sometimes you can be in a zone and just be standing around. You've got to continually force yourself to be pro-active and not get caught standing around."

The Hurricanes, who will take a 5-4 record into their game against the 6-3 Hokies, also have made changes in the lineup from the group that began the season.

Kirk and senior guards Rion Brown and Garrius Adams are the only three Hurricanes who have started all nine games.

Forward James Kelly, a junior college transfer, has started the last five games in place of sophomore Tonye Jekiri inside, and freshman guard Davon Reed has taken over at point guard in place of another freshman, Manu LeComte.

They range in height from 6-feet-6 to 6-9, and their long arms and quick hands and feet contribute to the effectiveness of the zone.

After the game against Virginia Tech, the Hurricanes will take an 11-day break for final exams. They will resume play Dec. 19 at Savannah State, then finish the month with games at home against La Salle on Dec. 22 and Loyola-Maryland on Dec. 30.

Miami men's basketball team seeking consistency

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
Dec. 7, 2013

A basketball offense, Jim Larrañaga explained, is like ballroom dancing, orchestral music or synchronized swimming.

If that's the case, his Hurricanes would be stepping on each other's feet, hitting the wrong notes or kicking out of line.

Inconsistency reigns for the youthful Canes (5-4), whose offensive struggles have created as much concern as their successes have led to smiles.

UM's 60-57 win over Pac-12 stalwart Arizona State last Sunday was sandwiched in between a pair of games that saw the Hurricanes score less than 50 points. They put up just 13 points in the first half of a 60-49 loss to Nebraska on Wednesday in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge in Lincoln, Neb. In the past two decades, the City of Miami's temperature has dipped into the 40s more often than the Hurricanes' scoring output.

The last time UM scored less than 50 points in a game twice was 1993-94, when it finished 7-20 in Leonard Hamilton's fourth season. In 20 years and 604 games since, UM has scored in the 40s on just nine occasions, never more than twice in a year.

Until this season.

The 1994 team, which scored in the 40s in five different losses, ended the season on a 17-game losing streak. Don't expect that from this group, though it could take them a while to get up to speed.

"We're still trying to figure out what plays work against certain defenses and how to adjust to different teams and what they throw at you," freshman guard Davon Reed said. "Plus, not every shot's going to fall every game. That's just the way the game goes."

The Hurricanes are allowing 62.9 points per game, which ranks in the top 30 nationally. However, their offensive output

— a shade under 64 points per game — places them tied for 306th of 351 Division I teams.

"We're trying to get everyone to play in sync," Larrañaga said. "You're not out there doing a solo. How you perform affects how everyone else performs."

Miami gets a taste of ACC play at 12:30 p.m. Sunday against Virginia Tech (6-3). The Hokies are shooting well to start the season (45.5 three-pointers, fifth-best nationally) and have a strong interior presence (29.1 defensive rebounds per game, also fifth).

After that comes three more non-conference games. The Hurricanes begin their full-time ACC slate in January with games at Syracuse (Jan. 4) and North Carolina (Jan. 8).

Senior Rion Brown, who put up 6.3 points last year, was the most prolific returning scorer for a team that lost its top six scorers. He's made the most of his increased responsibility, leading UM in points (13.8), rebounds (6.6) and assists (3.0) per game. Graduate forward Donovan Kirk, who played his freshman year in Coral Gables and then transferred to DePaul, has averaged 9.2 points, 6.3 boards and 2.1 blocks in his return.

Reed scored a team-high 19 points against Arizona State and 17 in a loss to UCF, but is a combined 4-for-18 shooting in the games that followed those performances. However, Larrañaga said, Reed has played three positions, guarded four different player types and is starting at point when he's really a wing.

Like his teammates, Reed is trying to find his game. More importantly, he's trying to make it fit with the others.

"Who knows how long it's going to take," Reed said. "I think we're making some progress. Of course we're up and down, but we're on our way."

Larrañaga described a play in the Nebraska game that ended in a Tonye Jekiri dunk. The ball scarcely touched the floor as it

went from Brown to Reed to Jekiri to Garius Adams and back to Brown, who lobbed it to Jekiri for the slam.

"It was all bang-bang-bang-bang-bang-boom," he said, snapping his fingers.

That's the music he wants to hear.

Kirk thrives in return engagement

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 21, 2013

Donnavan Kirk was listed as a “newcomer” on the University of Miami basketball team’s preseason literature, but anyone who followed the program for the past five years was familiar with his name.

The 6-9 power forward from Pontiac, Mich., began his career at UM in 2009 and was redshirted after a back injury his freshman year. He played sparingly the first half of the 2010 season and transferred to DePaul to be closer to his ailing grandfather and because he hoped to get more playing time there. Kirk played two seasons at DePaul, averaging 6.2 points, 3.9 rebounds and 2.5 blocks.

All along, he kept tabs on the Hurricanes and kept in touch with his UM roommate, Garius Adams. He said he made the right decision going to DePaul, got a lot of experience there, but as he watched the Canes’ thrilling March Madness run last spring, he got the itch to return.

When he graduated from DePaul with a marketing degree in May, he decided to come back to UM for graduate school and his final year of eligibility. He is working toward his master’s degree in Community and Social Change at the UM School of Education.

Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga brought Kirk in to help make up for the loss of big men Kenny Kadji, Julian Gamble and Reggie Johnson. So far, he is the team’s leading scorer with 14.5 points per game and is averaging eight rebounds. He started the season with back-to-back double-doubles for a combined 34 points and 20 rebounds.

“With the graduation of those three guys, we were looking for size, and Donnavan

reached out to us, and it made sense because he is familiar with UM, with our personnel,” Larrañaga said. “Being a fifth-year player, he is further along in the process than if we had brought in a freshman. He is long, athletic, can score, block shots, make perimeter shots. He gives us a lot of what Kenny Kadji did and is filling his role very nicely.”

Kirk’s teammates say he brings an infectious energy to the team and is a force on the boards.

Adams is rooming with Kirk again and happy to have him back, not just for what he does on the court but also for his homemade blueberry muffins and his killer spaghetti and pasta Alfredo.

“I was upset when he left, didn’t think he should have, but Donnavan felt it was best for him,” Adams said. “When he was deciding what to do this season, he called me and asked how it is with Coach L, and I told him he’s a great coach and encouraged him to come back.”

Kirk feels at home. He liked what he found when he returned.

“It’s a real focused group, and with this staff it’s more about learning, about why things should be done this way or that way,” he said. “Coach L is a great teacher and motivator. Everything happens for a reason, so I don’t regret going to DePaul. I progressed a lot there.”

Kirk’s high school coach, Kurt Keener, is pleased to see his former player contributing for the Hurricanes. He watched Kirk’s game evolve at the famed Detroit Country Day — Shane Battier and Chris Webber are among the alumni — and was most impressed with his work ethic and team-first approach.

“Donnavan wants to make the most of his last year of college basketball, and with Miami’s change in coaching and all they did last year, he wanted to go back and be part of it,” Keener said. “He loved the school, loved the city, and has a high comfort level there. That is why he is playing with such confidence.”

Although he misses his mother, Tanya Orr, his father, Eric Kirk, and his three younger siblings, Kirk does have a Detroit connection here in Battier. Keener phoned Battier over the summer and told him to reach out to Kirk, if he could. Keener wound up as Battier’s son’s coach in Cane Nation, a youth basketball camp.

“Shane is really busy, but it was nice to see a familiar face from Country Day,” Kirk said. “Everything just fell into place here, and I’m really happy to be back.”

Read more here: <http://www.miami-herald.com/2013/11/21/3767975/canes-kirk-thrives-in-return-engagement.html?storylink=digger-topic#storylink=cpy>

Brown Ready To Lead New Look Canes

Inside The U
David Lake
Nov. 12, 2013

Going into this 2013-14 season, senior guard Rion Brown was expected to carry the scoring load for the Miami men's basketball team.

During UM's 84-55 exhibition win over Florida Tech last week, Brown didn't disappoint.

Brown was sharp as he scored 20 points in just 20 minutes while converting 7-of-8 shots from the field and making six three-pointers.

"It was a good start personally for me confidence-wise going into this year," Brown said of the exhibition game. "I never really start off the year shooting well so it's definitely a confidence-booster for me."

With the Hurricanes losing their top six players from a team that won the ACC last season, Brown will be looked upon to be the veteran leader of this team. Brown says he is ready for that challenge.

"I have been working hard and preparing for this season ever since last year ended," Brown said. "I do feel like this is my team now in a way and I need to step up and lead with my play on the court and off the court by being a senior. I am excited about this year."

Miami does return four other players from last year's ACC Championship team and Brown is confident that winning culture will carry over to this season.

"Tasting that success just makes us hungrier," Brown said. "That was a lot of fun last year, so we want to put in the work to get back to that."

Brown has averaged 5.9 points per game over his career at Miami while shooting 38 percent. This year the Hurricanes will need him to be one of their top scorers.

"I definitely think me and Garrius can be the leading scorers and Tonye can be there too," Brown said. "Last year we had a lot of balance and I feel like us three can be the main core scoring group."

Center Tonye Jekiri figures to be a player to make a huge jump from last year to this season. Jekiri was more of a defensive player for the Hurricanes last year. Now he will be looked upon to help with the scoring.

"He is a totally different player," Brown said. "He is really coming into his own. He has a lot better on offense this year and he is bigger and stronger and that will only help him be even better on defense."

Miami will feature four newcomers to the team that figure to receive heavy minutes in the rotation. Brown has been pleased with the focus the young and inexperienced group has shown in the preseason practices.

"We have a lot of young guys and as long as we just listen to coach Larrañaga, we will be fine," Brown said. "All the guys have great work ethic, which I have been very happy about. We are going to learn and grow together and if we can just keep improving each day, we will be good. There will be mistakes, but we just have to push through those mistakes."

Miami was picked to finish 12 by the preseason ACC media this year. Brown and the Hurricanes will be looking to prove that prognostication wrong.

"I can understand it," Brown said. "All people can see right now is who we lost, not

who we got. They don't really know these guys and how we all play together. We are coming in with the same attitude that we have every year and we will just keep playing hard. There is a lot of new faces, but these guys can definitely play."

Miami plays their season opener tonight at the Bank United Center against St. Francis Brooklyn at 10 p.m. The game will be broadcast on ESPN3.

Miami's Offensive Issues on Display in Opener

AP
Tim Reynolds
Nov. 9, 2013

CORAL GABLES, Fla. (AP) — Jim Larrañaga looked at the first box score of Miami's season, scanning the Hurricanes' defensive numbers.

They allowed St. Francis Brooklyn to shoot only 37 percent from the field, 29 percent from 3-point range, and forced 17 turnovers Friday night. Going back to January 2000, the last 19 times a Miami team put together a game with defensive statistics like those, it not only left the court with a victory but did so by an average of 25 points.

Not this time.

The reigning Atlantic Coast Conference champions are starting anew.

Miami's offense was offensive on opening night. After just one game, it's already clear that finding scoring will be a problem for a program that's coming off ACC regular-season and tournament titles. Miami fell to St. Francis Brooklyn — a program that hasn't finished over .500 since 2003-04 — 66-62 in overtime, a game in which the Hurricanes shot only 31 percent and went 0 for 15 from 3-point range.

"We should win a game like that defensively," said Larrañaga, the reigning national coach of the year entering his third season on the Miami sideline. "But not when we're shooting 31 percent from the field and zero percent from the 3-point line."

Larrañaga said coming into Friday that he and his staff felt comfortable thinking Miami's defense could be very good. There's obviously not the same comfort level with the offense. And the telltale signs seem to have been there for a while — in Miami's

first intrasquad scrimmage this fall, the team played for 10 minutes in practice.

The score was 4-2.

"We've got a lot of work to do," Larrañaga said.

Donnavan Kirk shot 6 for 8 for the Hurricanes on Friday. The rest of the team was 13 for 53. Miami used nine players; only Kirk shot better than 30 percent.

The top six players from last season's team are gone. Shane Larkin packed up for the NBA, and the other five were seniors or graduate students who no longer have eligibility. And another huge blow came just before the start of this season, when Deandre Burnett — widely expected to be not only the team's top freshman but quite possibly its best offensive player — hurt his wrist so severely that Miami already knows he'll be redshirted.

Combined, all the players on the Miami roster have scored 1,724 points in their college careers.

That's 512 fewer than the nation's leading active scorer, Creighton's Doug McDermott.

"We have fewer weapons than we've ever had," Larrañaga said. "Last year, six guys could score in double figures on a given night. Now we don't have anybody that averaged over 6 points a game in their college career. So we're going to have a hard time manufacturing points."

Growing pains for this Miami team — which became the second straight reigning ACC champion to lose its first game the following season, after Florida State last year — were expected.

Point guard Manu Lecomte was playing his

first college game Friday. Garius Adams played his first game in nearly 20 months. Only one returnee scored more than 47 points for the Hurricanes for all of last season.

Larrañaga is convinced that once these new-look Hurricanes relax a bit, more shots will fall.

"It's a new year," Larrañaga said. "Last year was great, but it's behind us. This is about this team trying to be the best that it can be."

Team has plenty of holes to fill

Miami Herald
Walter Villa
Nov. 8, 2013

Julian Gamble is playing pro ball in France, Durand Scott is doing likewise in Spain and Shane Larkin, an NBA first-round pick, practiced with the Dallas Mavericks on Monday for the first time since breaking his ankle this past summer.

Trey McKinney Jones is playing in the NBA's Development League, Kenny Kadji is deciding between that and Europe, and Reggie Johnson was drafted by the D-League's Delaware 87ers.

The Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team, which makes its regular-season debut Friday at 10 p.m. against visiting St. Francis Brooklyn, will be without those six standouts, who combined to score 5,399 career points.

And as of Wednesday, freshman combo guard Deandre Burnett, who was expected to be a Canes go-to scorer, is out for the season because of a wrist injury.

What's left?

Not much, numerically at least. The Canes have just nine available scholarship players, four under the limit, and their returners account for just 13 percent of Miami's scoring, 14 percent in rebounding and 1 percent of assists from the season before, all ACC lows.

Canes coach Jim Larrañaga said he expects to start sophomore Tonye Jekiri at center, senior Donnavan Kirk at power forward, seniors Garius Adams and Rion Brown on the wings and freshman Manuel Lecomte at point guard.

Larrañaga and a couple of his players said Jekiri — listed at 7-0 and 235 pounds — is Miami's most improved player from last season.

"Tonye looks like a totally different person to me, body-wise," Brown said. "He has ton more post moves than last season. Coach L just limited him to one thing last year (alley-oop dunks), and now he is broadening his game."

Larrañaga agreed that Jekiri's skill set has improved, but now it's a matter of knowing when, for instance, to use his jump hook and when to go to the turnaround jumper.

"I spend a lot of time with Tonye on the court," Larrañaga said. "Tonye is very confident in his defense and his rebounding. He is not as confident in his scoring, although if he figures one or two things out, he could be a double-figure scorer."

Larrañaga said his other relatively novice starter, Lecomte, is a "terrific three-point shooter" who needs to be more aggressive. He needs to look for his shot more and be prepared to let it go.

For depth, the Canes will rely on 6-9 senior power forward/center Raphael Akpejori, 6-5 senior forward Erik Swoope, 6-7 junior power forward/center James Kelly and 6-6 freshman Davon Reed, whose role will be expanded because of Burnett's injury.

Reed, who is from Ewing, N.J., improved his bench press from 170 to 250 pounds from June to October. The 208-pounder will back up at point guard, shooting guard and small forward.

"Davon, of all our newcomers, is best prepared to play our defense," Larrañaga said. "He is a little more aggressively defensively, which is good ... but he could get in foul trouble."

"His natural position had we had Shane back and Deandre healthy would have been (small forward)."

ACC Team Preview: Miami Hurricanes

Rush the Court

Brad Jenkins

Nov. 6, 2013

Last season was a historic one for Miami basketball. The Hurricanes became the first school from outside the state of North Carolina to win the ACC regular season title outright and the ACC Tournament in the same year. Along the way came two home blowout wins over perennial league powers Duke and North Carolina, and a level of local support never seen before at Miami. They even had LeBron James and Dwayne Wade attend a game! Unfortunately, the top six players from that squad are now gone, so this will clearly be a rebuilding year for the Jim Larrañaga's squad.

The good news is that the man in charge is still Jim Larrañaga. The 29-year head coaching veteran swept conference and national Coach of the Year awards last season, but he is best known for leading George Mason to the 2006 Final Four. Larrañaga excels at putting pieces together to form a cohesive team and, despite his age, is known as a progressive thinking coach. He's constantly looking for new teaching and motivational techniques, and has also embraced the new advanced statistics now available. To prepare for this season's rules changes limiting contact, Larrañaga has put a greater emphasis on defending without fouling. As he explained to the media at the recent ACC Operation Basketball, the Hurricanes' goal each game is to limit opponents to less than one point per possession. If you put someone on the free throw line, all they have to do is hit one out of two to beat their goal. To combat that tendency, Miami preseason practices are stopped when the defense fouls and everybody runs sprints. Although the Hurricanes will have a dropoff this season, the program is in good shape moving forward. Next year, two transfers from Big 12 schools will be eligible, when Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas) will form a solid junior backcourt.

Newcomers

The amazing thing about the eight new players to the program is the incredible variety in the group, especially with how they arrived. This includes the two transfers that must sit out this year. Perhaps the strangest of all is graduate transfer Donnavan Kirk from DePaul who actually started his career at Miami. He started 30 games last year for the Blue Demons, but only averaged 6.2 PPG and 3.9 RPG in Oliver Purnell's system. More likely to help right away in the post is JuCo transfer James Kelly, a NJCAA D-II All-American. Shane Larkin's replacement at the PG spot could be 5'9" Manu Lecomte, a star on Belgium's U-18 team last year. Reportedly he is a quick and skilled shooter and passer, but it remains to be seen if the smallish Lecomte can handle the physical play he will see in the ACC. More perimeter help will come from the only two recruited American freshmen, 6'6" Davon Reed and 6'1" Deandre Burnett. Finally, there is 5'11" freshman football player Cornelius Elder, who is expected to join the basketball team when the football season is over. Last year Elder was voted the Tennessee prep Player of the Year in both football and basketball, so he may help at the point guard spot.

Returnees

This won't take long to list. Rion Brown is the only significant contributor from last year returning. It's essential that he become a strong leader vocally but also in his overall performance. To do that he must improve his three-point shooting, which dropped from 39.4 percent as a sophomore to 29.2 percent last year. He will be rejoined by senior Garrius Adams, who missed last season due to injury. Those two will provide good defense on the wing but must prove they are ready to handle a greater scoring burden. Seniors Raphael Akpejori and Erik Swoope have never been major contributors but at least they will provide experienced frontcourt depth and leadership for the newcomers.

Potential Breakout Player

The returning big man with the most po-

tential is 7'0" Tonye Jekiri, a sophomore native of Nigeria. He saw limited action last year, playing behind senior standouts Kenny Kadji, Reggie Johnson, and Julian Gamble, but he did show some flashes of talent. As expected from someone who's only played the game for a few years, the athletic Jekiri is still an offensive work in progress, but is already a good defender. With the opportunity now for major minutes, look for his improvement to accelerate.

Schedule

Miami is part of a strong field in the Wooden Legacy tournament in Anaheim, California, during Thanksgiving week. Otherwise the non-conference schedule is very weak, with only a home game versus La Salle looking like a contest with a possible NCAA Tournament at-large candidate. In the ACC, Miami has a pretty good draw, playing Syracuse, Florida State, N.C. State and Virginia Tech twice. If the Hurricanes survive January, they may be able to make a surprise move in the conference standings. Among the six ACC games in that month are both meetings with Syracuse along with the only games with Duke and North Carolina.

Overall Outlook

The program is in great hands with Larrañaga, but his teaching skills will certainly be tested this year. It's a bit surprising that this season's Hurricanes actually have five more seniors after losing five from the year before. So at least there is a good level of experience and leadership, even though all the remaining key players will have newly expanded roles. Look for Miami to accumulate a nice record against its weak non-conference opponents and then get knocked back with the front-loaded ACC schedule. After that, it's quite possible that the Hurricanes recover and finish close to the middle of the pack in league play and earn an NIT bid, building momentum for the 2014-15 season when their talented transfer backcourt becomes eligible.

PG Lecomte Ready to Make Impact

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Nov. 1, 2013

Belgian freshman point guard Manu Lecomte will make his first appearance in a Hurricane uniform tonight.

Miami is hosting Florida Tech at 7:30 in their lone exhibition game before starting the season on Nov. 8.

Lecomte, who hails from Brussels, is a 5-foot-9 point guard looking to make an immediate impact this season.

"I want to go back to the Sweet 16 like last year," he said. "I know it's going to be very difficult because we're young, I'm young, but I really think I'm ready and I'm pretty confident I can do it."

Head coach Jim Larrañaga has seen some positive signs with Lecomte during pre-season camp.

"The only true point guard we have is Manu and he's very much in the learning stages," Larrañaga said. "He hasn't competed the kind of players he's going to face this year, but he has shown some real grit. He works hard in practice and most successful 3-point shooter in the five-minute 3s drill, which indicates to me that once he gets comfortable he should be able to make some shots for us, but right now he's much more comfortable just distributing the ball and there are many times he only takes two or three shots in a scrimmage."

Senior Rion Brown has been complimentary of Lecomte's playing style.

"He has great quickness," Brown said. "He makes great decisions and great passes. We wish he would shoot more, but that

is a problem that can be fixed. I feel like he will be a great floor leader for us this year."

Lecomte has been labeled as a pass-first point guard, but he doesn't feel that is an accurate assessment of his game.

"I'm not really pass-first or score-first, I just like to make good decisions," Lecomte said. "If we play and I have to score a lot, then I will do it. I can adapt myself to the game."

The game is different in the United States compared to Belgium and he's been adjusting to the style of play.

"The game is very different than in Belgium," he said. "It goes way faster. That's the main difference. It's mainly going against faster opponents. I'm fast, but I have to get used to playing fast."

But overall, Lecomte says the transition has been easy.

"It wasn't that hard because my teammates are all very nice, very friendly, so it was not hard for me and we have other foreign people like Tonye (Jekiri) and Raphael (Akpejori) so that made it easier for me," he said. "Plus coach (Michael) Huger is like an extension of my family here so it was pretty easy."

Huger, who played in Belgium, recruited Lecomte to Miami.

"A lot of people in Belgium know Huger, my parents know him, and he was a very good point guard," Lecomte said. "He has been very helpful for me. He's like an extension of my father here. He's great."

Lecomte lists Chris Paul and Tony Parker as his favorite NBA players and watched them play a lot while growing up. He didn't

get to see nearly as many college games, but was able to watch some videos on YouTube. Still, playing in college was a dream of his and he

"Since I was 14 I wanted to play in college so that was a goal of mine to come to a great college," he said.

Nigerian Soccer Lover Becomes Canes Basketball Star

CBS Miami
Summer Knowles
Nov. 1, 2013

Tonye Jekiri stands just under 7-feet tall, and is a true sophomore on the University of Miami's basketball team. Jekiri, who was born and raised in Nigeria, only became interested in the sport after a renowned basketball coach in Nigeria spotted him.

Jekiri's first love was always soccer, "All I ever dreamed about was playing professional soccer in Europe."

But after learning how to dribble some, he attended a basketball camp, where his raw ability to run, block shots and grab rebounds got him noticed and ultimately earned him a scholarship to Champagnat Catholic High in Hialeah.

From there it was on to the University of Miami, where although Coach Jim Larrañaga said Jekiri is still playing catch up to a degree, he believes Jekiri's potential is promising.

"His ceiling is very high he hasn't come close to scratching the surface of that ceiling so we expect him to just get better and better," Larrañaga said.

Jekiri said being where he is now doing what is doing is miraculous.

"It's a miracle because my mom had been praying for me that one day I would change," said after explaining how he'd often get spankings as a child for skipping class to play soccer.

Despite being relatively new to the sport, Jekiri now dreams of one day playing in the NBA and being able to give back to kids in his hometown in Nigeria.

"If you could just teach them how to dribble the ball because running is not something you are going to teach the people back home because they already know how to do that," Jekiri said with a smile.

Jekiri, who is one of five siblings, said he is very happy and thankful for the opportunity to prove himself as a ball player and a good son.

"I feel like I'm the one they love most now," he said while laughing.

New Faces, Same Jerseys, Big Shoes: Canes Hoops

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Oct. 30, 2013

We interrupt UM/FSU week to bring you this special bulletin from the Bank United Center in beautiful Coral Gables, Florida! BASKETBALL SEASON IS UPON US!!! The new-look Miami Hurricanes take on Florida Tech tonight, and we had the opportunity to catch up with Assistant Coach Eric Konkol ahead of the contest.

To say that this is a "new" team is an understatement. This is truly an almost entirely new team! The Hurricanes lost their top six players from last year, with senior wing Rion Brown having started just six games last season, and only one during the conference season. The Hurricanes added three freshmen, a junior college transfer, and a graduate transfer to a team returning four contributors from last year, as well as senior wing Garrius Adams after an injury redshirt year. This Canes team is truly learning how to play together as a unit for the very first time, with new roles and responsibilities. Whereas last year's run was built around beefy paint presences combined with the dynamic point guard play of Shane Larkin, this year's team looks to have a different flavor, with a balance towards speed, length and athleticism.

Full practice started in late September for the first time this year, and Coach Konkol shared his thoughts on how the team looked after 23 full practices to date.

"Any time you've got such a large number of guys that are here for the first time, or for the first season, rather, of being thrust into new roles it's going to take a little time to figure out what everyone's best at and how best to mesh everyone's strengths together," Konkol explained. "We've had some great, great practices. We're excited. We're excited about playing other people [rather than intrasquad scrimmages]."

Though the team is anxious to play competitive games against other schools, practices are not lacking in intensity. "We've had very competitive practices," Konkol said. "We've got a very hard-working, blue collar group. These are guys that really like to be in the gym, they like to practice, they want to get better. These are guys that they really want to improve, guys that are very serious about their games. We

enjoy that. We enjoy these guys."

Konkol says there are limits to what can be gleaned from the repetition and routine of practice. "You start to see things repeat themselves and you start to really figure out guy's games and what they're best at" in competitive games.

Adams, Brown, Akpejori and Swoope are all expected to step up and contribute on the court as seniors, but Konkol told us that their number one job is to help the new players adapt.

"The first thing we expect is great leadership," Konkol explained. "They've been in the program for two years. They know what we expect. We expect them to lead the seven new individuals in the program and show them what we have done. The best coaching is when your upperclassmen, guys who have been around the program, are also able to coach and help guys along."

The staff expects Brown and Adams to provide scoring and mismatches on the perimeter, while Swoope and Akpejori will provide physicality and versatility in the frontcourt. The other returnee, center Tonye Jekiri, is starting to live up to his enormous potential on both ends of the court, though he needs to become more consistent.

Mostly, Konkol gave us insight into the new faces who will debut on the BankUnited Center court tonight.

Belgian point guard Manu Lecomte is the one true point guard on the team, and will likely start in the exhibition game tonight. "Manu is a pure point guard. He really pushes the ball, and he likes to pass," Konkol told us. "He likes to get into gaps and find guys. I think his teammates really enjoy playing with him because he so freely passes the ball."

The staff is looking for him to take more shots, Konkol said. "On the flip side, we want him to be even more aggressive looking to score," he continued. "He's a very good shooter and we want him to make that weapon known more."

Freshman combo guard Deandre Burnett built a reputation in recruiting circles as a dynamic scorer, and returning to the court after a broken collarbone, he's truly impressed the staff. "Deandre Burnett has shown that he can score at a high level," Konkol noted. "He's got very much an attacking personality on the of-

fensive end."

Freshman swingman Davon Reed will contribute right away to his length. "Davon Reed has shown that he's a versatile guy with really long arms, and he wants to be an elite defender. He's very, very active," Konkol told us.

Big man Donnavan Kirk played his freshman year at Miami before transferring DePaul, and has returned as a graduate transfer for his last year of eligibility. The staff is very pleased with what they've seen from him. "He's going to be able to do some different things inside and outside for us," Konkol explained. "He's a lot stronger than he was the first time here. He's a very intelligent guy. He can shoot the perimeter shot, he can pass, and he's got a nice jump hook inside, both right-handed and left-handed."

Forward James Kelly has missed the last few days of practice after having his wisdom teeth removed, but should be ready to go for the exhibition game. Konkol is excited to see what he can do. "James Kelly is an elite athlete, he's shown that over and over again."

The Hurricanes also have two transfers sitting out, Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan. Konkol said that the two "make practices great" and "very, very talented guys." Playing against such talented, experienced players is clearly helping the young guns adjust quickly.

The Hurricanes magical season last year has already had an impact on season ticket sales as there have already been more than 3,000 tickets sold for this year more than doubling the amount sold last year. The Canes take to the hardwood versus Florida Tech at home TONIGHT. Doors open at 6 for a Select-A-Seat event, followed by "Chalk Talk" with Coach Larrañaga at 7. Tip-off is 7:30 and TICKETS ARE FREE! Visit HurricaneSports.com for more information. Probable starters for tonight's game: G Manu Lecomte, G Rion Brown, G Garrius Adams, C Tonye Jekiri, F Donnavan Kirk.

Fantasy Camps Provide Millionaires Opportunities

Forbes

Alicia Jessop

Oct. 30, 2013

On a sunny autumn day, the University of Miami Field House was buzzing with the sounds of basketballs dribbling and whistles blowing. Inside, players ran the length of the court, as their coaches paced alongside it chiding them to compete harder. Training tables ran the length of the room, ready to assist players should they tweak something while playing. On this sunny autumn day, it wasn't the 2013 ACC Men's Basketball Champions, University of Miami, pacing the court under the guidance of head coach Jim Larrañaga. Rather, it was a group of 35-year-old to 70-year-old men with net worth's over \$1 million seeking to live out the fantasy of being a college basketball player.

Founded in 1998 to provide summer sports camps for children and assist professional athletes in hosting camps, in 2012 Pro Camps entered the fantasy camp market. Fantasy camp attendees are told they can "live their ultimate fantasy" at the five fantasy camps Pro Camps hosts: the Bill Self Basketball Fantasy Experience at the University of Kansas, the John Calipari Fantasy Experience at the University of Kentucky, the Tom Crean Fantasy Basketball Experience at the Indiana University, the Jim Larrañaga Fantasy Basketball Experience at the University of Miami and the USA Basketball Fantasy Basketball Experience in Las Vegas.

At each experience, the camp's adult participants are treated to a fantasy version of what being a student-athlete is like. For starters, there aren't any classroom activities. Rather, there are hotel stays at places like the Ritz Carlton and dinners at steakhouses like Ruth's Chris. There are swag bags filled with items including t-shirts to jerseys from basketball's biggest merchandisers. There are team meetings, film review sessions and personal coaching opportunities by each school's head coach and his staff. No fantasy camp would be complete without behind-the-scenes ac-

cess to each team's locker rooms, training facilities and offices, with the ability to compete in the arena that each team calls home.

What the promotional material for each fantasy camp fails to advertise, though, is what each camper is the most willing to spend big dollars on to receive: high-level basketball competition and camaraderie. For these men who work high-stress jobs, those two factors justify the \$2,995-to-\$10,995 price tag Pro Camps charges for its fantasy basketball camps. "Participants of our fantasy camps will tell you that the best thing about them are the friendships and relationships they build. It's not about the gear. It's not about the good food, hotels and events we provide them. It's about the relationships they build. When they first started going, guys didn't know each other and now they're building relationships with them. Guys are recruiting other guys to go to different camps with them," Pro Camps' chief operation officer, Andy Danner said.

The enjoyment the camp's participants receive from participating in the camps has led to the creation of a businessman basketball counterculture of sorts. Fantasy camp participants traverse the country throughout the year participating in Pro Camps' fantasy camps and other fantasy camps organized by individual coaches or other entities, like Jim Boeheim's at Syracuse or Mike Krzyzewski's at Duke. Many of the men have built basketball training facilities into their homes, with some adding facilities to their offices. Most have personal trainers and some have shooting coaches.

Even after the camp ends, the fantasy lives on. Throughout the fantasy camp "off-season," they email each other talking smack and scouting to see who has improved the most away from camp. One camper at the recent Jim Larrañaga Fantasy Basketball Experience who wished to remain anonymous for fear over how investors in his business may react to what he called his "\$100,000-per-year basket-

ball habit" noted, "There's a bunch of type-A personalities who are unbelievably successful here. There are 50 millionaires, multimillionaires and more, who are competing at the highest level and they share a passion for basketball. It's an amazing experience to suspend reality and come into an environment, have coaches come and work with us, and come together with a common goal in this very temporary bubble of fantasy. You can't get this in other facets of life."

Pro Camps notes that the market for fantasy basketball camps is niche and as such, growth must be slow, steady and intentional. The number of men with net worth's over \$1 million limits the pool of participants from the outset. Add to that the fact that not every man with that net worth wants to spend his money traveling to play basketball. On top of that, realize that there are only a handful of coaches in America who could draw a large enough crowd committed to paying thousands-of-dollars to learn under them. Quickly, one realizes the market for fantasy basketball camps is small. "What's unique about fantasy basketball camps, is we feel there's only a certain number of camps we can do. The camps have to be tied to very elite programs—the Camelots of college basketball," Danner explained.

That fact hasn't dissuaded Pro Camps, however, from entering the market. In fact, the company is looking for ways to expand its fantasy camp experience, through the addition of other sports that may be more attractive to a wider audience, like golf and tennis. If its fantasy basketball camps are any indicator, it's likely that if Pro Camps makes the move, it'll have golf courses and tennis courts filled with millionaire businessmen eager to live the life of their favorite golf and tennis stars.

Larrañaga Uncertain About Upcoming Season

CanelInsider

Victoria Hernandez

Oct. 30, 2013

A few weeks ago, head coach Jim Larrañaga was excited about the athleticism of the Miami Hurricanes despite their youth. Now, he's not so sure.

"Maybe we look athletic against each other, but when you play against other teams that are more athletic, bigger, older, more mature, physically, what have you, you realize, 'Ok, we are gonna have to re-think where we are athletically,'" he said Tuesday.

A major question mark is still the point guard position. With Shane Larkin's departure, there is a gaping hole. Freshman Manu Lecomte is the only player on the roster that is a true point guard.

"He's very much in the learning stages. He hasn't competed against the kind of players that he's gonna face this year, but he has shown some real grit," said Larrañaga. The head coach is looking for Rion Brown and Garrius Adams to step up as leaders. He said his definition of leadership starts on defense. Brown is the only player returning from last year's starting rotation. Adams hasn't played a full season since his sophomore year three years ago. As of now, Larrañaga said the player who is playing the best at his position is center Tonye Jekiri.

Last year, the Miami Hurricanes lost their exhibition game 69-67 to St. Leo. Larkin twisted his ankle in the game. The season did not look too promising. Yet the Hurricanes had their best season in program history, winning the Atlantic Coast Conference Championship. Instead of viewing the loss as an omen for the season, Larrañaga used it to make the necessary adjustments for success.

"We lost that game. And everybody thought, 'Oh, man that is awful.' No. It was the best thing in the world," he explained.

He has the same mentality going into the exhibition game Wednesday night against Florida Tech. Tipoff is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. at the BankUnited Center.

Canes have high hopes for transplanted Nigerian Jekiri

Miami Herald

Michelle Kaufman

Oct. 28, 2013

Tonye Jekiri's unlikely journey from Nigeria to Hialeah to starting center on the University of Miami basketball team reads like a Disney movie script. It all began with a free meal and a Fort Lauderdale cable guy.

Jekiri, like most kids in Nigeria, grew up playing soccer and following the European soccer leagues. Though he had grown to 6-foot-10 by age 16, basketball never crossed his mind. He played defensive midfield for his school in Port Harcourt, and in his free time, watched Real Madrid on TV.

Then, one day in the summer of 2010, a buddy told him about a basketball camp being run by Ejike Ugboaja, a 6-9 Nigerian power forward who had been drafted in 2006 by the Cleveland Cavaliers. Ugboaja never made the Cavs squad, but was a Nigerian national team hero and made a good living playing in the European leagues.

Ugboaja started a charitable foundation to help future generations of Nigerians pursue their academic and athletic dreams in Africa and abroad. He holds camps for hundreds of Nigerian athletes every summer, and with the help of donors, provides free meals, lodging and a chance to be discovered.

Among the many promising athletes who wound up in America through his camp — recent UM football signee Sonny Odogwu, a 6-8, 311-pound lineman who switched from basketball to football.

Jekiri, who had never played a minute of organized basketball, was reluctant to attend the camp. A friend convinced him it would be fun, and the free meals were enticing. His basketball skills were lacking compared with the other teens, but his footwork, speed and energy (and, of course, his height) caught the attention of Greg Brown, a Fort Lauderdale Comcast technician who played high school ball in Brooklyn, played at a Canadian college, and moonlights as a part-time coach for Ugboaja's foundation.

Brown met Ugboaja through a mutual friend, and worked his first camp in 2008. A self-described basketball junkie and frustrated coach, Brown returned from his first camp and started calling area private schools to see if anyone would be willing to take a chance on a few Nigerian kids. The school would have to file for an I-20 student visa, and roll the dice on a player sight unseen.

Most schools were wary, but Brown was able to place Ismaila Douda at Grandview Prep, and Douda went on to sign with Cleveland State. Brown brought a couple of other players over, and they all lived with him and

his wife in their Fort Lauderdale house until school families agreed to take them in.

Brown says he is on nobody's payroll for his Nigerian scouting pipeline. On the contrary. He loses money paying for barber shop visits, clothing and food. He does it because he is a gym rat who finds joy in spotting talent.

"I'm just a crazy cable guy, and my wife wasn't too thrilled when I told her five Nigerian kids would be moving in, but this is very fulfilling for me," Brown said. "I like watching the kids develop, and helping them find a better life. Some of these kids grew up in shacks, in really poor areas, the kind of place where you'd find Sally Struthers around the corner filming a commercial."

Brown had trouble finding a school for Jekiri, especially when coaches heard he was so new to the sport.

"High schools want a polished guy, and Tonye was really raw," Brown said. "Coaches would ask me, 'Do you have video of the kid?' To be honest, I didn't want them to see video, because if they saw him at that point, they'd say, 'Hell, no.' But I knew with good coaching Tonye had a chance to make it to college."

Champagnat, a small Catholic school in Hialeah, gave Jekiri a chance. Athletic director/football coach Mike Tunsil was receptive to the idea, Brown said, and applied for the student visa. Jekiri packed his bags, kissed parents Emilina and Frank goodbye, and boarded a flight to Miami. He showed up in flip flops, but ready to work.

"He was not very impressive at the start, but he'd have flashes," Brown said. "It's not natural for a guy 7 feet tall to move around the floor like that. He ran like a soccer player. He even ran the 100 meters for the Champagnat track team."

Jekiri learned the game his junior year, and by his senior year, when coach Danny Serrano took over the high school team, Jekiri was a bona-fide Division I prospect. He averaged 20 points, 12 rebounds and five blocks as a senior and led the team to the 2A state championship game.

ESPN.com named him the nation's 17th best recruit at the center position. He shined for AAU Team Breakdown and was recruited by UM, Clemson, Virginia Tech, George Mason, Alabama, Vanderbilt and FSU.

"He is a rare kid who came here with a purpose and is relentless in his effort to be the best he can be," said Serrano. "His motor never gets tired. He runs the floor like a guard, covers the court end to end in seven or eight strides. How many 7-footers can run like that? It's a coach's dream to find a guy like that, and his learning curve is monstrous."

UM coach Jim Larrañaga and his staff got a few calls about Jekiri shortly after they were hired in April 2011.

"We kept hearing, 'Hey, there's this kid at Champagnat you should see,'" assistant Eric Konkol said. "He's almost 7 feet and he can really run."

Konkol went to Myrtle Beach, S.C., for an AAU tournament in early July 2011 and got his first look.

"First thing I thought was, 'Man, can he run, and he has a good sense of the game,'" Konkol said. "Second thought was, 'I gotta get Coach L to see him.' He loved him. Tonye was a very willing passer, could feel where the point guard was, didn't try to force a lot. He played within himself. Very impressive."

The AAU program listed Jekiri as an incoming junior, so many coaches figured he'd be a prospect for the next year. But Konkol found out he was, in fact, an incoming senior. He was listed as a junior because he had been told he'd benefit from a year of prep school after high school graduation. Konkol told him he'd be ready for college the next season.

He arrived on campus weighing 215 pounds and got knocked around at practice by senior big men Reggie Johnson, Kenny Kadji and Julian Gamble. He played sparingly, averaging 1.4 points and 1.6 rebounds in 6.9 minutes per game. His biggest game came against Pacific during the NCAA Tournament, when he had six points, five rebounds and a pair of blocks in 16 minutes.

Johnson, Kadji and Gamble graduated, leaving Jekiri — now 7 feet — as the tallest man on the team. He beefed up to 240 pounds over the summer with the help of protein shakes, chicken, pasta and many hours in the gym.

"I see myself as a major key this year and really want to make my presence known on the court," Jekiri said. "I want to make sure I contribute and give them what we had last year so we don't feel like, 'Oh, we don't have those guys anymore so we don't have those weapons anymore.' That's why I stepped it up."

Larrañaga has high hopes for Jekiri but cautioned that he remains a work in progress.

"He's more experienced than a year ago, his ball skills have improved, but there is still has a lot of room for improvement," the coach said. "He's only played three full seasons. He's a very, very good defensive player and should have a very solid sophomore season."

Jekiri credits his soccer background for his speed, endurance, and footwork. He still kicks the ball around with the UM women's soccer team whenever he can, and admits soccer remains his true love. But for now, his meal ticket is basketball.

Hurricanes face rebuilding job in hoops

AP

Tim Reynolds

Oct. 29, 2013

MIAMI — With the season about to tip off, reigning Atlantic Coast Conference basketball champion Miami again leads the league, this time in lack of experience.

The Hurricanes are the only ACC team with no returning starters. They return 13 percent of their points from 2012-13, 14 percent of their rebounds and 1 percent of their assists, all league lows.

The team that went 29-7 a year ago and reached the round of 16 in the NCAA tournament was led by five seniors and sophomore Shane Larkin, now with the Dallas Mavericks.

That leaves 2013 Associated Press coach of the year Jim Larrañaga with perhaps the biggest rebuilding job of his long career. He said this season's players are talented but face a steep learning curve.

"It's going to take them some time," Larrañaga said. "We have to be very, very patient with them. Some kids learn faster than others. Hopefully once they all learn what we're teaching, we can develop into a very fine team."

Here are five things to know about the Hurricanes:

LARRAÑAGA'S ABILITY TO REBUILD: The media picked the Hurricanes to finish 12th in the ACC, which has expanded to 15 teams. But while the program has been hit with heavy turnover, the 64-year-old Larrañaga is a comfortable constant. He received a three-year extension during the offseason and is now under contract until 2022. Larrañaga is 49-20 in two years at

Miami and has a career record of 519-354. While the players have changed this season, his approach hasn't. "He's the same Coach L," senior forward Erik Swoope said. "The philosophies, mentality, drive and success are the same."

LARKIN REPLACEMENTS: The Hurricanes' No. 0 is gone to the NBA after finishing sixth last season in voting for the John R. Wooden Award. Three players are competing to succeed him at point guard — Garius Adams, a versatile 6-6 senior whose career has been curtailed by injuries, and freshmen Manu Lecomte and Deandre Burnett. Former Kansas State starting point guard Angel Rodriguez will sit out the season as a transfer.

BROWN THE NEW LEADER: Rion Brown, the son of former Georgia Tech player Tico Brown, is the only returning player who was part of the rotation last season. The 6-foot-6 Brown averaged 6.4 points per game, and he scored 21 points with five 3s in a victory over Illinois that sent Miami to the round of 16. Miami will also count on scoring from 7-foot sophomore Tonye Jekiri, a Nigerian who has bulked up from 215 pounds year ago to nearly 240 now.

HOME CROWDS: Last season's run to the Hurricanes' first outright league basketball title was a box office hit. A succession of sellout crowds transformed Miami's traditionally sleepy gym into a raucous environment. But the program has perennially been overshadowed by college football and South Florida's four professional sports teams, and Miami usually ranks last in the ACC in attendance. In the past, Larrañaga has cultivated student support by dispatching his players to dormitories to distribute pizza and chicken wings. This season will test his salesmanship.

THE WAIT FOR AN NCAA RULING IS OVER: The Hurricanes will lose one bas-

ketball scholarship in each of the next three seasons as a result of NCAA sanctions stemming from allegations by former booster and convicted felon Nevin Shapiro. The announcement last week lifted a cloud of uncertainty that had hung over the basketball and football programs for more than two years. Missouri basketball coach Frank Haith, who preceded Larrañaga at Miami, will miss the first five games of the Tigers' season because of his role in the scandal.

ACC Preview

ACC Blog - Start News Online
Brett Friedlander
Oct. 28, 2013

Coach: Jim Larrañaga (3rd season)

2012-13 record: (29-7, 15-3 ACC)

Postseason: Lost to Marquette, NCAA Sweet 16

Projected finish: 12th

Returning starters (0)

Returning lettermen (5): Rion Brown, 6-6, senior, guard (6.4 ppg, 2.0 rpg); Garrius Adams (7.3 ppg, 3.7 ppg in 2011-12); Erik Swoope, 6-5, senior, forward (1.6 ppg, 1.2 4pg); Tonye Jekiri, 7-0, sophomore, center (1.4 ppg, 1.6 rpg); Raphael Akpejori, 6-9, senior, forward (0.6 ppg, 1.1 rpg).

Newcomers (6): Donnavan Kirk, 6-9, graduate, forward (6.2 ppg, 3.9 rpg at DePaul); James Kelly, 6-7, freshman, forward (18.3 ppg, 10.3 rpg at Owens Community College); Deandre Burnett, 6-2, freshman, guard; Cornelius Elder, 5-10, freshman, guard; Manu Lecomte, 5-9, freshman, guard; Davon Reed, 6-6, freshman, guard;

Outlook: About the only similarity between this year's Hurricanes and the team that won 29 games, blew out both Duke and North Carolina, and won the school's first ACC championship last season is the uniforms they'll wear. Miami lost all five starters and 87 percent of its scoring from a year ago, forcing coach Jim Larrañaga to literally have to start over from scratch.

The rebuilding effort would have been much less of a challenge had transfer guards Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State) and Sheldon McClellan (Texas) been eligible to play right away. Because they'll

have to wait until 2014-15 to form one of the ACC's best backcourts, the Hurricanes will have to piece things together with a patchwork collection of veteran reserves, a fifth-year graduate student, a junior college transfer, three recruited freshmen and a football player.

The most experienced of the returners is 3-point specialist Rion Brown, who will be joined on the wing by Garrius Adams, a starter two years ago before missing all last season with a knee injury. Seven-foot sophomore Tonye Jekiri should be ready to step into a starting role after seeing considerable action.

Heading the newcomers most likely to make major contributions are 6-9 forward Donnavan Kirk, a starter at DePaul last season before transferring to Miami as a fifth-year graduate student, 6-7 forward James Kelly, who put up impressive numbers at an Ohio junior college a year ago.

The freshman contingent is comprised of guards Manu Lecomte, Davon Reed and Deandre Burnett, while Cornelius Elder could be a wild card in the lineup once he joins the team after finishing the season as a defensive back on the Hurricanes' football team.

Quotable quote: "I'm seeing a lot of new faces, a lot of young guys with energy and enthusiasm, all very, very tough competitors. They love to compete in practice. They push each other in the weight room. They'll push each other on the court. Every game we play, whether it's to 5, 11, 21, a full scrimmage, they're at each other from start to finish. I love that energy and enthusiasm." Coach Jim Larrañaga.

Projection: Larrañaga took a nucleus of veteran players left behind by former coach Frank Haith and did what Haith was never able to do with them. Win big. Last year's

ACC championship earned the 64-year-old national Coach of the Year honors and a contract extension, but it also came with a price.

Because the abundance of seniors on the 2012-13, the Hurricanes are now forced to rebuild from the ground up in 2013-14.

Gone are the top six scorers from last season, including underclassman Shane Larkin, a first-team All-ACC point guard who left early for the NBA draft. In their place are an assortment of role players, transfers and untested freshmen that make Miami the mystery team of the ACC. Needless to say, Larrañaga will have his work cut out for him.

Preview: Miami Hurricanes

ESPN

John Gasaway

October 23, 2013

2012-13: 29-7 (15-3 ACC)

In-conference offense: 1.07 points per possession (3rd)

In-conference defense: 0.93 points allowed per possession (1st)

With an outright ACC regular-season championship, a conference tournament title (wherein the Hurricanes recorded three double-digit wins), an NCAA tournament No. 2 seed and a trip to the Sweet 16, 2012-13 stands alone as the most successful season in Miami basketball history. (Its only real competition comes from 1998-99, when a UM squad coached by Leonard Hamilton and led by Tim James and Johnny Hemsley also grabbed a No. 2 seed but fell in the round of 32.)

Nonconference losses to Florida Gulf Coast (months before the world came to appreciate FGCU as Dunk City) and Indiana State likely cost Jim Larrañaga's team what would have been a truly historic No. 1 seed. "Historic" meaning this is a program that entered 2012-13 with a lifetime 52-76 record in ACC play.

Showing a blithe disregard for that history, the Canes roared out to a 13-0 start in the ACC, outscoring their conference opponents by a margin (0.19 points per possession) that appeared to mark Larrañaga's team as a clear national title threat. In particular, UM's defense was remarkable during this 13-game streak, limiting ACC opponents to just 0.88 points per possession. Extended over an entire major conference season, that level of performance would have marked the Canes as one of the finest defenses of the past decade.

Miami's rather stunning performance in January and the first half of February called to mind what Texas did over an eerily similar stretch during the 2010-11 season, when Rick Barnes' team held its first 11 Big 12 opponents to just 0.83 points per trip. And, just like the Longhorns two seasons before it, the Hurricanes' defense collapsed starting around mid-February.

"Collapse" is not too strong a word. Miami's last five opponents rung up 1.06 points per trip against this D, as the Canes closed out the regular season with a 2-3 minislump. Strikingly, four of those five games were played against opponents that would not receive NCAA tournament

bids. In its own way, the close of Miami's ACC season was just as unusual as its beginning -- or at least it seemed unusual at the time. But if you see a surprise team this season playing an unbelievable level of defense in January, my advice is to wait confidently for the inevitable Mid-February Defensive Collapse (MFDC).

Looking ahead, the roster turnover will be near total in Coral Gables, Fla., this season. Durand Scott, Kenny Kadji, Reggie Johnson, Trey McKinney Jones and Julian Gamble all graduated, and junior-to-be Shane Larkin was drafted with the No. 18 pick in the NBA draft by the Atlanta Hawks. Only Rion Brown returns from a rotation that set a new standard for Hurricanes basketball.

Losing all those minutes would be a challenge for any program, but Miami's in a particularly tough spot in terms of personnel and, more specifically, timing. Larrañaga was able to land just two recruits in the November signing period, and the coach has acknowledged that prospects were apprehensive about what the NCAA might do to the school in the wake of the Nevin Shapiro case. Earlier this week the NCAA announced it will take away one scholarship annually for three years. Note additionally that Kansas State transfer Angel Rodriguez will not play for Larrañaga this season.

This level of turnover leaves Brown as the leading returning scorer at six points per game. Don't be fooled by that low number, though, because Brown likely extended Miami's season by a game. If not for his 21-point outburst (on 5-of-10 shooting from beyond the arc), the Hurricanes might have fallen to Illinois in the round of 32 instead of recording a 63-59 win. A career 34 percent 3-point shooter, Brown will be given every opportunity to function as the Canes' main perimeter threat this season.

Another option for points from the perimeter will be Garrius Adams, who red-shirted last season while he rehabbed an injured knee. His best season came in 2010-11, when he made 24 starts and averaged seven points per game as that most curious of hoops oddities, the pass-first shooting guard. Now Adams stands to inherit large quantities of minutes, possessions and shots by default -- assuming he beats out freshman Deandre Burnett. In fact, if Burnett can hit outside shots or draw fouls (much less both), he could see a

lot of minutes right away as a 2-guard. He averaged 36 points per game as a senior at Carol City High in Miami Gardens, Fla.

With the decision to hold out K-State transfer Rodriguez this season, Larrañaga might go with Manu LeComte at point guard. Turning to a 5-foot-9 freshman is not customarily a recipe for success in the ACC, but at least LeComte has a couple impressive bullets on his résumé. Belgium's leading scorer in the U18 European Championships, LeComte also received offers from Gonzaga and Creighton. The only other option at point could be 5-foot-11 freshman Corn Elder, who plans to play football as well as hoops at Miami.

Speaking of transfers, Donnavan Kirk played a total of 26 minutes over four games as a freshman for Miami in 2009-10 before transferring to DePaul. As a Blue Demon starter last season, the 6-foot-9 Kirk blocked an occasional shot, attempted about one 3-pointer per contest and, surprisingly, connected at a 39 percent rate from beyond the arc.

Kirk figures to be the grand old man of an otherwise green frontcourt rotation. On paper, Tonye Jekiri was an outstanding offensive rebounder in his cameo appearances as a freshman, but it's difficult to know how much faith to put in said paper when his career high for a game is three offensive boards. As a sophomore, he'll need to work on lowering his foul rate while blocking more shots. Meanwhile Erik Swoope's best game of the season came arguably against Marquette in the Sweet 16, when he scored six points on 3-of-3 shooting in seven minutes. If he wants to be on the floor late in close games as a senior, however, he'll have to better last season's 32 percent shooting at the line. Lastly, 6-foot-8 junior college transfer James Kelly will also get minutes. Larrañaga's never been partial to recruiting junior college talent, but the extremity of Miami's current situation has forced his hand.

Just one season removed from the best in program history, the cupboard is suddenly very close to bare at Miami. The Hurricanes' 2013-14 shouldn't be judged solely, or even primarily, on the court, where UM will likely finish in the ACC's bottom third, but rather in terms of talent development and, most crucially, recruiting.

Projected 2013-14 conference finish: 14th

Player Profiles: Deandre Burnett

State of the U
Juan Toribio
Oct. 17, 2013

Coming in to last season, everybody knew that most of the front-court of the Canes was gearing up for their last season. What we didn't know was that sophomore point guard Shane Larkin was going to be a top-5 point guard and declare early to the NBA draft. As soon as Larkin made his decision official, the search for a new starting point guard was underway. The coaching staff went all the way out to Belgium to recruit and land Manu Lecomte, but they also landed a commit from their own backyard.

Burnett played his senior season at Massanutten Military Academy in Virginia, but spent three years at Carol City High School in Miami. It didn't matter if Burnett played ball in Virginia or in Miami, he would still score in bunches. Burnett averaged 37 points per game and that earned him the third highest scoring average in the country during his senior season. To display his scoring ability, Burnett hit the 45 point mark three times that year. During his junior season, Burnett was able to score 28 a game at Carol City High School. Burnett grew up a Canes fan and that was one of the reasons why he came to the University of Miami. Burnett was a four-star recruit coming out of high school by every major recruiting website, but was only offered by Miami, Florida International, Florida Atlantic, Stetson and Georgia Southern.

Despite being a highly ranked recruit, Burnett isn't the only one in his family being highly recruited. Burnett is brothers with Miami Central's star running back Dalvin Cook. I'm sure all the die-hard Canes fans who follow recruiting heavily know what an impact Cook has on the football field. Well, besides Coach Golden, Miami has Burnett as a bit of a recruiter. He's been quoted in the past saying that he would try

and convince his brother flip his commitment to Clemson (then) and Florida (now) to a UM commitment. So, not only can Burnett play on the hardwood, but Canes fans will not say no to Dalvin Cook on the gridiron.

Okay so enough recruiting and let's talk about what Burnett can bring to the table this year and during his career. Burnett suffered a broken collarbone early in the summer, but during the last practice I attended about two weeks ago, he looked healthy and ready to go. He was also making shot after shot at the beginning of practice and that's pretty much what Canes fans can expect. A scoring point guard who can light up the court with his ability to score. Burnett won't average 37 points a game like he did in high school and the learning curve will still exist to him, but after he gets comfortable playing in the college game, I think Burnett will be a phenomenal player. This season, he's in a competition with Manu Lecomte for the starting point guard position. Manu is more of a prototypical point guard, but Burnett's scoring ability is second to none on this team. Expect Deandre Burnett to be a "bucket getter" for four seasons for the Canes.

Player Profiles: Rion Brown

State of the U
Juan Toribio
Oct. 16, 2013

Rion Brown grew up in Hinesville, Georgia while also watching his father play basketball in the CBA and overseas. In this interview with hurricanesports, Brown admits that basketball wasn't his first love. "I don't know why, but that was my first love. I played rec ball all the way until I was in the seventh grade for football. Once I got basketball in my head, that was a done deal." Rion then went on to have a pretty successful high school career. He was named the Class 3-A South Player of the Year by the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association and went on to be listed as a four-star recruit. Brown was listed as the 15th best shooting guard by Rivals and the 47th best shooting guard by ESPN. Brown was also offered by South Carolina, South Florida, Auburn and Xavier. His father's collegiate school, Georgia Tech, did not offer Rion.

Rion had a very good freshman season. He appeared in all 36 games played by the Canes and started all five postseason games (2 ACC tournament, 3 in NIT). He logged at least 15 minutes in each of the Canes' last 18 games, including 30-minutes in his best game during his freshman season. Brown connected on six three pointers and scored a then career-high 19 points. His 6 three-pointers were the most by a Canes freshman since Darius Rice hit 7 three-pointers in 2001. Brown finished his freshman season scoring 4.4 points per game while shooting 35% from beyond-the-arc. During his sophomore season, Brown played in all but two games in which he missed due to illness. When he played, however, he was pretty efficient. Averaging 7.2 points per game and 2.8 rebounds in 20 minutes per game. He also shot 42% from the field and 39% from long distance. Brown also had a really

good showing in the postseason for the second straight year. He was second on the team in scoring during the ACC tournament with 11.5 points per game and led the team in the NIT with 17.0 points per game. He shot 47.8 percent from the field and 42.9 percent from three during that span. Now let's take a look at the role that Brown had during the ACC Championship year. The first ACC game for Miami this season was against at Georgia Tech, the school his father called home in college. Brown scored 22 points in that game and broke out of a massive shooting slump. [HERE](#) is the entire recap of that game. His minutes per game went up to 22.2 per game and started in place of Durand Scott during his suspension. Brown had a little bit of a down year shooting the ball, but he came up clutch when needed the most. Who can forget his 21 point performance in the NCAA tournament against Illinois? Or his exclamation dunk against Duke? Those are two memories Canes fans won't forget for a really long time.

Last season, Brown was called upon as the sixth-man for the ACC champion Hurricanes, but this season his role is going to be a lot greater than just a spot-up shooter. The Canes need a focused and consistent Rion Brown to have any success this season. They need an efficient shooter and a leader on and off the court. Expected to be a team captain, he needs to teach the young players the system and bring that ACC defending-champion attitude to the team.

Kelly Takes Unconventional Route

Inside the U
David Lake
Oct. 16, 2013

Power forward James Kelly did not take the typical route to major college basketball at the University of Miami.

Kelly didn't start playing basketball until his junior year of high school after he went through a growth spurt of seven inches.

In one year, Kelly went from being 5-feet-8 to 6-feet-3 and was strongly encouraged to try out for his high school basketball team.

"I really wasn't into sports until I started growing in my sophomore year," Kelly said.

Kelly made the team and learned to like basketball. He also kept growing until he reached 6-feet-7 after his senior year of high school.

"I tried basketball because it was something to do," Kelly said. "It was pretty fun. Then I had to work on my fundamentals and I started getting interest from junior colleges and I kept at it and kept pursuing things. Then I figured out I could play college basketball."

The only college interest Kelly received out of high school was from junior colleges because his grades were poor.

"I honestly didn't think I was good enough to play Division I," Kelly said. "Junior college was a good route for me. I was able to develop my skills and learn the game even more."

Kelly settled in at Owens Community College and it didn't take long for his talent to shine. Over this two seasons at Owens, Kelly averaged 17.9 points per game with 10 rebounds per game, 1.5 blocks per

game, and 1.5 steals per game. He totaled 38 career double-doubles.

Kelly received interest from schools like Miami, Michigan State, Marshall, Louisiana Tech, and St. Bonaventure. In the end, Kelly settled on Miami.

"I can play both down low and go outside on the perimeter a little bit too and Miami will let me play that style," Kelly said. "I really got comfortable with the coaches here and I knew it was the right place for me because I could come in and make an impact."

During the first few weeks of practice at Miami, Kelly admits it has been adjustment making the transition from Owens College to UM.

"It is a lot more intense," Kelly said. "We do a lot more drills and really you get tested more mentally than you do at JUCO. I'm adjusting and I feel like I am doing a good job with it so far right now. It is just more physical and more patience is required. In JUCO most of the plays were ran through me, but here I am more inside and out. In JUCO I kind of stayed outside. Now I am playing both inside and outside here. I am just being more versatile."

Kelly discussed what dimension he will look to bring to Miami.

"I score more down low because that is where I learned first," Kelly said. "Coach has helped me be more comfortable with my outside game too though with shooting and the pick-and-pop game. I am working on expanding my range because the coaches really want to see me pick-and-pop."

Kelly has already impressed UM coach Jim Larrañaga with the athleticism he brings to the front-court.

"He is probably our most explosive athlete in terms of running and jumping," Larrañaga said. "He has worked very hard at getting stronger. He works hard in the weight room. He gives us a pretty deep power forward position along with Donnavan Kirk and Eric Swoope.

After losing their top six rotation players from the ACC Champion 2012-13 team, Kelly is one of six newcomers Miami will count on this year. Kelly is encouraged by the way the team has come together during the first weeks of practice.

"I feel like we are jelling," Kelly said. "We have to get used to how we all play. Then everything will come together smoothly with our offense and defense. We have a lot of new guys, so we are building that chemistry. Once that part comes, we will be good."

Player Profiles: Raphael Akpejiori

State of the U

Juan Toribio

Oct. 15, 2013

You might not know this but, Lagos, Nigeria is the second fastest growing city in Africa, and in addition to that, it's also the hometown of Canes hoops senior, Raphael Akpejiori. Although Akpejiori was born in Nigeria, he played his high school basketball for Sunrise Christian Academy in Kansas. Akpejiori had a good career at Sunrise Christian and he was rated as the 64th best power forward in the class of 2010 by ESPN despite sitting out his entire senior season. His performance on the court is sometimes criticized by fans, but his performance in the classroom is second-to-none. Akpejiori was named to the ACC academic honor roll last year and made the Dean's list his sophomore year. Akpejiori was recruited by Frank Haith and was also being recruited by Texas A&M, Colorado, USF, and UCF.

Akpejiori hasn't logged a lot of minutes in his college career. During his freshman season he played 20 games and was only out there for 5 minutes per game. He did average a career-best 1.6 points per game and 1.6 rebounds per game. He was also third on the team in blocks with 13 despite playing limited minutes. His sophomore season, Akpejiori got an increase in playing time with 6.7 minutes per game, but his production stayed the same. He averaged 1.6 points per game for the second straight year and his rebounding went down slightly to 1.5 per game. Last season, however, Akpejiori didn't find a spot in the rotation for most of the year as the frontcourt depth was exceptional. Raphael only appeared in 18 games last season, mostly because of foul trouble by the other bigs. His scoring went down to less than 1 point per game and averaged 1.1 rebounds per game, while also shooting a career-low 35 percent from the field.

With most of last year's frontcourt graduated, there are a lot of spots up for grabs. Larrañaga was able to bring in James Kelly and Donnavan Kirk, but he's going to need some more depth in order to contend this season. Akpejiori will have to fight his way into the rotation, but I think he'll provide solid minutes of the bench. He won't log ten minutes a game, but he will provide good minutes on selective nights. After a good "Athletes in Action" performance in the summer for Team Jamaica where he averaged 9.2 points per game along with 5.8 rebounds per game, Raphael will be looking to build off that and have a successful senior season for the Canes in whichever role Jim Larrañaga needs him to fill.

Player Profiles: Garrius Adams

State of the U
Juan Toribio
Oct. 14, 2013

Under Frank Haith, Miami had a North Carolina pipeline going on. Haith was able to land Adams, Daniels, Julian and Reggie Johnson from the tobacco state. Out of the four, Adams was the highest rated recruit as he was ranked as high as the 83rd best player by ESPN in the class of 2009. Adams chose Miami over schools such as South Carolina, NC State, Virginia Tech and Wake Forest.

Adams had a shaky start to his Hurricanes career, he played in 32 games, which was tied for most amongst freshman (Reggie Johnson), but he couldn't really find his touch. He shot 32% from the field. Adams, however, started seven games as a freshman. Adams sophomore season is probably his best year to date; he played in 36 games for the Canes and got the nod in the starting five, 24 times. He averaged 7.6 points per game and saw his field goal percentage increase to 39%; he also recorded his career-high in points during his sophomore season with 16 points against UNC Greensboro. Junior year was an up-and-down year for Garrius, he started the year off playing his best basketball, but a lower extremity injury forced him to miss 14 games during January and February. He was a starter to begin the season, but after he returned from surgery, he really didn't find his early-season form. We all got glimpses of how good of a player he can be during junior year, however, as he scored 15 points in one game against West Virginia, but showed his rebounding abilities in games against Tennessee Tech and Ole Miss. Adams led the team at least once in scoring, rebounds, assists, steals and blocks. For his original senior season, Adams underwent knee surgery after having

battled knee problems for his entire junior season and the staff decided to red-shirt him last season.

Garrius Adams has had a roller coaster career at Miami, but entering his fifth-year on campus and his senior year on the court, I think he's ready to emerge as the team's number one option. Word out of most practices last season was that Adams was playing really well against last year's starters, and sometimes he would be dominant. Shane Larkin was recently asked on Twitter who he believed was the best player on the UM roster and he responded with Adams, and Shane knows basketball.

I expect a great season from #25 and I think he'll be close to averaging double-digit points as he tries to establish himself as the leader of this young Canes team this season. But most importantly, I hope Adams can stay healthy and finish his career on top. If you want more of a comparison of the type of impact Adams can have this season, you can take a look at Garrius' good friend, Julian Gamble.

Much like Adams, Gamble had to deal with a ton of injuries throughout his career, but it all seemed to click his senior season. If Adams can put it all together this season it would make for a lot of happy Canes fans.

CHD Sits Down with Miami SG Rion Brown

College Hoops Daily

Jon Teitel

Oct. 14, 2013

To prepare for the tip-off of another great year of college basketball, CHD is reaching out to coaches and players around the country to get the inside scoop on what we can expect this time around. Jon Teitel continues our season preview series by chatting with Miami SG Rion Brown about beating a top-ranked team by the largest margin in NCAA history.

Three of your new conference opponents this year will be Notre Dame, Pitt and Syracuse. How competitive do you expect the brand-new ACC to be this winter? It is going to be fun. We have added a couple of more games to our schedule that will help our RPI, and adding those Big East teams will change the style of play in the ACC. We look forward to getting our 1st win against all of them!

You play for Coach Jim Larrañaga; What makes him such a great coach and what is the most important thing you ever learned from him? He has great leadership and consistency from year to year. We call him "the man with the plan" because he always lets us know exactly what he wants from us: we know what to expect because the rules and philosophy stay the same each year. He taught me how to control myself on the court both mentally and physically. I know what I can do as well as what I cannot do, and my reaction to a bad play can change the result of a game.

You are the team's leading returning scorer after losing your top six scorers from last year. How much pressure is there on you to be a leader this year? What are your expectations for the upcoming season? There is not so much pressure; just a bit more responsibility to make some more shots. It will be a lot different than last

year. We have to do a lot of learning. Being the seventh man last year, I can help teach the rest of the team about what Coach L is looking for. The earlier I can teach our freshmen what to expect, the better we will be.

One of your high school teammates was 2013 first team all-SEC guard Jordan McRae. Do you think he can get Tennessee back to the NCAA tourney this year? I definitely think so. It has been fun to see his play develop over the past few years as he has become a more mature player. He was always gifted offensively and he has a lot of good teammates returning.

As a freshman in 2011, you played in all 36 games. How were you able to come in and contribute right from the start? I just came in with the right mindset. I tried to earn my keep rather than thinking I was entitled to playing time.

In the 2011 ACC tourney, Tyler Zeller made a layup at the buzzer in a two point win by North Carolina. Where does that rank among the most devastating losses of your career? It is probably number two. It really hurt. We were up by about 20 points before they came all the way back to beat us. We could have received an NCAA bid but we ended up in the NIT. The worst loss was in my senior year of high school was when we lost on a buzzer beater in the postseason.

Last January you scored four points in a 90-63 win over #1-ranked Duke (the largest margin of defeat ever for a #1 team). Where does that rank among the highlights of your career? It is probably number one just because of the circumstances. It was the first week we had been ranked during my time here, and it is always competitive to play against a Duke team who is always in the upper echelon of the ACC.

In the 2013 ACC tourney title game, you scored 12 points in a 10 point win over North Carolina (the first ACC title in school history). How much of a home-court advantage did the Tar Heels have in Greensboro? What was the reaction like when you got back to campus? It was definitely a home game for them: there was a sea of blue with little spots of orange. It is always fun to play in a hostile environment. The welcome we got back on campus was just phenomenal: there were fans, kids asking for autographs, TV cameras, etc. To see that kind of support so late at night was great.

In the 2013 NCAA tourney, you scored five points in a 10 point loss to Marquette. What did you learn from that game that you think will help you this year? It showed us that we have to take care of our bodies. We were not really tired, but were unaccustomed to playing that deep into the season so the practices and shoot-arounds took a toll on us. We need to get more rest and stay hydrated. You could tell that we ran out of gas in the tourney.

Your father, Tico Brown, played basketball at Georgia Tech and was voted to the all-time CBA team. Who is the best player in the family and who does your dad cheer for when you play the Yellow Jackets? I will say that he is the best, but he would probably say the same about me! It took him awhile to hit the learning curve as a player. When we play Georgia Tech he wants me to play well...in a Miami loss! I have to respect that because that is where he grew up, but he always cheers me on.

Jekiri Poised For Breakout Season

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Oct. 11, 2013

Head coach Jim Larrañaga throws Tonye Jekiri a pass in the post and Jekiri turns to his left for a jump hook.

Then Larrañaga fires a pass to Jekiri on the block and Jekiri turns to his right for a shot off the backboard.

Larrañaga has been spending extra time with Jekiri heading into the 2013-14 season as the 7-foot sophomore center is poised for a breakout year after gaining 25 pounds in the offseason.

"He's more experienced than a year ago," Larrañaga said. "His ball skills have improved. His offensive moves and understanding is better. His shot has improved, but he still has a lot of room for improvement because he's only played for three full seasons. He's a very, very good defensive player and is rebounding the ball very well. The extra weight and strength have helped him in those two categories and I think he's going to have a very solid sophomore season."

Jekiri averaged just 1.4 points in 34 games as a freshman, the lowest scoring average among regulars, but did shoot 51.4 percent from the floor. But with a year under his belt and a strong offseason, the defensive-minded 240-pounder has improved his offensive game.

"I know offensively, Tonye's been tremendous," senior guard Rion Brown said. "He looks like a totally different person and we're definitely going to need that post scoring threat with guys like Julian (Gamble) and Reggie (Johnson) leaving."

With the work he has been putting in, Jekiri is confident in his scoring ability.

"Offensively I'm feeling really good," Jekiri said. "The confidence is there, the post skills are there. I feel so good about it because I can really score on any guy right now. The whole offensive thing is about being poised and calm, just flow with the

game and don't be in a rush. I just feel ready and I'm excited about it."

While he's improving offensively, Jekiri's goal is to be a premier defender. He's already considered a good defensive player, particularly with his on-ball defense, but there are areas he still needs to improve on. His 5.2 percent block rate from last season is not very high for a player of his caliber and his 6.7 fouls per 40 minutes should also be improved.

"My goals are on the defensive side because we have guys who can score from every spot on the floor," Jekiri said. "My goal is to really help on defense, stay out of foul trouble. I see myself as a major key on the team and I'd really love to let my presence be known by blocking shots, rebounding, and making some deflections I really want to help on the defensive side because I feel that can really help my team more than on the offensive side because we have guys who can really score so I'm not worried about that. On defense that's where it will really matter."

His increased weight can be attributed to having protein shakes and meals before bed in addition to the attention trainer Wes Brown has given him. If Jekiri comes into the training room and hasn't eaten yet, Brown sends him back out for food before tending to him.

Jekiri also credits living off-campus to getting close to his goal weight for the season of 245 pounds.

"Last year I was back in the dorms eating food from the cafeteria. It was pretty good, but it wasn't that much I could eat from," Jekiri said. "This year I'm staying off-campus and I'm cooking for myself. I'm eating a lot of protein food, a lot of chicken and pasta so that has really helped."

He's no longer being pushed around down low, which happened at times especially during practice going against Gamble (260 pounds) and Johnson (310). He believes he can now rely on his strength, balance, and quickness this season as opposed to just

his quickness a year ago.

"It really changed me with posting up and guys are not able to push me around anymore with me sealing my man and fighting in the paint," Jekiri said. "It really helped."

Jekiri's strength has also increased, but he's been unable to max out on the bench press due to his left hand, which is recovering from torn ligament damage. Jekiri was planning to have surgery the week after last season ended, but instead opted for rehab to avoid a loss of motion.

"The doctor said there was no point in having the surgery because I wouldn't have full motion with my right hand, which is much better," Jekiri said. "If I had the surgery I would lose a lot of motion so what I did was I kept doing rehab to try to strengthen it and it feels a lot better now."

Jekiri plans to wear the brace during the season for precautionary reasons.

"It's a lot better right now," Jekiri said. "There's a lot more things I can do like bench pressing, which I couldn't do. Last year when I had the problem I could only do dumbbells and one-handed lifting, but now I can bench press, not too much weight. I can't max out, but I just lift."

Jekiri has come a long way with basketball from his days of being a defensive midfielder and tallest player on the soccer field. He still watches soccer and occasionally plays with the women's team, but he's thankful of his opportunity with basketball over the last three years since picking up the game.

"Playing soccer back home, I never thought about playing basketball," Jekiri said. "It all happened one day. It's a big change and I really appreciate the help of my coaches starting with my coach back home, my high school coach, and now Coach L. I really appreciate all they have done and I'm looking forward to going to the next level after this."

Burnett Looking to Be a Scorer

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Oct. 9, 2013

Deandre Burnett has been a scorer wherever he's been.

The freshman guard will be counted on to score this season for the Hurricanes, but head coach Jim Larrañaga has been on Burnett more about improving his defense.

"Everybody knows I can score," said Burnett, who averaged 36 points a game as a senior in high school. "So he's just trying to—so I can stay on the court—help me learn the defense and concepts and constantly stopping me whenever I mess up on defense teaching me basically the game on defense."

It's not just learning how to play man-to-man defense, but the concepts within the defense that Burnett is adjusting to.

"There's a lot of things as far as defense," he said. "I've learned different concepts—it's not just a man-to-man defense. You've got to know your rotations, know when to help, know when to help off the shooter, who's the shooter, and things like that, but it's coming along good."

The transition isn't hard per se, but it is an adjustment he's having to make.

"I wouldn't say it's hard, it's difficult because of the level I'm at, it's the college level, major D-I, but I wouldn't say it's hard because coach L is a great teacher," Burnett said. "If I listen I'll pick it up. I pick up things pretty fast and if I listen I think everything will come easy."

Scoring at this level hasn't been an issue for Burnett thus far through the first week of practices.

"It's still kind of the same, I'm a scorer and I work every day hard as anybody so I feel like it's coming along really good," Burnett said. "I think my scoring ability can really help this team out a lot."

Burnett was third in the country in scoring at Carol City as a senior and continued his scoring prowess at Massanutten (Va.)

Military Academy in his year of prep school averaging 28 points a game. He'll look to continue his scoring ability at Miami.

"That's what they recruited me for," Burnett said.

His teammates have been impressed with him thus far.

"He is a nice combo guard," senior forward Donnavan Kirk said. "He can score, he can shoot the ball and play some point. I like his aggressiveness and ability to score because we need some scoring. I like his work ethic. He works hard and he is going to do what it takes to win. That is the first step for a freshman and just working hard and being willing to learn."

The 6-foot-2 guard has been playing both point and shooting guard throughout the first week of practices.

"Coach L knows I can score so he's trying to see if I can run the 1, teaching me to slow down and see guys that are open, find the guy that's open, and get the team into the offense," Burnett said.

He has played point guard in the past, but even then his primary role was to score. At UM he's asked to distribute more, which is a tough adjustment to mix in his scoring ability.

"That's a big adjustment," Burnett said. "I feel that's the biggest adjustment so far. If I'm at the 1, just don't think to pass, but still look to get my shot. Point guards do score what people don't realize. If I just have the scorer's mentality still, then at the end of the day and think another man's open because another guy's helping, then I'll do fine at the point."

Larrañaga prefers to have Burnett as a shooting guard, but with the lack of depth at point guard, he's been competing with fellow freshman Manu Lecomte and senior Garrius Adams, who is a more natural swingman, for the starting spot.

"(Deandre's) best position is really the two-guard spot because he's got a knack for putting the ball in the basket," Larrañaga said. "He still has a lot to learn and

the size of the athlete in the ACC is far different than what he faced in the high school and prep ranks so he's working on his assortment of shots and moves, when to shoot, and when not to. That's a part of the learning process."

Burnett isn't concerned with what his role will be.

"Whatever they need me, if they need me to score, I'll score, if they need me to play the point, I'll play the point," he said. "I'll still have the same mindset. It's wherever the team needs me, I just want to win."

And regardless of where he plays, he knows he'll have to play to his strengths.

"At the end of the day I've got to have the mentality to score first," he said.

Burnett broke his left collar bone over the summer and is hoping to have it fully healed by the start of the season.

"It's a lot better," Burnett said. "It's not 100 percent yet, but it's good enough for me to get the job done on the court. Wes (Brown) is helping me with treatment and by the time the season comes it will be 100 percent."

Miami has an exhibition game on Oct. 30 and begins their season on Nov. 8.

"I think we should be real good," Burnett said. "People are not projecting us to be good, but last year they didn't either so I think we'll surprise a lot of people."

Basketball Buzz: 10/8

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Oct. 8, 2013

The Miami Hurricanes practiced four times last week after beginning preseason practices and will practice five times this week.

"We're in the learning mode," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "Everything is new to the new guys. Some of it's review for the veteran players, but we don't have that many veterans so a lot of the things we do we have to take our time, go very slowly, but at the same time like last week we basically put in 15 different ball screen situations, but that's the only thing we did offensively. So hopefully the guys now are familiar with our terminology and the situations we use various ball screens and now we hope to build on that and get better and better and better."

Miami's lone exhibition game is on Oct. 30 against Florida Tech.

News & Notes

- C Tonye Jekiri received individual attention from Larrañaga during individual shooting drills before Monday's practice as Larrañaga passed the ball to Jekiri for various low-post moves. This type of attention is not a surprise given Jekiri's importance to the team this season. Jekiri did not have wrist surgery as originally planned after the season to avoid the likelihood of a loss of range of motion. Instead Jekiri opted to rehab it and it has improved from where it was last season although he's continuing to strengthen it and is planning on wearing a brace for precautionary reasons. "It's a lot better right now. There's a lot more things I can do like bench pressing, which I couldn't do. Last year when I had the problem I could only do dumbbells and one-handed lifting, but now I can bench press, not too much weight. I can't max out, but I just lift."

- With Jekiri being regarded as a good defensive player, the key for him this year will be to stay on the court and avoid foul trouble—something he didn't have to worry about last season as a role player when he averaged 6.7 fouls per 40 minutes, which is high for a big man. A good range would be to be around 4.5 while improving on his 5.2 block percent, which is low for a player of his size and ability. Larrañaga said that fouling is an issue for Jekiri as well as the rest of UM's big men. "I think all of our big guys foul too much, not just Tonye," Larrañaga said. "Our bigger guys tend to be very physical which we like, but we don't want them fouling the shooter. Contest without fouling is one of our ten commitments and we're need our players to understand the importance of that because we don't want to put people on the foul line."

- PF James Kelly continues to receive attention from assistant coach Eric Konkol, who has been working with Kelly since he arrived on campus this summer. Kelly has a combination of inside-out scoring ability, which the team will need in the post. "He's probably our most explosive athlete in terms of running and jumping," Larrañaga said. "He's working very hard at getting stronger and he likes what he sees in the weight room."

- PF Donnavan Kirk showed his long-range shooting ability once again during practice as he shot at a very good percentage from behind the

3-point arc at the top of the key. He has a nice, smooth stroke from the outside—something he's worked on immensely over his collegiate career. "Donnavan gives us some size and versatility kind of like Kenny Kadji did," Larrañaga said. "Kenny was an excellent 3-point shooter and Donnavan is very solid in that category. Kenny was very solid at running in the open court and getting lay-ups and dunks and Donnavan can do that; he also has a very good hook inside that I'd like him to use even more than he has in practice. He can defend different guys—a four man, a five man—but I think he's also able to switch out on a perimeter player and do a pretty good job there. He's pretty athletic, pretty long, and he's gotten stronger. I think he's going to have a very good year for us. For a guy that only has one year with us he has a lot to learn so he can apply it very, very quickly. He's smart and he's learning."

- Freshman G Deandre Burnett says his left shoulder is still not 100 percent after injuring in the summer, but says it's not been an issue and hopes to be completely healed for the season. "It's a lot better," Burnett said. "It's not 100 percent yet, but it's good enough for me to get the job done on the court. Wes (Brown) is helping me with treatment and by the time the season comes it will be 100 percent." Burnett has been splitting time between point and shooting guard this fall and will continue to do.

- Freshman PG Manu Lecomte continues to receive praise, which backs up the belief that he'll be the team's starting point guard this season. "He's a terrific little player, smart," Larrañaga said. "He is an experienced player beyond his years. He's very calm on the court and if you've spoken to our players and asked them what he's like, I'd imagine that they'd like him a lot because he's a pass-first point guard. If he can find you and you're open, he's going to get it to you." The biggest transition for Lecomte in adjusting to the style of play in the States compared to Europe is the bigger, faster, and more athletic players he'll see in the ACC. The biggest differences between Lecomte and former point guard Shane Larkin is that Larkin was far more athletic and could create for himself and others whereas Lecomte is solely comfortable creating for others.

- To update the team's efforts to run Larrañaga's ideal scramble defense, Larrañaga said: "We're still early in the practice season so we're just introducing it and the scramble has several different components and we've only introduced two and they've picked those two up pretty well. They're not executing it very well yet, but they've showed signs that they could. The biggest thing with the scramble is that you have to have guys who are willing to rotate. You don't want to leave a guy open. When you double-team, which is what the scramble is—it's trapping out of your man-to-man defense so if we trap the ballhandler someone's got to rotate to the open man and if I leave my man to go trap the ball and someone doesn't help me, I'm not likely not going to want to leave the next time. We're getting to the point where we're trying to trap the guy, working on the traps, but it's not very good yet. If we played someone today I'd be very reluctant to use it very often. I'd try it to see how the other team would handle it, but it's not

something I plan on using more than a couple of possessions right now. But based on the quality as we go forward we'll increase the percentage that we'll use it if our frontcourt guys really are good at rotating." Larrañaga added that his big men this year are much more comfortable rotating compared to last year's team, which preferred to stay close to the basket.

- Raphael Akpejori is working as a center behind Tonye Jekiri while Donnavan Kirk, James Kelly, and Erik Swoope are battling for time at the power forward spot. "(Raphael) is probably the biggest strongest guy on the team and we need him to battle other big, strong players that we'll face," Larrañaga said. "He's someone that's going to be vitally important to our progress."

- Freshman SG Davon Reed is continuing to work on his ballhandling and has showed improvements, which were evident during practice as he's getting to the basket better with a quicker first step.

- Miami has 10 players on scholarship available for this season and all will play according to Larrañaga with primarily an eight-man rotation. Transfers Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan will participate in all team activities with the second unit as two teams, white and green, will be divided with six players on each team as opposed to giving more reps to other players that will play this season. When the season begins, the second unit (green) will be the scout team, which Rodriguez and McClellan will be a part of. And if McClellan continues to make the improvements on his outside shot, which has been his primary focus since he arrived, he'll be UM's top scorer next season.

- SG Garrius Adams is being inducted into the Middle Creek (N.C.) High School Athletics Hall of Fame. Adams, who is the school's all-time leading scorer, will be honored before the school's football game on October 18. "Playing basketball at Middle Creek was a great experience and a major highlight in my life," Adams said. "It was great at the time because we worked hard every day to be the best and I was doing it with teammates that were like brothers."

- There are minor injuries the team is dealing with, but nothing that have kept the players out of practice.

- Larrañaga discussed the balance of having joke-tellers and being serious, which are key components in building team chemistry. You can listen to Larrañaga discuss the topic here

- Walk-on tryouts will be held on Oct. 24. Currently UM has two walk-ons on the team: Justin Heller and Steve Sorenson.

- To update the whereabouts of last year's Hurricanes, Shane Larkin is with the Dallas Mavericks still recovering from a knee injury, Kenny Kadji is in camp with the Cleveland Cavaliers and Trey McKinney-Jones with the Milwaukee Bucks with non-guaranteed contracts. Durand Scott is in Spain with Blusens Monbus and Julian Gamble is in France with Saint Valier while Reggie Johnson is not currently with a team.

Men's Basketball Practice in Full Swing

CanelInsider

Victoria Hernandez

Oct. 8, 2013

"Wasn't that a great football game the other day?" smiled Coach Jim Larrañaga when he addressed the media on Monday. Last year, when his Miami Hurricanes won the Atlantic Coast Conference, the football players responded on Twitter with high hopes for their own season. Now that the guys on the gridiron are undefeated, it is the basketball team's turn to pick up where it left off.

"I think winning has a way of becoming a habit," Larrañaga said.

The team announced Tuesday it is holding walk-on tryouts for students who wish to join in on the fun at 5 p.m. on Thursday in the Bank United Center Fieldhouse. Requirements are that the athlete must be a full-time student at the University of Miami, attend an information session and pass a physical. Sophomore Steve Sorenson earned his spot on the team last year as a walk-on. Senior Justin Heller is also a walk-on.

For now, everyone is playing healthy after some injuries limited players including Garrus Adams and Erik Swoope.

"Once they were able to get started with the official practice date, miraculously, they all got well," the coach chuckled.

The team has been loosely following a two days on, one day off schedule. The pace is very slow. Offensively, the players worked on different ball screens. On defense, they were introduced to the scramble. All 12 players are participating, including Angel Rodriguez who is redshirting and Sheldon McClellan, a transfer from Texas.

Last week, the first week of practice, was the first time Larrañaga got to see his team because he had been out recruiting. He said Tonye Jekiri is definitely more experienced now that he's a sophomore, but still has room to grow. He is competing with Raphael Akepejori, who Larrañaga called

the biggest, strongest guy on the team, for a spot on the starting lineup. One improvement Larrañaga is trying to make from last year is that he doesn't want his big men to foul as much. A positive change from last year is that the big guys are not afraid to leave the basket. This will be essential in implementing the scramble.

There are high expectations for freshman Manu Lecomte because of his success on the Under-20 team in his home country of Belgium. There are early comparisons to Shane Larkin, but Larrañaga said he has to work on his defense in order to reach the caliber of player that Larkin became.

Donnavan Kirk returned to the Hurricanes after transferring from Miami to DePaul in 2011. He has one more year of eligibility and Larrañaga compared him to Kenny Kadji because of his size and athleticism. He is competing with James Kelly and Swoope.

This team is starting to bond as a family, as Larrañaga explained how the players are cracking jokes, but know when to be serious.

"I think they're enjoying the competition, but they're very, very conscientious about learning and doing what we're asking them to do," he said.

Practice continues next week. The exhibition game is against Florida Tech at 7:30 p.m. on October 30 at the Bank United Center.

Kirk Happy To Be Back At Miami

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Oct. 4, 2013

When the 2012-13 season ended, power forward Donnavan Kirk, who earned his degree in marketing, made up his mind that he would take advantage of the NCAA's graduate student transfer rule.

Once the word spread that Kirk was looking into a transfer, colleges lined up for his services.

Kirk (6-9, 228) started 30 games for DePaul last season, averaging six points per game while blocking 50 shots. His length and athleticism could be a valuable addition to many teams around the country.

"That was a pretty crazy recruitment because I only have one year, a lot of schools were interested," Kirk said. "It was more intense than high school."

Kirk heard from schools like Gonzaga and Colorado State. Then UM coach Jim Larrañaga made contact. Kirk started his career at Miami in 2009 and then transferred to DePaul midway through the 2010-11 season.

Kirk played at UM under coach Frank Haith.

"I thought about it and at first I thought going back and starting over might be weird, but then I came to the conclusion that it wouldn't be a bad idea because I know the coaches, the players, and the area. It wouldn't be much of a start over," Kirk said. "I could incorporate myself at a position they needed."

Kirk came down for a visit at Miami and after spending time with the UM coaching staff and players on the team, he knew a move to Coral Gables was the best option

for his final year of college basketball.

"It was just the best fit," Kirk said.

A big part of choosing Miami was because of the strong run the Hurricanes went on in 2012-13. UM was one of the best teams in the country last year and Kirk attributes a lot of that success to coach Larrañaga and the way he gets the best out of his players.

"They were all over ESPN, so I couldn't miss them," Kirk said. "I followed them and I liked the chemistry they had as a team and the togetherness they showed. That definitely comes from having good guys that are unselfish and want to play well as a team. Coach Larrañaga put them all in great positions to succeed."

Kirk is also familiar with the veteran players on the team like Rion Brown, Raphael Akpejori, Garrius Adams, and Erik Swoope.

"The best part about being back is just being around those guys," Kirk said. "They are a great group and knowing them has made the transition easy. It was like I never left and I am glad that they welcomed me back like they have."

Even though Kirk was gone from the Miami program for just 18 months, he can already see the transformation that has taken place under the leadership of Larrañaga.

"I think the biggest difference in the program since the time I left is the foundation is stronger. I think everybody on the same page now and the communication is better with how the coaches let it be known what needs to be done and what they want from the players."

DePaul went 11-21 last season with a 2-16 record in the Big East. He expanded

his game since he left UM and hopes to fill the role Kenny Kadji played last season as a stretch power forward.

"I developed a better jump shot," Kirk said. "I was forced to play outside a little bit because I hurt my back in my first year there and I didn't want to bang around as much down low. I learned a lot about pressing and some different concepts on defense. I also got better with blocking shots with my timing and when to take a charge. It was a great place for me."

"The coaches have talked to me about playing a stretch four role at times. That opens up a lot of the offense. It is hard for defenses to guard if there is a power forward that can hit threes."

Coach Larrañaga is confident Kirk can be a valuable addition to the team this year.

"Donnavan gives us some size and versatility like Kenny Kadji did," Larrañaga said. "Kenny was an excellent three point shooter and Donnavan is solid in that category. Kenny was athletic in the open court getting lay-ups and dunks and Donnavan can do that. Donnavan also has a jump hook I'd like to see him use more than he has so far in practice. He can defend a four man and five man and he can switch on a perimeter player and do a good job."

Miami lost their top six players from the 2012-13 season, but Kirk has confidence that the group of new faces in 2013-14 will jell and come together in time under the leadership of Larrañaga.

"We are coming together nicely and coach Larrañaga really lets us know what it is going to take for us to win," Kirk said. "We trust in him and we just have to stay with this process and keep coming together and everything will work out."

Swoope Anticipating Larger Role

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Oct. 4, 2013

Erik Swoope has been a role player throughout his first three years at Miami.

He's hoping for a larger role this year.

Swoope lost 17 pounds in the offseason in preparation for his new role.

"I understand that it's going to change," he said of his role. "Over the summer, I lost 17 pounds, put on muscle. My lifting numbers are insane. I've understood that for us to be successful just like we were last year, the senior leadership is key. Some of the guys made transitions. Some of them stepped up in times where we really needed them. I understand that, no, I've not always been a big scorer or rebounder or anything like that, but going into this year we do have so many young guys that I know my role is going to change and I'm just trying to do everything that I can to help us out."

He recently broke his nose, but does not anticipate it to hold him out very long.

"I fractured it about two weeks ago," he said. "I had a minor surgery a couple of days ago. I should be good to go in the next couple of days."

The 6-foot-5, 220-pound athletic small forward was not in Miami's primary rotation last season, but did play in 27 games scoring 1.6 points a game.

In addition to having a larger role, Swoope is looking to be one of the leaders on the team as one of four seniors.

"It's been a big learning curve," he said. "We have so many new guys. With Rion (Brown) being the only one of the rotation guys still around, I think he understands, as he's said, it's a big task to get everyone on board, to understand, to be successful like we were last year. I noticed in summer practice, the guys are gravitating

towards him very quickly. What Coach L teaches us, it's really influenced some of the seniors and mainly Rion. I think we're definitely on the right track."

There are seven newcomers with an eighth, Cornelius Elder, expected to join the team in January when football season is over.

"Especially our last few workouts, we're working on the offense a little bit and helping guys understand what reads to make," Swoope said. "In high school, you'll be that superstar and the biggest transition is finding out what you're actually really good at the highest level."

An important factor for the newcomers is to be inquisitive.

"I would say it is important from my experience as a young guy to ask a lot of questions," Swoope said. "Sometimes when the young guys come in, they feel like they know everything there is to know about basketball. But, these guys are very inquisitive. They want to know what's going on. They want to learn, meet with the coaches, watch films, and so on and so forth."

One of the intriguing newcomers is freshman point guard Manu Lecomte from Belgium.

"He's looking good," Swoope said. "He's learning. He's young. He needs to lift a little bit more. He's picking up on our offense and the tendencies it will take to be successful in the ACC. He's picking up on them very quickly."

Junior college transfer power forward James Kelly has also been a newcomer who has impressed.

"He reminds me a lot of DeQuan Jones," Swoope said. "He's very, very athletic, has a lot of different capabilities. He has to understand in the floor of the offense where he can be most useful."

Sophomore center Tonye Jekiri has received plenty of praise for his improvements and many expect him to have a breakout season.

"It just a confidence thing," Swoope said. "Last year with so many seniors being around, he just had a respect for them and their games, where this year he understands, 'I am the big man. For us to be successful, I have to be a threat.' He's making that transition very quickly."

When asked what area will surprise people with this year's team, Swoope replied:

"Our athleticisms is, if you ask me, ten times what it was last year. I know we're not as big, but I've seen in practice the new guys, the program that we've instilled last year, the guys' athleticism, their speed, and their quickness is outstanding. To be honest, there's going to be some fun games to watch."

The increased athleticism will change the team's playing style.

"It will affect different things like full court press. We only did it for split seconds in the games in the spring to surprise them. That might become a key for our defense."

Head coach Jim Larrañaga returns for his third season, but Swoope doesn't see much difference in him after last year's historic season.

"No. He's the same Coach L. Hasn't changed a bit. The philosophies are the same just newer guys. His mentality, his drive, and his success are the same."

Miami has an exhibition game on Oct. 30 against Florida Tech.

Brown Ready To Lead

Inside The U
David Lake
Oct. 3, 2013

Senior shooting guard Rion Brown is one of the few players returning who received significant minutes during Miami's magical 2012-13 season.

Brown logged 22 minutes per game for the ACC Champion Hurricanes last year, averaging six points per game.

Now Brown will take on a much bigger role for the 2013-14 Hurricanes and will serve as the veteran leader on the team.

"I feel a responsibility to step it up a little bit more, take more responsibility for the team, and how we play in the games," Brown said.

Miami coach Jim Larrañaga believes Brown is up to the challenge of having a bigger role.

"I don't know if you have noticed how much Rion's body has changed from early in his career, but he's now a man," Larrañaga said. "If you look at him, he's older, stronger, and very athletic and he shoots the three well. He's a father. He has a son so he has matured very well throughout his college career. And very simply, in my mind, this is going to be the best year of his college career."

Miami will look for Brown to shoulder more of a scoring load this year. Brown has averaged 5.9 points per game and shot 38 percent from the field during his Miami career.

"I think the guys that were looking for immediately to take on a scoring load will be Brown, Garrius Adams, and Tonye Jekiri," Larrañaga said. "Those three guys have a lot of experience in terms of comparing

them to the other guys on the team."

Brown knew his role would expand once the 2012-13 season ended. He put in a lot of hours in the gym this offseason to improve his game.

"I would just say that I worked on every aspect of my game," Brown said. "I mean there's probably nothing I left out. I'm trying to be more versatile, be able to score different ways. On defense, I'm getting a little quicker, getting stronger, be able to guard bigger guys every once in a while. I just worked on any and every thing I could think of."

Brown, Jekiri, and Adams are Miami's most experienced players on the UM roster and the Hurricanes will also need to lean heavily on newcomers like graduate transfer Donnavan Kirk, Texas transfer Sheldon McClellan, JUCO transfer James Kelly, and freshmen Manu Lecomte, Davon Reed, and Deandre Burnett.

Brown knows the success of the team this year will depend greatly on how quickly those players adjust to playing at UM this year.

"This season is really about how fast the young guys learn," Brown said. "It took us a while when Coach L first got here until you saw the results really start happening. The faster those young guys learn, the faster we start to mesh and bond a little bit more, the better we'll be."

Brown has been impressed by the attitude and work ethic of the newcomers thus far.

"All of the freshmen definitely came in with the right mindset," Brown said. "That's actually kind of surprising. You always feel like you're going to have those one or two that you're going to have to sit down and talk to like 'Hey, this is how it goes...' But,

they all came here ready to work, going to the gym every day and every night, even together. That's great to see, knowing that we're not going to have to get on them too much."

The ACC will have a different look to it this year with the addition of Syracuse, Pittsburgh, and Notre Dame. Brown is looking forward to playing at Syracuse on January 4th.

"I would probably say I'm looking forward to playing at Syracuse the most. I've never been to New York. I hear about it and see it on TV. I definitely want to get down there and be able to have that experience. Of course you know their gym is always packed. They play in the dome. I'm looking forward to that.

'It's gotta be the shoes?'

NBC Sports College Basketball Talk
Raphielle Johnson
Oct. 3, 2013

"If you look good, you feel good. If you feel good, you play good. If you play good, they pay good."

Those are the famous words of Deion Sanders, and while college basketball players certainly can't be "paid" the words can be applied to the college game. Why? Shoes, that's why. While signature shoes saw their start in the 1980s it took some time for college players to add their own personal style, with many of the nation's top programs going with a more uniform look when it comes to footwear.

source: Getty Images
In recent years some programs have given their players more freedom to express themselves in this regard, and the results have grabbed the attention of many. One program that's stood out in this regard is Miami, whose school colors (orange and green) tend to lend itself to more self-expression when it comes to footwear. Last year's ACC champions displayed a wide variety of looks, catching the attention of both college basketball fans and diehard "sneakerheads."

With the freedom to add their own personal flair, what shoes a player wears on the floor can become competitive but in a good way. Teammates can turn this into a good-natured competition of sorts, with the goal being to make sure no one's shoe looks better than theirs.

"Definitely, especially between Shane [Larkin] and Durand [Scott]," Miami senior guard Rion Brown told NBCSports.com in a phone interview. "Of course guys like myself, Kenny [Kadji] and Erik Swoope jumped in. Every time a new shoe came out we wanted to get it before someone else got it, and we tried not to tell anybody [else] what shoe we had until the game started."

The Hurricanes displayed some interesting footwear, and as Brown noted in the

phone interview their colors (orange and green) worked well with some of the new shoes the program's official supplier (Nike) released. Big man Julian Gamble wore the SoleFly x Jordan Spiz'ike shoe during the NCAA tournament last season, with the shoe being designed to commemorate SoleFly's (a Miami-based sneaker boutique) two-year anniversary. As for the aforementioned Larkin, he wore volt colorways of both the LeBron X and the Spiz'ike (the special Black History Month release) during the ACC and NCAA tournaments. And among the sneakers worn by Scott last season were the Black History Month version of the Kobe 8 and the Zoom Huarache 2K4 Volt.

In regards to which players were the most creative last season, that was a tie according to Brown.

"I would probably say that was between Kenny and Shane," said Brown. "Shane always had the most "up to date" shoes, and Kenny always picked the weirdest ones."

Miami isn't the only school with players who like to stand out via their footwear, and the companies have aided in this process. Players at Arizona, San Diego State, UNLV and many other programs have caught the attention of sneaker collectors in recent years thanks to some of their footwear choices. North Carolina even has a team-specific version of the Jordan XX8 that they'll wear this upcoming season.

Gone are the days of the old-fashioned Chuck Taylor shoe being worn on the court, much to the chagrin of some traditionalists from a style standpoint, with technology improving as well as consumers being able to practically design their own shoe (for a higher cost, of course).

That can go a variety of ways, from players creating their own designs to manufacturers designing special shoes for the programs they sponsor. One example of this would be Maryland, which is sponsored by Under Armour (founded by Maryland alumnus Kevin Plank). For their game against

N.C. State in January the Terrapins wore a full "Maryland Pride" ensemble, complete with a pair of sneakers that featured different patterns in order to replicate the look of the Maryland state flag.

Another program that's been one of the more creative in college basketball is Baylor, who wore those unforgettable "electricity" uniforms during their run to the Elite Eight in 2012. During the Big 12 tournament the Bears, who won the Postseason NIT, wore uniforms designed by adidas that had sleeves and their colors also led to some eye-catching footwear choices.

Is a player's shoe choice the difference between winning and losing? Unless the player's out on the floor playing in an uncomfortable shoe with its best feature being multiple holes in the sole the answer is obviously no. But while sneakers are clearly a billboard for the manufacturer, they also give the players an opportunity to show off some of their personality.

Some will go with the standard team issue sneakers, either because it isn't that big of a deal to them or they play for a school that prefers that they go with a more conservative approach. And on the other end of the spectrum are the players who want to make a statement in two regards: with their play, and with their fashion sense.

As for Miami, Brown and his teammates will look to continue to wear distinct shoes despite the majority of last season's squad moving on to the professional ranks.

"Me and Erik will definitely look to step our game up and keep it going," said Brown, who noted that the Hurricanes' newcomers are catching on when it comes to the footwear. "Even our three walk-ons, Justin Heller, Mike Fernandez and Steve Sorenson, have already started getting their shoes ready."

Rodriguez won't apply for waiver, will sit out

CBS Sports

Jeff Borzello

Sept. 30, 2013

When Angel Rodriguez announced he was leaving Kansas State and transferring to Miami, the first question everyone had regarded a potential waiver. Would Rodriguez be eligible to play immediately for the Hurricanes, without sitting out a year?

It turns out, Rodriguez and Miami are not even waiting for an NCAA decision: the point guard will sit out.

Head coach Jim Larrañaga spoke to the media on Friday regarding the situation:

"I should let everybody know that when Angel contacted us and made the decision to transfer here, in one of our very first conversations, Angel shared with me, that he was struggling with injuries that he sustained during his two years in college. One was a wrist injury, and one was a very serious tendinitis in his knee. When we had him visit with our trainer Wes Brown, Wes felt that it was so severe that he took him to our team doctors. They did X-rays and MRI's, and eventually shut him down the entire summer.

"When Angel and I talked about him for this upcoming year, the discussion was, 'There is no sense applying for the waiver to help you be eligible when you're not physically going to be fit enough.' He told me at that time, he would much prefer to just sit out the year anyway, learn the new system and be 100%, or close to 100%, for his last two years. We were waiting to decide whether or not to apply for the waiver to see how he was feeling. I spoke to him the other day. We both agreed that we weren't going to apply for the waiver, so he's definitely going to red shirt this year with Sheldon McClellan and be available next season and the following year."

Rodriguez, a 5-foot-11 junior from Puerto Rico, averaged 11.4 points and 5.2 assists last season for Kansas State. He would have stepped right into the vacated point guard role formerly occupied by draft pick Shane Larkin. Without Rodriguez, Larrañaga will turn to a committee of sorts. Belgium native Manu Lecomte and scorer Deandre Burnett, both freshmen, will see minutes, while 6-foot-6 Garrius Adams brings versatility.

Miami will undoubtedly take a step back from its 29-7, ACC championship campaign. The Hurricanes lose all five starters, with Rion Brown (6.4 ppg) the leading returning scorer and the only player who played more than seven minutes per game last season. A deep freshman class, along with DePaul transfer Donnavan Kirk, will bring reinforcements. Sophomore center Tonye Jekiri could be poised for a breakout season.

Expect a bounce-back in 2014-15, when Rodriguez and Texas transfer Sheldon McClellan will both be eligible. With only three seniors on this year's team, Larrañaga could have the Hurricanes back in the mix within two years.

Miami now stocked with freshmen, transfers

The Miami Hurricane
Patrick Riley
Sept. 29, 2013

It's only been 186 days since the Canes' magical season came to a sudden end. But somehow, Miami has grown nearly unrecognizable after falling to the Golden Eagles of Marquette in the NCAA Sweet 16.

Shane Larkin has left for the NBA (he was a first-round draft pick for the Dallas Mavericks), and Durand Scott and Julian Gamble are trying their luck in Europe (Spain and France, respectively). Kenny Kadji, Reggie Johnson and Trey McKinney Jones have graduated, so Miami now features a roster with five freshman and four transfers.

The most intriguing transfer case is Donovan Kirk, who came to Miami in 2009, transferred to – and graduated from – DePaul. Kirk has now come back to Miami for his master's. He is joined by fellow transfers Angel Rodriguez (Kansas State), Sheldon McClellan (Texas) and James Kelly (Owens Community College).

One of the few familiar faces on the Hurricanes is senior guard Rion Brown, who knows that the success of this upcoming season will largely depend on his leadership and ability to help incoming players transition to the college level.

"I'd say it's moreso going to be how fast the young guys learn," Brown said at Miami's opening media day Friday. "You know, it took us a while when coach [Jim Larrañaga] first got here, as you can see the results didn't really start happening until the next year. So the faster those young guys learn, and the faster we start to mesh and bond a little bit more, the better we'll be."

So far, Brown has been impressed with their demeanor.

"All the freshmen, they definitely came here with the right mindset," Brown said. "That actually kind of surprised me. You always feel like you're going to have those one or two that you're going to have to sit down and talk to, 'Hey this is how it goes.' But they all came here ready to work. They were in the gym every day, every night, even together."

Likewise, sophomore Tonye Jekiri has put in a lot of work to become a bigger factor at the center position.

"It's mainly just a confidence thing for him," senior Erik Swoope said of his 7-foot teammate. "Last year with so many seniors being around, he just had a respect for them and their games, where this year he understands 'I am the big man and for us to be successful I have to be a threat.' And he's making that transition very quickly."

But while the younger players continue to make big strides, there is still a degree of uncertainty in the Coral Gables air.

"Last year at this time, I was confident that we had the talent and experience, the skills to compete for a national championship and ACC championship," Larrañaga said Friday. "Going into this season, there are a lot of unknowns. I just don't know my team well enough, because we have so many new faces."

A huge question mark for the Hurricanes is the point guard position. Rodriguez will sit out the year due to a wrist injury and tendinitis in his knee. McClellan will redshirt as well.

"The plan is to spend the next three weeks trying to figure out who might start, who might back that person up, and who would give us the depth we need at the point guard position," Larrañaga said. "But right

now if you'd ask me, I would say Manu [Lecomte], Deandre [Burnett] and Garrius [Adams] will all share that responsibility, either as a starter or as a sub."

With a tough ACC schedule ahead and massive personnel turnover, the Hurricanes have their work cut out for them as they plan to defend their ACC regular season and tournament championships. But Miami's confidence remains high despite potentially lower expectations.

Swoope looks forward to facing conference newcomers Pittsburgh, Syracuse and Notre Dame.

"I'm excited to see all three of them," he said. "They're new to the ACC and if you ask me, I want to let them know what the ACC is all about."

Canes will not seek waiver for transfer Rodriguez

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Sept. 28, 2013

It remains to be seen who will replace Shane Larkin as starting point guard for the University of Miami men's basketball team this season, but one player who won't be running the floor — at least not until next season — is Angel Rodriguez, a Kansas State transfer who played at Miami Krop High.

Coach Jim Larrañaga said Friday before the Hurricanes' first official practice that the school will not appeal to the NCAA for a waiver to expedite Rodriguez's eligibility because Rodriguez is recovering from tendinitis in his knees, and the player said he would rather sit out this season, learn the new system and come back 100 percent for his final two years of eligibility.

Larrañaga said that UM team doctors examined Rodriguez upon his arrival and "shut him down the entire summer" because the tendinitis was that severe.

"When we talked to Angel about this coming year, we told him there was no sense in even applying for the waiver if you're not physically fit enough," the coach said. "We were waiting to decide to see how he feels, spoke to him the other day and both agreed we're not even going to apply."

The point guard duties will likely be shared by Belgian freshman Manu Lecomte, graduate student Garrius Adams (back from a medical redshirt season) and freshman DeAndre Burnett of Carol City High, who is more of a scorer but can also play the point.

Lecomte has competed for the Belgian Under-16, U-18 and U-20 national teams. He is small — 5-9, 159 pounds — but has impressed his coaches.

"Manu is adorable and will have to be aware of all the girls who are going to be interested in him," Larrañaga said. "He is a very good-looking young man, smart and has a very mature way of approaching his schoolwork and basketball. I am very, very impressed with him as a person, and the players are impressed with him as a player. You'll see a lot of him, as a starter or a sub."

The Hurricanes are coming off an Atlantic Coast Conference championship season and a thrilling Sweet 16 run. They lost the top six scorers from that team, including Larkin, Kenny Kadji, Durand Scott, Julian Gamble and Reggie Johnson. The only player returning who was in the starting rotation is senior forward Rion Brown, who has taken on more of a leadership role.

This season's team has nine new faces, including five true freshmen.

"They are learning a whole new way of looking at the game of basketball," Larrañaga said. "Everybody comes from a different background, learned the game from their high school or AAU coach. It's going to take them some time. We have to be very, very patient with them."

One player who could make a big difference — literally — is sophomore center Tonye Jekiri. He bulked up from 215 to 240 pounds over the summer and has been working on his shooting so much that he developed tendinitis in his shoulder.

"Tonye looks like a totally different person," Brown said. "You won't even recognize him."

Senior forward Erik Swoope agreed.

"Tonye has so much more confidence this year," Swoope said. "Last year, he had a

lot of respect for the older guys. This year, he's saying, 'I am the big man, and for us to be successful I have to be a threat.'"

Added Larrañaga: "When Tonye was a freshman, the first thing you noticed is he's got size and speed, but he didn't have the bulk or strength to battle against the bigger, stronger guys on our team. So when he was going up against Reggie, Kenny and Julian and Rafael [Akpejore], they pushed him around a lot. He has worked very hard at gaining strength and weight. He gained valuable experience as a freshman in practice against the veterans and in games against all the best teams in the country. He's going to take a major step forward this season but still is not going to be the kind of player he's going to become until his junior year."

The Canes will play an exhibition game Oct. 30 against Florida Tech and open the season Nov. 8 at home against St. Francis.

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/09/28/3655618/canes-will-not-seek-waiver-for.html#storylink=cpy>

Larranga talks 2013-14 prospects at Miami

The Examiner
Paul Borden
Sept. 27, 2013

With his team readying for the official start of practice the next day, University of Miami basketball coach Jim Larranga sat down Friday with area media representatives to talk about prospects for the 2013-14 season.

Either through exhaustion of eligibility (Durrand Scott, Julian Gamble, Trey McKinney-Jones, Kenny Kadji, and Reggie Johnson) or an early move to the NBA (Shane Larkin), the Hurricanes lose their top six scorers from a team that won the regular-season and tournament titles of the Atlantic Coast Conference this past season, set a school record for wins (29), and advanced to the NCAA tourney regional semifinals.

Only one player who played in all 36 games, Rion Brown, returns. Brown, a senior guard, averaged 6.4 points in 22.2 minutes an appearance and made six starts.

"Last year at this time I was confident that we had the talent and experience, the skills, to compete for a national championship and an ACC championship," Larranga said. "Going into this season, there are just a lot of unknowns.

"I just don't know my team well enough because we have so many new faces. Before I can project how we're going to do or how we're going to play, I've got basically to watch us for two or three weeks or even into November."

Other returning veterans in addition to Brown include senior Erik Swoope, who had no starts in 27 appearances last season, and sophomore Tonye Jekiri, who has added about 25 pounds to his 7-foot frame since reporting as a slender freshman a year ago. He now weighs in at about

240 pounds and won't be as easily pushed around as he was at times.

Graduate guard Garrius Adams, who has had injury problems throughout his career and sat out all of last year, also is a returnee with some experience. He played in 19 games as a junior in 2011-12 after making 68 appearances his first two years.

One of the more pressing priorities will be finding a point guard to take over for Larkin. The Hurricanes don't need his successor to be the scorer Larkin was last season (a team-best 14.5 points a game), but do need someone to run the offense and generally take command.

Adams is the most experienced hand in the mix, but freshmen Manu Lecomte from Belgium and freshman Deandre Burnett from Miami also have the opportunity share in the responsibility.

Burnett's best position, however, may be as a "2 guard" or scorer, Larranga said.

"He's got a knack for putting the ball in the basket," Larranga said.

Lecomte, who is only 5-9, drew the coach's praise.

"You'll see him a lot during the season, either as a starter or someone coming off the bench," Larranga said of Lecomte. "But he's going to earn a lot of playing time."

There was some thought to applying to the NCAA for immediate eligibility for guard Angel Rodriguez, who had 173 assists at Kansas State last season, but Rodriguez is contending with injuries and has expressed the desire to sit out the 2013-14 season. He will join another transfer guard, Sheldon McClellan from Texas, as a redshirt this time around.

Coach Jim Larrañaga ready for uncertain season

CanelInsider

Victoria Hernandez

Sept. 27, 2013

There are a lot of unknowns heading into the 2013-2014 basketball season. The Miami Hurricanes lost six of their key players from last season's team that won the Atlantic Coast Conference championship. There are five true bright-eyed freshmen on this roster. The buzz word Friday, the first day of practice, was "learning curve." Coach Jim Larrañaga's third year will be defined by how fast the young guys adjust to the big stage, which might be sooner than later.

Larrañaga said the biggest challenge to prepare for the season is, "learning a whole new way of looking at the game of basketball because we have so many new players."

Senior Erik Swoope said he is impressed with how the new guys have been asking questions. They have the humility to admit they don't know everything there is to know about basketball.

Fellow senior Rion Brown added, "All the freshmen, they definitely came in with the right mindset. It actually kind of surprised me."

Brown is expected to take on the responsibilities of a leader. He is the only returning rotation player and as Swoope pointed out, the younger guys are already coming to him for guidance. Brown said he worked on every aspect of his game this summer.

"He's now a man. If you look at him, he's older, stronger," said Larrañaga, who predicts this will be Brown's best season yet. There are high expectations for sophomore Tonye Jekiri, who played minimally last year. Playing behind Julian Gamble and Reggie Johnson allowed him to study the game. Now that he is the lone big man, he has a new sense of urgency to make an impact.

"He looks like a totally different person," said Brown. "I'm gonna let that be a sur-

prise for y'all. I'm telling you, you'll see. Not even like the same person, I promise you," he continued.

Swoope, another returning veteran, lost 17 pounds over the summer. He feels confident and showed last year's swagger is still lingering when he smiled at how his "lifting numbers are insane now, as usual." He is fully prepared to fill whatever role he is called to.

Raphael Akpejori will continue to contribute to the team, especially on defense. He spent the summer with Athletes in Action in Jamaica and has a new motivation for playing the game. "He looks like the Hulk," joked Brown on Akpejori's size. "He's just got pure diesel. And he's getting ready to guard those bigger guys."

Garius Adams is listed as a graduate student after redshirting last year with a knee injury. Brown said he is 100 percent, but Larrañaga was hesitant to agree, saying Adams suffered a minor injury this summer that's still bothering him. The coach praised Adams for being a versatile player, but the main priority is keeping him healthy.

The ACC has added Syracuse, Pittsburgh and Notre Dame. Brown said he is most excited to play away at Syracuse because of the hype surrounding the program. Swoope is looking forward to playing all three teams and introducing them to hard-nosed ACC basketball.

With the departure of Shane Larkin, the point guard position is a big question mark. If Larrañaga had to determine his point guard today, it would be between Adams and freshmen Manu Lecomte and Deandre Burnett.

Angel Rodriguez will redshirt this season. Before transferring from Kansas State, he informed Larrañaga of a wrist injury and tendonitis in his knee. Instead of applying to waive the transfer sit-out period, Rodriguez will take this year off so that he is healthy for his last two years of eligibility. When asked what his expectations are,

Swoope immediately said that "Our athleticism is, if you ask me, 10 times what it was as last year." Look for the full court press to be a regular feature of the defense. Larrañaga said the team will start learning the scramble on the first day. The defense will be expected to create offense. Swoope promised some fun games. That's a lofty guarantee, especially considering Hurricane fans packed the Bank United Center multiple times last season. It will be hard to forget the memories of the upset over Duke and the net-cutting ceremony after clinching the ACC regular season in a victory over Clemson.

The Hurricanes have an exhibition game on October 30 at the Bank United Center against Florida Tech. They will open the season November 8th at home against St. Francis.

Jim Larrañaga appointed to Miami faculty

AP
Tim Reynolds
Sept. 20, 2013

Miami coach Jim Larrañaga is now a member of the school's faculty.

Larrañaga, last season's Associated Press men's basketball coach of the year, has been appointed an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Kinesiology and Sport Sciences at Miami.

Because of his coaching responsibilities, Larrañaga will be a guest lecturer at Miami's School of Education and Human Development.

Larrañaga studied education in college and always planned to be a teacher. He was also a member of the faculty at George Mason, where he coached before coming to the Hurricanes.

Larrañaga says the move "will give me the opportunity to interact with more students than ever before." His team opens practice for the coming season on Sept. 27.

Peek Inside the Canes Hoops Scheduling Laboratory

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Sept. 10, 2013

University of Miami assistant coach Eric Konkol will be the first to tell you that it's not an exact science, and that the NCAA selection committee looks at a mountain of information to determine tournament participation and seeding. With more teams, games, data and at-large bids than ever before, there is no guarantee that a team's projected profile will come to pass in March, or that the selection committee will view it the same way that a coaching staff does when they make the schedule, sometimes years in advance. The old practice of scheduling has gone by the wayside, replaced by a hybrid of science, mathematics, art, and maybe even a little bit of psychic fortunetelling.

Konkol, the chief scheduler for the team, does his best to treat it as science - to continue to schedule and refine a formula that will have the year's version of the team looking attractive to the decision-makers come March. While many different factors go into scheduling, and fanbases or television producers may clamor for "sexy" matchups, for Miami, it all comes down to numbers. Konkol was kind enough to take his head out of his vastly detailed spreadsheets and offer us some insight as to the team's scheduling philosophy.

"We don't really use the terms mid-major, low-major, high-major, we use numbers," Konkol explains. "We use top 100, 100 to 200, or 200 and above."

He is referring to the Ratings Percentage Index (RPI) by which teams are ranked based on a formula that considers a team's own winning percentage (50 percent), as well as its opponents winning percentage (25 percent) and its opponents' opponents winning percentage (25 percent). There are over 300 Division I teams that are ranked in the RPI. The selection committee looks beyond records to determine how teams have done against elite opponents, how inflated their record might be, and the overall quality of their opponents and their wins in order to select at-large bids for the tournament.

Knowing what the selection committee is looking for, how does it all come about?

"I have a spreadsheet that's basically just called our Macro Plan, where we're looking at all of our contracts, how they impact each year," Konkol responds. "You have 29 regular-season games you can play," he continues, "or you can play 27 regular-season games, plus an exempt event, which can be up to four games, so you can play a maximum of 31 games."

These events are typically single elimination tournaments at a neutral site, and for Miami, they form the backbone for any year's schedule.

"We want to play in an exempt event every year," Konkol says. Pointing out that the staff was unable to find a replacement for a canceled event in their first year, Konkol indicated that Miami is currently in the second year of a five-year contract with ESPN to play in their tournaments, the first being last year's Diamondhead Classic. "We know they are stable, we've been in them before and they're first class events, and we had those dates locked in and we could build the rest of our schedule around it, and do it years in advance without worrying what exempt event we're going to be in."

"We feel like playing in those events, on the road or neutral site, it mimics the NCAA tournament. You'll play back to back nights," Konkol says. "We know we're going to get some pretty quality teams," plus he adds, that "it's also a great bonding experience" for the team.

Miami plays in the Wooden Legacy in Anaheim this year, starting on Thanksgiving afternoon against George Washington. A potential second-round revenge matchup against Sweet 16 opponent Marquette looms, with Creighton and San Diego State most likely to come out of the other side of the bracket. The remaining three years of the contract will see Miami play in Charleston, Puerto

Rico, and Orlando.

According to Konkol, scheduling is still not a one-year process, even beyond the exempt tournaments. "I have charts all the way out to '16-'17," he notes, "but other than our exempt events and the ACC-Big Ten Challenge, we don't have any games locked in there." Konkol plans for Miami to be a participant in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge each year, as only one ACC team will be excluded in the future due to an imbalance in conference numbers. The Hurricanes play on the road against Nebraska, and plan to play a home game next year against an unknown opponent.

Beyond these made-for-TV contracts and the conference schedule, schools are independent in scheduling other match-ups, though their television partners might suggest a high-visibility match-up against a like team. Typically, schools will pay to bring in lower-rated foes (called "guarantee" games) on a one-year basis, as well as reaching deals for home-and-home series against similar opponents, or "2-for-1" series where the power conference team visits the smaller school once. As Miami plays road games at Savannah State and College of Charleston this year, it might be fair to assume those teams will be back in Coral Gables as soon as next year.

When looking at potential partners, there are a wide variety of factors that come into play. But it all comes back to the numbers. In addition to the RPI, Miami has its own proprietary formulas to look at strength of schedule in a way that they believe has the most impact on their own profile come March.

"We feel there is a number you want to reach, a number of top 100 games and not play anyone 200 or above," Konkol says. "Let's try to schedule like you're not going to play any, but know that you're probably going to play two, and that's okay, out of 30 games."

Konkol and the rest of the staff typically review data, looking at three- and five-year averages and trends amongst potential opponents. In addition to previous scheduling, the staff considers what the proposed opponents might bring to the table during that particular season - returning players and newcomers, the overall strength of that team's conference, and the like. They want to play true road games, but not play in a "small bandbox" - if not playing a similar opponent, they'd prefer to play them at an off-campus site that may have some historical or eye-catching prestige, citing Madison Square Garden or the Barclays Center in New York as examples.

The team also gives considerations to matchup styles, if possible - the game last year against Florida Gulf Coast, a carryover contract from the previous staff, was a challenging contrast between the upstart's "Dunk City" style and Miami's beefy interior. Most importantly, the team wants to be challenged in its schedule.

"Coach L has always believed in playing good teams," Konkol says. "He doesn't like to play games that you're just supposed to win by a landslide, and we know when some people look at our schedule they may think that. He knows that's not the case. We can sit in front of our team in our preparation and say 'Hey, this team went 16-2 in their league last year, and they've got almost everybody back.'

Konkol tells us that while fans may not see the marquee matchups on this year's schedule, the team would rather play a consistent schedule than pinning its entire profile on one or two elite games that may not have as much impact as was predicted months or even years in advance. He knows the data inside and out, and can easily point to several bubble teams that had weak non-conference schedules, and were hurt by it on Selection Sunday.

"They've got very little margin for error," playing that sort of schedule, he says. According to Konkol, if their strength of schedule number was "cut in half, those teams might have made the tournament."

The staff may also try and schedule near a player's

hometown, or in an area where they would like to recruit more. Konkol points to this year's Savannah State road game, which serves as a homecoming for senior guard Rion Brown, who grew up just 15 minutes away. "It's a cherry on top if you can make it happen," Konkol explains. "It's a nice thing to say in recruiting that we're going to try and play near your home." A game near basketball hotbeds such as New York, Washington, DC, or Atlanta also helps increase visibility for the program and amongst potential high-priority recruits.

But, he cautions, "The bottom line is, some of these games, you can't get everything." And above all, the team prioritizes the numbers.

With all of that said, what about this year's schedule?

The school is in the process of announcing non-conference games, and Konkol feels that the numbers work out in favor of the Hurricanes.

"The non-conference schedule we're about to play, if we played them last year, and you assume that we play Marquette and San Diego State (in Anaheim) would be the 30th strongest schedule in the country," according to Konkol. La Salle, a Sweet 16 team last year, is the strongest team that Miami is guaranteed to play when they visit the Hurricanes on December 22.

Konkol calculates that, conservatively, "unless something happens to some of these teams like some major injuries, we anticipate having a top 100 non-conference schedule." He says that should be good enough for fourth- or fifth-best in the ACC based on how other teams traditionally schedule.

Konkol realizes that with tough mid-majors and low-major contenders, the schedule is not as "sexy" as last year's that featured Michigan State and UMass, as well as a matchup with top ten Arizona in Hawaii. He admits that is somewhat by design.

"It's impossible to know how we're really going to be," Konkol says. "We've got nine new players, and two of them may not play (transfers Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan). We've got a lot of figuring out to do, but we're still going to be challenged in the non-conference. These are some good teams coming in here that are used to winning."

Konkol explains that, "we want to give them great challenges against teams that are used to winning, and we know that if we play well in those games and if we can continue to improve and get hot in conference play," anything can happen.

Again, he emphasizes looking at the numbers rather than the name on the front of the jersey.

"Last year, I had guys come in my office who were upset, they were concerned that I didn't think we'd be very good based on our schedule," Konkol notes. "We expected to have a top 20 schedule," though he admits that even he was surprised it worked out favorably to be rated as high as fifth in the country.

So, Canes fans, even if names like Savannah State and Texas Southern don't excite you, know that excitement is not the only reason to schedule a game. The Canes will be challenged in the non-conference, will play elite conference foes like Syracuse (twice), Duke, and North Carolina. Konkol thinks that the team will deliver an exciting product and the staff hopes fans will continue to provide such strong support as they did last year. "Only four of these teams had losing records, and only two of them had RPIs more than 200 last year," Konkol says. Fans are "going to be surprised at the end of the year with the strength of the schedule." Hopefully, the NCAA Tournament selection committee will be surprised as well when they place the Hurricanes somewhere in the bracket next March.

A Conversation with New PG, Manu Lecomte

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
August 1, 2013

The commitment of incoming freshman Belgian point guard Emmanuel ("Manu") Lecomte, which we broke here on SOTU, came as surprise to @CanesHoops fans who are used to looking at major recruiting rankings to gauge the school's success on the trail. But it looks like assistant coach Michael Huger, a former MVP in Belgium's professional league, signed a player who might be a revelation - not only to Canes fans, but to the staff itself. Just 17, Lecomte took the time to answer some questions for us fresh off of an all-tournament performance at the European Under-20 (Division B) championships. The budding international star speaks three languages, and we appreciate him not forcing us to learn Flemish or French before the interview!

Q: Manu, first of all, thanks for taking time to talk to us here at State of The U and congratulations on your all-tournament performance at the U20s! What could you tell us about your experience?

A: It was a great experience playing against guys who were older than me and who are already playing at a top level in Europe. It's always pride for me to play for my country.

Q: Why do you think that you played so well and had such exceptional statistics, compared to some previous successful European appearances?

A: I think I just put the work in, and then the results speak [for] themselves, I've worked really hard the whole year and in the preparation for that championship. My coach was also a big part of that, he put me in the best positions to make a great championship, he knows me very well and knows how I'm playing my best.

Q: What were your final average stats from the U20s (points, assists, steals & rebounds)?

A: My final average stats were: 21.6 points, 6.6 assists, 1.9 steals and 4.1 rebounds. (Editor's note: Lecomte led the tournament in assists and was second in scoring.)

Q: Were there any issues with you as the team leader at just age 17, when you were playing at the 20-year old level? Did your results speak for themselves, or was there anything in your leadership style that made the team more comfortable?

A: Although I was the youngest player in the team, I was captain of the team. I always try to play and to act like a guy who's 20 so at that moment people don't consider you as the youngest guy, so it was not a problem at all. I wasn't only a leader on the floor but also off

the floor that's what my coach expected from me. He wanted me to be an example for the team and I think I did a good job, it was also very important to me.

Q: How disappointing was it not to get promoted to Division A by just one point?

A: It was really disappointing for us but, you know, many good players had [planned] to come but they couldn't because they were injured so a lot of people were thinking before the championship that [Belgium] "ain't gonna win one game." And then we got that 4th place so I told my guys that we could be very proud of what we did.

Q: What was the Miami coaching staff's reaction to the success you had?

They said I [did] a great job but we didn't have the opportunity to talk about that yet.

Q: Could you tell us about your experience with the senior team (Belgian Lions)? Did you just practice with them, or did you see any minutes during a preseason friendly?

A: After the championship, the coach of the senior team told me that I was selected in the team. I've made one week of practices and then he told me that he doesn't want me to get hurt before I leave for Miami, so I didn't make any games and he gave me some rest till I leave for Miami.

Q: Do you expect that next summer, you will focus again with the U20 roster, or will the Lions be who you'd expect to spend much of your time with?

A: Well, after what the coach of the senior team told me, I will be selected again with the Lions but it also depends if I put the work in at Miami. But the coach is really positive about that, and I can't wait to be a part of the Lions.

Q: After you were released, what is your plan for the rest of August? When do you start practicing with the team?

A: I'm gonna start again the workouts next week till I leave for Miami. That means probably the 18th or the 19th.

Q: Have Miami's coaches given you things to work on before you arrive, or do they simply want you to rest after playing such heavy minutes?

A: They want me to rest a little bit but they haven't given me any particular things to work on.

Q: Have they told you how they plan to use you? It's unknown whether experienced Angel Rodriguez would be eligible to play this season, leading potentially to many available minutes. Are you ready for that responsibility? You are

both smaller point guards, would you be able to play together if needed?

A: Coach told me to be ready to play because of Angel's eligibility and I told him that I will be ready. To be honest, I've never seen Angel playing but I heard about him and I think we will be able to play together if needed. I don't see any problem.

Q: What do you think you need to work on, coming off of this summer's experience?

A: I will probably have to add some weight because the game is a bit different than in Europe. But I'm used to work on every parts of my game.

Q: There has been some inconsistency in your measurements, which combined with your age, has made some Miami fans apprehensive that you're undersized, even with some impressive looking photographs from the tournament. What do you currently stand (with or without shoes, please let us know)?

A: I am going to turn 18 the 16th of August, so I'm still 17 years. I'm between 5'10 and 5'11 without shoes.

Q: We've been told that you're considered a top 25 prospect in your class in Europe (Eurohopes.com has hinted that Manu will move the 15 to 25 range for the 1995 year when they update their rankings next month)? What made you want to play college basketball, and specifically, why did you then choose Miami? Has your relationship moved beyond initial contact with Coach Huger?

A: Yes, top 25. Well, I wanted to play in college because I think it's the best thing for me to improve my game and to reach another level. Other colleges wanted to offer me but I picked Miami because first, I think they have a very good coaching staff and second, because they play in best conference of the country.

Q: What will you miss most about home and what are you looking forward to most about Miami and living in the U.S.? Have you traveled to the States before? What are some of your favorite things - foods, shows, and so on - that you might miss or import over to the States?

A: I will miss my family the most and then my friends, but I'm looking forward to start a new life in the U.S. I'm really excited about that, moreover I've never been to the States! I'm not very difficult with the food so it won't be a problem about that.

Q: Thanks again for your time. Is there anything else you want to tell Canes fans?

A: Just wanna tell the Canes fans that they won't be disappointed to see me playing for the U!

SG McClellan a Natural Scorer

Inside The U
Chris Stock
July 28, 2013

Sheldon McClellan heard from a number of schools after he announced that he would be leaving Texas.

McClellan, a 6-foot-4 shooting guard who averaged 13.2 points as a sophomore last season for the Longhorns, took visits to Miami, LSU, and Oregon before picking the Hurricanes.

"Mainly (because of) Coach L (Jim Larranaga)," McClellan said. "I liked the type of person he was, how he coached his players, and the players loved his enthusiasm. I wanted to play for somebody like that, someone who would encourage me."

Georgetown and Florida Gulf Coast were also among the suitors.

"It was very hard, but I had a long talk with my mom and God," McClellan said. "It was very hard, but I felt I made the right decision. It's going to make me better."

McClellan was still in Austin when Miami played their first two games of the NCAA Tournament, but could not attend the games due to NCAA rules. Still, he watched the games and liked what he saw.

"I liked their style of play and how everybody plays," he said. "I just like Coach L mainly. He's a motivating guy that's going to make me work hard."

Deciding to transfer wasn't easy especially knowing that he'd have to sit out a year. But now he's looking forward to using the time to improve his game.

"At first it was tough," he said. "I didn't really transfer because I didn't really want to sit out a year, but I think it's going to

benefit me in the end because it's going to make me work hard. I'm not going to just sit around and wait for next year. This off-season is going to make me better for next year and it starts right now."

McClellan was a double-digit scorer in each of his first two seasons in Texas averaging 13.5 points as a sophomore to go with 3.9 rebounds during a disappointing 16-18 season.

Although he has moved on, the Houston native enjoyed his time at UT.

"It was a fun program," he said. "Texas is a good school. The players were good and I respect everyone that was there. I just felt like I had to make a decision for me and my family. It's nothing against them, I love them guys and they're always in my corner."

McClellan showed he was a capable scorer eclipsing the 20-point mark eight times including a career-high 27 against Texas Tech on March 9. He scored in double figures in each of his first 14 games this past season averaging 15.6 before being taken out of the starting lineup.

He credits former NBA player John Lucas for his development over the years.

"He's been helping me and that's where I've gotten all of my skills from," McClellan said. "My dad wasn't really around so I was always playing by myself. Then I got with John Lucas and he brought me up."

Fellow Miami transfer Angel Rodriguez played against McClellan five times while with Big 12 conference foe Kansas State.

"He can shoot it, he can drive to the basket, he can pretty much do it all," Rodriguez said. "He's got good size and from what I've seen when he was at Texas,

he's good at coming off down screens and stuff like that. I'm sure Coach L and the coaching staff will have a good system in place for him."

Although he's scored in bunches, he hasn't always been effective shooting 41.5 percent from the floor and 29.2 percent from the 3-point line in his career. He shot just 38.2 percent as a sophomore, but will be using this year to improve his perimeter shooting.

"They've been helping me a lot with that," McClellan said. "I work on it every day for five minutes to see how many 3s I can make with my footwork and elevation. I'm seeing improvements."

The team has been practicing throughout the summer and McClellan likes what he sees.

"It's been great," he said. "They've been treating me like family ever since I came in. I feel comfortable already. We are already bonding on and off the court so everything is great right now."

Brown Embracing Pressure to Score

Inside The U
Chris Stock
July 22, 2013

When Rion Brown walks into the gym he's still getting used to seeing so many new faces.

Gone are teammates Durand Scott, Reggie Johnson, Julian Gamble, Kenny Kadji, and Trey McKinney-Jones, who he spent his first three years with along with Shane Larkin, who was there for two years.

"It's actually really weird," Brown said. "When I got here all of the guys that left they had been with me all my three years so it's definitely weird re-adjusting to a different role and having a bunch of young guys looking up to me that I have to tell them to do this and do that. I'm usually the one being told to do this and that so it is a little weird, but it's challenge that I definitely wanted and I'm glad I got to have it my senior year."

With Miami's six five leading scorers leaving the program, Brown returns as the top scorer at 6.4 as he played 22.2 minutes on the Hurricanes 29-7 ACC Championship team. He's looking forward to having the role as a primary scorer.

"I'd be liar if I said I wasn't really looking forward to it," Brown said. "It's the first time that the ball is in your hands. It's either win or lose and it's on you and Garius Adams of course. That alone gives you so much confidence because I'm used to being a role player for so long and having a couple of big games just to help the team, but now I'm going to have to have that game every game just for us to be anywhere near successful as we were last year. It's definitely a challenge and I'm looking forward to it. I feel I can step into that role."

The pressure is something the 6-foot-6 shooting guard is accepting.

"I feel the pressure, but I'm embracing it," Brown said. "It's two different things

when you're feeling the pressure and you don't really want it, but now I really do want it and I think it's going to help me as a player and help me perform better."

Brown has had his moments at UM including three 20-point games last year, which reminds him that he's capable of scoring at a high clip.

"I even think back to my high school days and remember my freshman year coming in that Frank Haith told me when I was kind of struggling at the beginning of the year and he told me to remember all of those good high school games you had and it's not that much different as you think," Brown said. "That helped me throughout the season because I thought back that I can do those things. I've done it before. Now it's the same thing. I think back on my career in high school and AAU that I've been that player they've needed me to be now. I just have to go back to who I was."

Rion Brown

Rion Brown scored 21 points in Miami's win over Illinois in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

The success that last year's team had, which included a school-record 29 wins, an ACC regular season title, an ACC tournament title, and a Sweet 16 appearance, is something that drives Brown.

"Actually I think it's a good thing looking back on all of the fun I had and success we had, I want that again," Brown said. "Coming in the gym practicing with these young fellas with me, Erik Swoope, and Raphael Akpejori and telling them what we experienced last year. We want this for y'all too. You can do this and have the best time of your life. We definitely want to do that like we did last year and go out with a bang like those other guys did."

Miami features a number of newcomers that have already enrolled including freshmen Davon Reed and Deandre Burnett, junior college transfer James Kelly, and three Division I transfers in Donnavan Kirk,

Angel Rodriguez, and Sheldon McClellan.

"I'm surprised they have the work ethic they do coming out of high school," Brown said. "At least back in my day when we came in even talking to the older guys that were here, it was a big adjustment with the work ethic. It was like coming into the gym to shoot, it was almost like, nah, we'll just come to practice, we're not going to do any extra work, we're tired, we have class, we have weights in the morning. We made every excuse not to come in and shoot, but these guys are coming in here at 10-11 at night. I come in to pick up stuff and they're in here shooting. I think back and wonder what if I had done that stuff, what kind of player would I be now? I'd say for them if they keep doing that, they are going to be really good this year and I feel we can get back to the level we were last year with the way these guys are working in the gym."

The team will continue to practice twice a week during the NCAA's eight-week summer rule with hopes of developing a connection with each other.

"Team-wise I would say it's getting team chemistry, getting to know guys, how we play together," Brown said. "What guys are going to do in certain situations. That's the good thing about last year's team we had been together for three years. We went through all that struggle and pain and then it all meshed together and worked out for the best. Now we want to mesh together and learn each other as much as we can, personality-wise and player-wise. That's the best thing for us right now. These young guys are putting in the work to get their game to the highest level before we start playing."

Jon Rothstein's ACC Offseason Notebook

CBS

Jon Rothstein

July 22, 2013

FIVE QUESTIONS ENTERING THE ACC

1. HOW MANY BIDS WILL THE ACC GET IN THE 2014 NCAA TOURNAMENT?

Probably eight or nine. With the additions of Pitt, Syracuse and Notre Dame, the ACC will officially become the old Big East when it comes to the NCAA selection process in 2014. This league is going to become even stronger next year when Louisville joins the fold, but even now it's hard not to say that this is the best conference in all of college basketball. Rebuilding situations for programs in the ACC are tougher than they ever were before. Lots of really good teams are going to finish in eighth or ninth place in this league on an annual basis. It's that tough.

2. WHO WILL BE VIRGINIA'S STARTING POINT GUARD?

Our money is on true freshman London Perrantes. The 6-2 Perrantes doesn't have game-changing speed, but possesses a terrific IQ and overall feel. If this California native can just get Tony Bennett's team into their offense and make open shots, Virginia should have a terrific chance to be a top-five ACC team and earn a high seed in the NCAA Tournament. Red shirt sophomore Malcolm Brogdon is another possibility at point guard. The Cavaliers are set at the other four positions on the floor with Joe Harris, Justin Anderson, Akil Mitchell, and Mike Tobey. Look for sharpshooting stretch forward Evan Nolte and South Carolina transfer Anthony Gill to thrive as reserves.

3. JUST HOW EXPLOSIVE CAN DUKE BE OFFENSIVELY?

Really explosive. NC State coach Mark Gottfried said recently that the Blue Devils could have the second and third picks in next June's NBA Draft in wings Jabari Parker and Rodney Hood. He's right. This team is beyond skilled and should have incredible spacing on offense. Duke returns a veteran point guard in Quinn Cook and a lethal outside threat in Rasheed Suliamon, who shot 37.6 percent from three-point range as a freshman. Those two should pair with Parker and Hood to form a lethal scoring quartet — but who will get a rebound? Look for lanky sophomore Amile Jefferson to have a break through season for the Blue Devils on the backboards. Jefferson logged productive minutes last year for Duke when Ryan Kelly was out with a foot injury, and should be able to make an impact with an expanded role.

4. WILL MARYLAND FINALLY GET OVER THE HUMP?

It all comes down to point guard play. The Terps have all the pieces to reach the field of 68 in 2014, but they have to produce at a higher level at the most important position on the floor. Sophomore Seth Allen will likely get first crack to be Maryland's starting floor general, and he'll be backed up by 6-4 freshman Roddy Peters. Allen had moments as a freshman, but will need to be more consistent if the Terps are to advance to the NCAA Tourna-

ment. A big game changer for this team next season will be Michigan transfer Evan Smotrycz — the Maryland staff loves him, and the former Wolverine should add major spacing offensively as a stretch power forward. With Smotrycz and sophomore Jake Layman, the Terps should be a significantly better outside shooting team than they were last season. Mark Turgeon's squad may have lost a top-five pick in Alex Len, but there's enough returning talent for this group to make the field of 68 before leaving for the Big Ten in 2014-15.

5. WHO IS THE SLEEPER?

Boston College. The Eagles return their top six scorers from last year's team that finished 16-17 and lost to both Duke and NC State by a single point at home. Steve Donahue has two potential All-ACC players in Olivier Hanlan and Ryan Anderson, while Notre Dame transfer Alex Dragicevich should give Boston College a capable outside threat on the wing. The Eagles have all the requisites to make a jump, but their biggest hurdle may be surviving their non-conference schedule. Before they play a game in the ACC, Boston College will travel to Providence, USC, Purdue, and Harvard, play UMass at the TD Garden, face VCU at the Barclays Center, and then square off with UConn at Madison Square Garden while having to play Indiana or Washington the next night. If the Eagles can survive that slate, a .500 record in league play and 17 or 18 wins should be enough to get them into the NCAA Tournament.

ACC PRESEASON POWER RANKINGS

1. DUKE THE SKINNY: Rodney Hood on one wing, Jabari Parker on the other. Watch out America.
2. SYRACUSE THE SKINNY: The Orange continue to reload under Jim Boeheim.
3. NORTH CAROLINA THE SKINNY: Roy Williams will return to a traditional, dual post lineup.
4. NOTRE DAME THE SKINNY: Eric Atkins and Jerian Grant give the Irish one of the ACC's best back courts.
5. VIRGINIA THE SKINNY: Freshman London Perrantes could be this team's answer at point guard.
6. MARYLAND THE SKINNY: Michigan transfer Evan Smotrycz should make a major impact as a stretch power forward.
7. BOSTON COLLEGE THE SKINNY: Steve Donahue has two potential All-ACC players in Olivier Hanlan and Ryan Anderson.
8. PITT THE SKINNY: Sophomore James Robinson will emerge as one of the better point guards in all of college basketball.
9. GEORGIA TECH THE SKINNY: The Yellow Jackets could be a bubble team if their point guard play improves.
10. FLORIDA STATE THE SKINNY: The Seminoles have a bevy of wings who can score, but will they get back to guarding?
11. NC STATE THE SKINNY: This team is loaded with talent, but most of it is unproven.
12. MIAMI THE SKINNY: After a historic year in Coral Gables, the Hurricanes are in transition mode under Jim Larrañaga.
13. WAKE FOREST THE SKINNY: Sophomore Devin Thomas is one of the ACC's most underrated post players.
14. CLEMSON THE SKINNY: Red shirt freshman

Jaron Blossomgame should have a major impact.
15. VIRGINIA TECH THE SKINNY: The post Erick Green era officially begins in Blacksburg.

ACC PRESEASON FIRST TEAM

Joe Harris, Virginia
P.J. Hairston, North Carolina
Rodney Hood, Duke
C.J. Fair, Syracuse
James Michael-McAdoo, North Carolina

ACC PRESEASON PLAYER OF THE YEAR

C.J. Fair, Syracuse

15 WHO HAVE WAITED AND WILL MAKE AN INSTANT IMPACT

Rodney Hood, Duke (transfer)
Michael Gbinije, Syracuse (transfer)
Anthony Gill, Virginia (transfer)
Malcolm Brogdon, Virginia (red shirt)
Evan Smotrycz, Maryland (transfer)
Damonte Dodd, Maryland (post grad)
Alex Dragicevich, Boston College (transfer)
Ralston Turner, NC State (transfer)
Desmond Lee, NC State (JUCO)
James Kelly, Miami (JUCO)
Garrius Adams, Miami (red shirt)
Deandre Burnett, Miami (post grad)
Jaron Blossomgame, Clemson (red shirt)
Malcolm Brogdon, Virginia (red shirt)
Joseph Uchebo, Pitt (JUCO)

15 IMPACT FRESHMEN

Jabari Parker, Duke
Matt Jones, Duke
Semi Ojeleye, Duke
Isaiah Hicks, North Carolina
Nate Britt, North Carolina
Kennedy Meeks, North Carolina
Tyler Ennis, Syracuse
Demetrius Jackson, Notre Dame
Anthony "Cat" Barber, NC State
BeeJay Anya, NC State
Mike Young, Pitt
Detrick Mostella, Pitt
London Perrantes, Virginia
Roddy Peters, Maryland
Xavier Rathan-Mayes, Florida State

10 UNDER-THE-RADAR FRESHMEN

Travis Jorgenson, Georgia Tech
Jarquez Smith, Florida State
Tyler Roberson, Syracuse
V.J. Beachem, Notre Dame
Steve Vasturia, Notre Dame
Josh Newkirk, Pitt
Devin Wilson, Virginia Tech
Davon Reed, Miami
Kyle Washington, NC State
Lennard Freeman, NC State

10 BREAKOUT PLAYERS

Rion Brown, Miami
Mike Tobey, Virginia
Jerami Grant, Syracuse
Tyler Lewis, NC State
Seth Allen, Maryland
Joel James, North Carolina
Amile Jefferson, Duke
James Robinson, Pitt
Marquis Rankin, Virginia Tech
Devon Bookert, Florida State

AI Golden details plan for 2-sport freshman Elder

South Florida Sun Sentinel
Michael Casagrande
July 22, 2013

GREENSBORO, N.C. — It's already been a busy summer for Miami freshman Corn Elder.

On top of starting college classes, he's being acclimated to two major athletics teams. The 5-foot-10, 170-pounder signed a football scholarship, but also plans on playing basketball.

There appears to be a more immediate need for him on the hardwood with a deficiency of point guards. But he's moving forward with both sports.

Should he redshirt with the football team, coach AI Golden said he could make an earlier transition to basketball.

Elder will play cornerback this fall and Golden likes his quick feet and "lateral ability." There's always a chance he could play as a slot receiver as well but is comfortable in the defensive backfield.

Punt and kickoff return duties will also fall to him, Golden said.

His first week on campus this summer was spent getting "indoctrinated" to football and its schedule. Then on Week 2, he went over to the basketball team for a few days of their summer practices.

"I wanted to make sure he went through that orientation, if you will, and how the lift and how they practice and their locker room so he's not doing it in January" Golden said. "So if he's not part of it, we'll be able to expose him to basketball a lot sooner."

Elder was a last-second commit coming out of Nashville. He was rated the nation's

No. 8 athlete by 247Sports.com and was the No. 7 running back according to Rivals.

He won back to back Mr. Football awards and was a two-time state basketball tournament MVP after leading The Ensworth School to consecutive titles.

Burnett Showing Strong Work Ethic

Inside the U
Chris Stock
July 21, 2013

Freshman guard Deandre Burnett was having as good of a summer as anybody on the team before an unfortunate injury.

Burnett broke his left collar bone three weeks ago during a pick-up game and will be sidelined until next month.

"Playing pickup I was going for a layup and i got fouled pretty hard, it was a good basketball foul and I ran into the pad (on the basketball goal) and broke my collarbone," Burnett said. "It's real disappointing, but with my work ethic I feel I can get back into form before the season."

Burnett enrolled at Miami in May after a year of prep school at Massanutten in Virginia.

"It's a dream come true being at your dream school and to be able to play in your hometown and knowing your family is coming, I love it," he said.

It didn't take long for Burnett to put in extra work aside from UM's offseason program as he was going to the practice facility on his own nearly every night to work on ballhandling and shooting.

"It's like peace," Burnett said. "You know there's not too many other guys in the gym that late. That drives just excites me more. It motivates me even more and makes me more determined."

Eventually, the coaches caught wind of Burnett's dedication and told him to slow down.

"They told me I needed to rest so I eventually started taking Sundays off," Burnett

said. "All of the coaches told me I needed the rest to be able to perform at the same level."

Burnett reluctantly agreed to the coaches' request.

"I don't believe in sleep," he said. "I'm in the gym mastering my craft, that's all that matters to me. I see the big picture. I have a dream for this school to keep the program at a high level and to play in the NBA, and to do that you have to work."

His dedicated work ethic is something that Burnett has had since he was a sophomore at Carol City. It first started when he got connected with Major Parker, a former Broward County standout and captain at Florida.

"Major Parker played a big role in my life and taking basketball serious," Burnett said. "I give him a lot of credit for my work ethic. I had a pretty good ninth grade year, but seeing what level I need to be playing at, I just needed to work. He caught wind of me and told me we're going to be in the gym more often so we're going to be ready by the time the season comes."

Burnett's late nights at the gym have been put on pause after the injury.

"At the end of the day it just motivates you to come back even stronger," Burnett said.

He's still able to do some drills on his own despite the injury.

"I'm getting my right arm stronger, my legs stronger, and trying to stay in shape so I won't be so far behind when I come back," he said.

The 6-foot-1 combo guard, who scored 36 points a game as a senior, is looking for-

ward to helping the Hurricanes any way he can this season.

"Team-wise to get back to the ACC and win it again and get back to the tournament and maybe go farther," he said of his goals. "Individually just to play my best and do whatever I can to help the team. That's my biggest thing, anything I can to help the team that's all that matters to me."

Freshman SG Reed Enjoying Miami

Inside the U
Chris Stock
July 18, 2013

Freshman shooting guard Davon Reed has enjoyed his first month at the University of Miami.

The 6-foot-6 four-star prospect arrived in South Florida after a standout prep career at Princeton Day (N.J.) School where he scored a school-record 2,102 points and averaged 23.2 a game as a senior.

He enrolled at UM for second summer session and has been participated in off-season practices.

"It's been great," Reed said. "A lot of hard work, a lot of time put in the weight room and the gym. It's been great. The coaching staff, players, the way we're coming together on and off the court, I love it."

Davon (pronounced Day-von) has been getting a lot of one-on-one time with head coach Jim Larrañaga to work on a variety of drills.

"That's pretty much a daily thing we do while work outs are going on and he'll pull me to the side and work on specific things like getting my footwork together, release points and different moves to add to my game and hopefully help the team," Reed said.

Although it's only been a month, Reed feels he has learned a lot from the coaching staff and being around the returners.

"I'm learning a lot from everybody in the weight room every morning, working how to get stronger and working on different ways to elevate my game," he said. "Off the court learning in the classroom, learning from Coach L, learning from my team-

mates especially my older teammates Garrius Adams and Rion Brown. Everybody has just been very helpful."

Reed has been enjoying the challenge of going against Texas transfer Sheldon McClellan in practices and wants to guard him any chance he can.

"I tell Rion all the time that I want to guard Sheldon," Reed said. "Of course he's going to beat me a few times, but the goal is to hopefully work on my defense and hopefully push him as someone who takes pride in my defense. Hopefully we can make each other better. Going against him, he's really skilled, really loaded game. It's tough, but the goal is to make myself and him better."

McClellan has Reed's respect as a scorer after averaging 13.5 points last season, which ranked 10th in the Big 12.

"He was one of the best scorers in the country last year so if I can face him in practice and hopefully shut him down then it's just that much easier when it comes to game time," Reed said. "I'm already seeing that it's more difficult than guarding someone at the high school level. Hopefully I just keep getting better at it, but it's difficult right now to be honest."

Reed is part of a young core of players that will be key in looking to get Miami back in the NCAA Tournament this season and for success in the future.

"I'm so excited for this year and for years to come," he said. "We're going to have a really good team this year and we're definitely going to get better especially when Sheldon and Angel are back."

The talented guard doesn't have any personal goals for his freshman season other than to contribute to a successful team.

"I don't really want to focus on my personal goals, I just want the team to have as much success as possible and get back to an ACC title and have a good run in the tournament," he said. "That alone will be enough success for me. I just want to do what I can to help the team get to that goal."

Reed is looking to finish off the summer on a positive note.

"I just want to continue to get stronger, continue to work on my shots, continue to be confident, and work hard so hopefully when late August rolls back around, I'll be ready to go at it full speed."

Basketball Buzz: 7/17

Inside The U
Chris Stock
July 17, 2013

The Miami Hurricanes basketball team is busy practicing during the summer as they look to put the pieces together for the 2013-14 season.

Teams are allowed two hours of practice time per week over an eight-week span during the summer. After having three 40-minute practices earlier in the summer, the team is holding two one-hour practices each week.

"Normally we get a lot of time to spend individually with two guys and get a chance to work with the guards one-on-ones and I really enjoy that part of it and teaching them," assistant coach Michael Huger said. "We do a lot of things that they need to work on. Everybody has different little things they need to work on so when we get them individually we work on that one specific thing."

It's been a hectic summer for the program as the coaching staff has been busy adding three transfers and a point guard from Belgium.

"It's different from anything we've ever had before," Huger said. "We always got our guys early when we were at George Mason so when November rolled around we were pretty much done and then maybe looking for one in the spring, but now we had four to fill in the spring and for us that's unheard of. We're working around the clock. We usually have a vacation in May and June, that's usually the time to go away and relax, but we didn't have that this year."

In addition, injuries have been a factor. Head coach Jim Larranaga acknowledged the injury-bug at the end of Tuesday's practice urging his players to not get hurt.

"We're putting it together, but we haven't seen the complete picture yet," Huger said. "I think we're still in that process to see what we really have for next year."

Still, there is a positive outlook for the upcoming season with a mix of veteran role players from last year's ACC championship team mixed with newcomers who will make a difference.

"I've seen that we're young, we're inexperienced, but I think we'll be competitive and I think we'll surprise a lot of people of how good we'll actually be," Huger said. "The guys work hard, that's the first thing. You want guys that will work and are willing to learn. I think the biggest difference I see from last year's team is strength, we were so much bigger and stronger last year. Now our guys are more athletic and faster so we'll see how that translates."

The coaching staff left South Florida on Wednesday to hit the recruiting trail as July is the biggest evaluation month of the year.

News & Notes

- PG Angel Rodriguez has not yet sent in a waiver request to the NCAA to allow him to play this season as opposed to sitting out due to transfer rules. Rodriguez is still receiving from left wrist surgery he had in March and is not cleared for contact, but is able to go through drills. "Now I'm doing more," Rodriguez said. "They cleared me not too long ago to dribble and do all types of stuff. They are still being careful with contact and things like

that. There's only two weeks lefts then we have a break to go home so there's no need to rush it. Everything has been going great, all of the rehab."

- Freshman PG Deandre Burnett broke his collarbone in a pick-up game three weeks ago and is hoping to be able to do individual work by the end of August. "It's real disappointing, but with my work ethic I feel I can get back into form before the season," Burnett said. Burnett was excelling when he arrived in May and is expected to make an immediate impact this season.

- C Tonye Jekiri and PF Raphael Akpejori were also held out of Tuesday's practice due to minor injuries. SG Garrius Adams is back home in North Carolina this week, but will be back next week.

- SG Rion Brown, who is UM's leading returning scorer at 6.4 ppg, is looking forward to the task of being one of UM's top scorers this upcoming season after primarily being a reserve his first three years. "I'd be liar if I said I wasn't really looking forward to it," Brown said. "It's the first time that the ball is in your hands. It's either win or lose and it's on you and Garrius Adams of course. That alone gives you so much confidence because I'm used to being a role player for so long and having a couple of big games just to help the team, but now I'm going to have to have that game every game just for us to be anywhere near successful as we were last year. It's definitely a challenge and I'm looking forward to it. I feel I can step into that role."

- Texas transfer SG Sheldon McClellan is a very good ballhandler who feels comfortable making decisions on the pick-and-roll. McClellan, a 27 percent 3-point shooter last season, is using the year off to work on his outside shooting and has already seen improvements since arriving at UM. He goes through a five-minute drill to see how many 3-pointers he can make. When he first started he made 30, then 40, and recently knocked down 53. McClellan picked Miami after taking visits to LSU and Oregon. "Mainly (because of) Coach L," McClellan said. "I liked the type of person he was, how he coached his players, and the players loved his enthusiasm. I wanted to play for somebody like that, someone who would encourage me."

- Freshman SG Davon Reed (pronounced Davon) is getting quality one-on-one time with coach Jim Larranaga at the beginning of practice to work on a number of individual moves. "That's pretty much a daily thing we do while work outs are going on and he'll pull me to the side and work on specific things like getting my footwork together, release points and different moves to add to my game and hopefully help the team," said Reed, who scored 2,102 points in his high school career in New Jersey.

- Junior college transfer PF James Kelly showed his offensive versatility during a stretch during a 4-on-4 half-court session as he took his defender off the dribble 15 feet out on the baseline to get to the basket, showed strong moves in the low post, and knocked down a 20-footer. Kelly also moved very well in pick-and-roll situations.

- Belgium freshman PG Manu Lecomte is not on campus yet, but he is expected to join the team next month when classes begin. Lecomte was discovered overseas after Shane Larkin decided to turn pro leaving a hole at point guard. One of Huger's former opponents, Odell Hodge from Old

Dominion, saw Lecomte live and was one of the first to tell Huger about him saying, "He's the truth." Then a conversation with one of Huger's former teammates, who coaches Lecomte said, "The kid is good." And finally, former Georgetown guard Johnathan Wallace provided the final convincing testament for Huger as Wallace played against Lecomte in practice with Mons-Hainut and told Huger, "The kid is definitely high-major." Huger said of the conversation with Wallace: "He told me everything I needed to know."

- Freshman PG Cornelius Elder has practiced with the team one week this summer as he's been busy with his football responsibilities, which will continue to be the situation moving forward. While with the basketball team, he impressed the staff. "He looked really good," Huger said. "For a freshman point guard he was really controlled, really poised, used the pick-and-roll very well, decent mid-range shot, didn't shoot a lot of 3s, but used a mid-range shot and finished at the basket. He's very athletic and an excellent defender." The staff saw Elder last summer with his AAU team. "We thought he was good and definitely thought he was a scholarship athlete for sure."

- Early starting lineup predictions for the season opener: PG Deandre Burnett, SG Garrius Adams, SG Rion Brown, PF Donnavan Kirk, and C Tonye Jekiri. Rodriguez would start over Burnett if he is allowed to play by the NCAA and Kelly could be swapped in favor of Kirk for more offense.

- The team has three walk-on guards as Justin Heller and Steve Sorenson have been joined by Belen Jesuit product Mike Fernandez, who was an honorable mention All-County player.

- Miami will face George Washington in the first round of the Anaheim Classic in Anaheim, Calif. on Nov. 28. The eight-team field features Marquette, which ended UM's season in the Sweet 16 last year.

- Former Hurricane Shane Larkin broke his ankle during practice before playing in a Summer League game with the Mavericks and had surgery on Tuesday. Huger spoke with Larkin following the injury, which is expected to keep him out 2-3 months. "He was upbeat, we laughed and joked, he wasn't down and depressed," Huger said. "He told me what happened, how he got the injury and I told him to make sure he stayed positive, to keep his head up and to come back bigger, stronger, and faster as the bionic man and he started laughing."

- Fellow former Hurricanes Kenny Kadji (Cavaliers) and Durand Scott (Spurs) will face each other in a Summer League game on Thursday at 4 p.m. Kadji has started the first three games averaging 3.7 points and 5.5 rebounds while Scott is averaging 4.3 minutes and has not scored.

PG Rodriguez Feels at Home at Miami

Inside the U
Chris Stock
July 16, 2013

Not many people knew, but Angel Rodriguez played the final three months with a torn tendon in his left wrist.

Rodriguez had surgery immediately after his season with Kansas State came to an end in the first round of the NCAA Tournament in March.

"It affected me, I could barely practice because I couldn't dribble with that hand at all," Rodriguez said. "It definitely impacted my game in a negative way, but everybody gets hurt at some point. You just have to get through it especially late in the season you have to play, you can't let your team down."

It's been nearly three months since the surgery and Rodriguez remains limited during off-season workouts after transferring to Miami in May, but is pleased with the progress.

"It feels great honestly," he said. "We're still trying to strengthen it, but it feels great."

Rodriguez isn't able to participate in contact drills with the team, but is able to handle the ball while wearing a small brace.

"Now I'm doing more," he said. "They cleared me not too long ago to dribble and do all types of stuff. They are still being careful with contact and things like that. There's only two weeks lefts then we have a break to go home so there's no need to rush it. Everything has been going great, all of the rehab."

Rodriguez averaged 11.4 points and 5.2 assists as a sophomore earning second-team All-Big 12 honors before transferring

to Miami, where the point guard originally from Puerto Rico played high school ball.

He's made a seamlessly smooth transition.

"I love it, I love it," Rodriguez said. "The coaching staff and players have made me feel like I've been here forever. They all have personalities, which makes it easier. I just love everything about here. I'm home."

One of the reasons Rodriguez chose to transfer to UM was to be closer to friends and family.

"It feels great seeing all of your friends supporting you," he said. "Every weekend they come see me or I see them. My mom already came to visit and when the second summer session finishes I'm going to go to Puerto Rico, then she's going to come again. It's been great seeing my people in such a small amount of time."

Rodriguez was expected to file a waiver with the NCAA to allow him to play this year, but he has not turned in the paperwork. He expects to do so "soon."

"We haven't even really applied yet for it," Rodriguez said. "But that's not something in our hands. We're going to leave it up to the NCAA and we'll see about that."

If Rodriguez does have to sit out, he plans to take the year off in stride.

"I'm not even stressing out honestly. When things are not in my hands I can't stress especially if it's not going to hurt me sitting out a year. I'm just trying to get used to this, get comfortable with the team, and we'll let the NCAA take care of the rest."

Another transfer, Texas guard Sheldon McClellan, will have to sit out this year and also has two years of eligibility remaining. Rodriguez played against McClellan five

times as Big 12 conference foes with Rodriguez and the Wildcats winning four.

The two didn't know each other before, but have been getting to know each other since they've become teammates in South Florida.

"I never really talked to him when I was playing against him, but as soon as I knew he was coming here we've had a good relationship," Rodriguez said. "The first day we talked, we said, 'Who knew, what a small world,' but it's cool now."

UM basketball summer practice shows new look

Sun Sentinel
Michael Casagrande
July 3, 2013

From the far wall, Shane Larkin is watching.

It's 3:51 p.m. Tuesday and the rebuilt Miami basketball team is cutting up as they enter the practice gym. Staring them in the face are 14 banners featuring images of the most successful team in program history.

Perhaps no team in the country will benefit more from a relatively new NCAA rule allowing summer basketball practices. Coaches were first cleared to supervise players during summer workouts in July 2012. Only a few players pictured in canvas banners above the UM floor appear on the court as the long rebuilding process begins.

Still, coach Jim Larrañaga smiles for much of the next hour. Never mind the fact that Larkin is a Dallas Maverick instead of returning for his junior season. Losing the second-team All-American and the next five leading scorers from the ACC championship team is just a fact.

So the combination of fresh faces, transfers, freshmen and a football player went through an abbreviated workout led by the ever-observant Larrañaga.

"It's soooo much better," he said. "We'd be doing this in September. And years ago, you wouldn't be doing it until October. So I think it really helps your young guys, your new guys to get acclimated to what it's going to be like in a practice situation. We went 40 minutes, then imagine how hard you have to practice for 2 1/2 hours."

Starting last year, college basketball

teams were allowed eight practice hours per week with a two-hour daily maximum.

Injuries and eligibility clearances further limited Tuesday's workout. Incoming freshman Deandre Burnett dribbled around with his left arm in a sling after breaking his collarbone during a practice last week. Burnett needed surgery after running into a wall and fracturing his collarbone.

Kansas State transfer Angel Rodriguez has hand and knee injuries keeping him from going full speed.

Freshman Manu Lecomte, a leading candidate to replace Larkin at point guard, is still completing exams in Belgium and won't enroll until later this summer.

Then 7-footer Tonye Jekiri took a shot to his nose and football/basketball freshman Corn Elder banged up his right elbow.

Transfers Sheldon McClellan (Texas) and Donnavan Kirk (DePaul) had not been fully cleared to participate in UM workouts, so they shot baskets on the side.

So a tough situation is a little more challenging.

But every minute of instruction, bonding and conditioning counts for a Hurricane team replacing 86 percent of last year's scoring.

At one point, Larrañaga stops the action and directs freshman Davon Reed to the place he should have been. There were nearly as many blocked shots as made baskets in earliest rough draft of a basketball team.

Larrañaga doesn't even try to project lineups with all five starting spots needing replacements. Seniors Rion Brown and Garius Adams are solid bets, though.

Brown is the top returning scorer after averaging 6.4 points before adding significant muscle weight since last year. Adams sat out the Hurricanes' dream run to a 29-7 record and the Sweet 16. But he impressed on the scout team after recovering from a knee injury and was consistent Tuesday. Both took turns draining 3s from well behind the arc during water breaks

But the healthy newcomers have talent. And effort was high. Near the end, Reed dove to the floor for a loose ball and quick pass to Adams for a rimless 3-pointer. Reed has the size and ability to thrive at UM, but he isn't used to facing this kind of size and ability.

"I've seen guys try to block his layups three or four times," Larrañaga said. "Normally he'd dunk it. And he's like, 'Holy mackerel, there's a big guy waiting for me.'"

Junior college transfer James Kelly has the athleticism and a few years of experience that could help him make an immediate impact as well.

Larrañaga doesn't expect the full-time starting lineup to be set before ACC play begins in January.

"I enjoy this part the most," he said leaning back in his chair. "I wish we did this all year and didn't have to play any games."

A summer chat with Jim Larrañaga

Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

July 3, 2013

As the only month devoid of collegiate athletic competition begins, the Miami basketball team is hard at work.

Since last year, college basketball teams are allowed eight practice hours a week in the summer with a 2-hour daily maximum. The Hurricanes have a lot to do with 86 percent of last year's scoring somewhere other than the UM practice gym.

We sat down with coach Jim Larrañaga after Tuesday's workout that you'll be able to read more about in Thursday's paper. Here are a few bonus thoughts from the interview:

These summer practices are more about evaluating the new talent than anything with nine new members joining the mix. Injuries aren't helping.

Freshman Deandre Burnett broke his right collarbone last week when a fast-break layup, a push and a wall intersected. He had surgery and currently has his arm in a sling.

Kansas State transfer Angel Rodriguez is still "months" away from knowing if the NCAA will grant him a waiver allowing him to play next season.

Rodriguez wasn't practicing Tuesday because of lingering wrist and knee injuries. The knee injury was something from Kansas State "that hasn't improved as much as we'd like," Larrañaga said.

Freshman Manu Lecomte is still in Belgium finishing up the many exams required to graduate the equivalent of his senior year in high school. Then the NCAA clearinghouse has to convert everything and grant

his eligibility. The 5-foot-8 guard could be featured heavily in the lineup with Shane Larkin leaving earlier than expected for the NBA Draft.

Junior college transfer James Kelly "is very athletic and I think he fits very, very well and will help us," Larrañaga said.

Transfers Sheldon McClellan (Texas) and Donnavan Kirk (DePaul) were still awaiting final clearance to join the summer practices. Kirk will be eligible to play next year.

The Kirk transfer came together with amazing speed. The former and current Hurricane only asked for his release from DePaul about a month ago. He finished up school work in Chicago, then chose Miami after visiting Colorado State.

Princeton, N.J. freshman Davon Reed "has good size, good length, good ball skills," Larrañaga said. He just doesn't have the experience against opponents with the same attributes.

Garrus Adams and Rion Brown are emerging as the two vocal leaders on the roster.

Even after losing six players last year, Miami brings six more seniors back. (It may be the oldest inexperienced team in basketball). Seniors include Brown, Adams, Kirk, Raphael Akpejori, Justin Heller and Erik Swoope.

Last Thursday's NBA Draft was huge for UM, Larrañaga said. There were some nervous moments for Larkin when projections went out the window early in the first round. Michigan's Trey Burke slipped and Larkin may have too.

"I think he's in a great situation," Larrañaga said. "He's playing for one of my former players (Rick Carlisle).

Miami rebuilds roster through impact transfers

CBS Sports.com

Jeff Borzello

June 17, 2013

Heading into the offseason, Miami had serious questions going forward. The Hurricanes were losing five seniors, and All-American point guard Shane Larkin was likely to declare for the NBA Draft.

After a historical season in which the Hurricanes won the ACC regular-season and tournament championships, the future wasn't very bright in Coral Gables.

Two months later, there's a much different feeling about the potential at Miami. The optimism is there, and the talent is being restocked faster than expected.

The main reason? Transfers.

Just like Iowa State and Missouri and UNLV and Illinois the past couple of years, the Hurricanes are turning to the transfer market in order to rebuild the roster. And it's working like a charm.

First, Miami picked up Kansas State transfer Angel Rodriguez, one of the best point guards on the market. Rodriguez wanted to move closer to home, and his family lives in Puerto Rico. He also played his high school ball near Miami. Hoping to receive a waiver to play immediately, Rodriguez is 50/50 to suit up in 2013-14, according to sources.

Then last week, the Hurricanes welcomed back Donnavan Kirk, a DePaul transfer who started his career under Frank Haith at Miami. Kirk isn't a dominant big man, but he can play immediately and provides a battle-tested body in the paint.

And on Monday, Miami made another big move. Texas transfer Sheldon McClellan, one of the most prolific scorers still available, decided to head east. McClellan

averaged more than 13 points with the Longhorns, and will bring scoring punch in two seasons after sitting out the 2013-14 campaign.

It's not far-fetched to say Miami has the best transfer class in the country, and the feeling in the Hurricanes' program is the same.

Suddenly, Miami could be a factor in the ACC if Rodriguez gets a waiver. He's an experienced point guard and playmaker who can be a focal point of the offense. Him getting a waiver would be an absolute game-changer for the Hurricanes. Throw in the return of guard Rion Brown and potential breakout candidate Tonye Jekiri, and Larrañaga has an interesting trio to combine with Kirk.

Of course, this doesn't even count the six non-DI transfers the Hurricanes are also welcoming. The fascinating part about that group is the fact two of them will be counted toward football scholarships: forward Derrick Griffin, a top-150 basketball talent, and point guard Corn Elder. DeAndre Burnett is a gunner, and Davon Reed is a versatile perimeter option. James Kelly, a 6-foot-7 power forward, was ranked among the top 25 junior college players in the country.

Another key aspect in Miami's rebuilding process has been a better balance in classes. Having five productive seniors (plus Larkin) leave at once is difficult for any program. Larrañaga likely won't have to worry about this sort of thing for a long time now. There will be five seniors leaving after the upcoming season, but Miami is better-prepared for it. No matter what, the 2014-15 Hurricanes will feature one of the best backcourts in the country in Rodriguez and McClellan plus a plethora of young prospects who will have contributed during their first seasons in the program.

Miami won't win the ACC again this year. If Rodriguez doesn't get a waiver, the Hurricanes might not even make the NCAA tournament.

But with nine newcomers entering the program -- including arguably the best transfer class in the country -- the rebuilding process is already much further along than anticipated.

Mavericks sign 1st-round pick Shane Larkin

AP

July 29, 2013

The Dallas Mavericks have signed first-round pick Shane Larkin, who is likely out until training camp in October with a broken right ankle.

Larkin is slotted to make \$1.28 million in the point guard's first season under the rookie salary scale.

The Mavericks traded down twice in the draft and ended up with the rights to Larkin, the son of Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin. He was taken 18th by Atlanta.

Larkin helped Miami to its first Atlantic Coast Conference title and a No. 2 seed in the NCAA tournament. Larkin led the Hurricanes at 14.5 points and 4.6 assists per game.

The 5-foot-11 Larkin broke his ankle while practicing for the summer league. He had surgery this month and should be sidelined about three months.

Kenny Kadji offers NBA teams a Unique Skill Set

SB Nation
Sam Vecenie
July 19, 213

Twenty-five year-old rookies straight out of the NCAA aren't common in the NBA. But with Bernard James and Vernon Macklin having been drafted each of the last two seasons, there appears to be room for someone like Kenny Kadji to make his mark.

Kadji's skill set is thoroughly tantalizing. Athletic, 6'11" power forwards that can potentially shoot threes don't grow on trees. Kadji shot 37% on three point attempts in his two years at Miami, along with averaging 12.5 points, 6 rebounds, and 1.4 blocks per game. He's a versatile player, to be certain. The question is simply how much can he grow into an NBA role after injuries and age. Kadji told me that he thinks his age and maturity is actually an asset in his favor.

"For me, being 25, I grasp the game a little faster than other guys...the terminology on defense and things like that," Kadji said. "I want to show the coaches that you can put me in the game and you don't have to wait three or four years like for an 18 or 19 year old."

Kadji comes from an extraordinarily interesting background that I was unaware of before writing this. He was born in France to Cameroonian parents in 1988 and then moved and lived in Cameroon for 14 years. Kenny's family owns "Kadji-beer," which is the most popular beer in that country. He told me about how proud he is of family and about how his father would bring samples back to the house for people to try when he was younger. Kadji obviously didn't go into the beer industry like his father, but that doesn't mean basketball was his first love either. Like most European and African athletes, Kadji's first infatuation was soccer. He had a dream to play for Paris Saint-Germain of France's Ligue 1, but that was quickly dashed whenever he had a growth spurt.

"I figured out I was done with soccer when I was 13 or 14 years old, when they wanted to put me at goalie," Kadji said. "At the same time, I was starting to fall in love with basketball. That's the time when overseas players were coming over and doing pretty well in the NBA, like Dirk Nowitzki and Manu Ginobili. So I started watching it and I loved it."

He came over to America at 15 years old, moving to Tampa and attending IMG Academy. Although IMG Academy is known more as a tennis facility run by Nick Bolletieri, Kadji transformed into one of the top 30 basketball recruits in the country during his time there. When the Florida Gators came calling, he decided he couldn't say no after their back-to-back NCAA titles.

As a freshman Kadji received a lot of playing time, appearing in all but two games. But then a herniated disk derailed his sophomore campaign. While recovering, Kadji decided he wanted to transfer. The Gators had a crowded front court rotation including Vernon Macklin, Erik Murphy and Chandler Parsons, as well as incoming recruit Patric Young.

"It was a learning experience, Kadji said. "I went there not knowing what to expect as a student-athlete. I made a couple of mistakes and decided to start new at the University of Miami."

Because of the injury and transfer, this essentially meant that Kadji did not play in an NCAA game for nearly two seasons. Then to top it off, former Miami coach Frank Haith left the program in order to pursue the job at Missouri. However, Kadji never wavered from his commitment after speaking to new coach Jim Larrañaga.

"I knew Larrañaga's reputation from what he did with George Mason, and I knew it was only a matter time with the guys we had," Kadji said. "In the first meeting he had with us, he just told us we're one of the best teams in the ACC, and that within two years we'd be on top of them."

Kadji reshaped his career at Miami, averaging nearly 12 points, 5 rebounds, and 2 blocks per game. In Larrañaga's offense, he was able to show off his aforementioned but previously unused jumper and shot 42% from three-point range. As one of the leaders on the team, he helped turn the program into a 20-win team that played in the postseason.

However, it was this season where they made their mark. Miami won the ACC's regular season conference crown and conference tournament championship in order to clinch a two-seed in the NCAA tournament. There, they reached the Sweet Sixteen before falling to Marquette. Kadji may not have been the best player on this team (Shane Larkin was deservedly named ACC Player of the Year for his stellar work), but he was most assuredly the glue and backbone that held together as he upped his statistical averages across the board.

"(Coach Larrañaga) put me in a great position to succeed," Kadji said. "We had Shane Larkin, Durand Scott, guys who were great at driving and dishing the ball. He just put me in a situation to spread the floor and he gave me the total green light. He had confidence in me to shoot the ball and when someone does that it's 90% of the fight."

Despite showing off exceptional athleticism at the NBA Draft Combine to blend with his proven collegiate production, Kadji went undrafted in June's NBA Draft. Teams were assuredly

scared off by his age, perceiving that he lacked upside potential. Even though it hurt to go undrafted, Kadji never assumed this was the end of his NBA career. He was the first undrafted free agent to sign up to play on the Cavaliers' summer league team here in Las Vegas.

While here, Kadji's been a mixed bag - although it's nearly impossible to take anything away from the production of big men in summer league play because it's mostly a guard-dominated event. Playing right around 20 minutes per game, Kadji is averaging 5.2 points and 5.0 rebounds per game, along with five blocks in four games. Thursday, Kadji played his best game of the week. Unsurprisingly, it was the game where he got the best opportunity to run the pick-and-pop and let it fly from three-point range. He scored ten points with five rebounds and two three-pointers.

It's clear upon watching him that there is a specific role for in the NBA for Kadji if can find the right system. He has a great basketball IQ in the pick-and-roll, knowing exactly when to release from the screen and how to find the open space on the floor for his shot. I can absolutely envision him playing a two-man game with Kyrie Irving in the future. Plus, he's an athletic and active defender in the post that is able to police the rim better than most power forwards are capable of.

He definitely has his weaknesses as a player - for instance he definitely isn't capable of creating his own shot off the dribble - but carving a niche in the NBA is more about playing to your strengths and minimizing weaknesses. It's rare to see him try to overstep his skills, which means he can be extremely valuable as a role player that can come in and space the floor. Kadji is a thoughtful observer of the game, and after speaking to him for only seven minutes I came away impressed with both his personality and also his basketball intelligence.

The Cavs don't have a 6'11" big man on the roster right now that is capable of stepping out to twenty feet and making a jumper consistently. For all of the good things that Andrew Bynum, Tristan Thompson, Anderson Varejao, and the rest of the big men bring, Kadji supplies a different look that should help to get him noticed by both the coaching staff and front office.

Because he went undrafted, every game he plays with the Cavs is a tryout either for them or the other 29 NBA teams. Also, with his international background, a contract with a European club is simply a phone call away. Kenny Kadji will be playing basketball for a living somewhere. Hopefully, that place is in the NBA.

Bronx Standout To Play In NBA Summer League

NY1.com
Erin Clarke
July 3, 2013

Durand Scott wasn't waiting at Barclays Center or biting his nails in front of the TV to hear if his name was called during the NBA Draft.

"I didn't want to be a part of watching it or see my name called or not called," Scott says.

In fact, it wasn't. But Scott, the defensive player of the year in the Atlantic Coast Conference, did get a phone call inviting him to play summer league for the San Antonio Spurs. It is sort of a training camp or tryout, where the scouts and coaches will watch the Bronx player play against NBA rookies and decide if he is a good fit.

"I just know that's the route I have to take and I have to make the best of my opportunity," says Scott.

The summer league begins soon, so Scott has to be on his A-game. He is taking no days off, training consistently.

"At least maybe, uh, three hours a day. I want to say at least five to six times a week," he says.

It's no problem, for this athlete, as he's been at it since he was 9 years old.

It all started in the Wakefield section of the Bronx, where Scott spent hours playing ball at a playground just a couple of blocks away from home. Those hours seemed to have paid off.

"There were other people smoking and playing other kinds of games, gambling and stuff like that, but Durand was always un-

der the net shooting his way," says Faithlyn Scott, Durand's mother.

Scott's mother encouraged sports to steer her son away from trouble. Local basketball coaches noticed him right away.

"The minute Durand walked in, the guy was, 'This is the kid I want,'" says Faithlyn Scott.

Durand Scott says he was not very good at first, and there were some rough times growing up. He lost his father at 15.

"It was very hard at nights to hear him crying in the room," Faithlyn Scott says.

But with the guidance of high school and college coaches and support from family and the community, Scott excelled and has made it this far.

"It's just another opportunity to go out there and do the thing you love," he says.

Now Durand Scott aims for a permanent spot in the NBA, accomplishing a dream for him and one for his late father.

"His last words were, 'I hope he makes it to the NBA,'" Faithlyn Scott says.

Gamble offers encouragement before pro career

Durham Herald Sun

John McCann

July 31, 2013

Former Southern High School center Julian Gamble, who played basketball for the University of Miami, departed for France on Wednesday to begin his professional basketball career.

Gamble recently was at Brogden Middle School encouraging students to resist peer pressure the way he did while growing up in public housing in Durham. He was at Brogden as an ambassador representing the S.J.G. Greater NC Pro-Am, a summer basketball league at Durham School of the Arts.

Youngsters at the Lakewood YMCA also have benefitted from Gamble's comments. Pro-am co-founder Donyell Bryant said that Gamble represents the sort of guys the league sends out to promote what's good.



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

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--understanding the different processes that it takes to make it here. And even just a name can link people that way."

It's All About The ñ

Jim Larrañaga was as shocked as anyone when he got his University of Miami business cards: "Jim Larrañaga."

"I showed my wife. I said, 'hey, look at this. They were able to do it.'"

And then again on ESPN: "That was the first time I'd seen it on TV."

How the tilde showed up again is a bit of a mystery. Larrañaga said he never asked anyone to do it, but he prefers the new, old spelling.

"It's always been there [in the signature]," he said. "That hasn't changed for me since I was a little boy."

And so the variable has been everything around Larrañaga -- a father who Americanized the family, a teacher who mispronounced his name, a part of the country where the line in his signature may have been mistaken for a flourish instead of a sign of Cuban heritage.

Larrañaga's glad to have the tilde back, glad to officially wear his grandfather's heritage on his name. Plus he's hoping it'll clear up one misconception.

"People are not going to say, 'he's Italian.'"

Larrañaga making himself at home in Miami

The Examiner
Kevin Dunleavy
March 9, 2013

As he entered Sports Grill in South Miami with an entourage of assistants, family and friends, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga received a standing ovation. His Hurricanes had just walloped then-No. 1 Duke by 27 points. Like a politician, the 63-year-old coach visited each table, holding court and pressing flesh.

The short trip from BankUnited Center down South Dixie Highway to the popular wings-and-beer joint has become a routine for Larrañaga and his coaches as they make new friends and draw fans to a program that has barely registered in South Florida.

It's the same outreach Larrañaga performed in 14 seasons at George Mason with Brion's Grille as his postgame headquarters. More than any other college program in the Washington area, the Patriots belonged as much to the community as to the school.

Now, 1,050 miles to the south, Larrañaga is lighting up Miami with his optimism, enthusiasm and self-help catechism. On cue, his team has arrived. After never finishing better than fifth in the ACC, Miami (23-6 entering Saturday) is ranked No. 6 and will open the conference tournament as the top seed this week in Greensboro.

"It's been quite a transition," Larrañaga said Friday. "It's 75 today. The sun is shining. It's absolutely beautiful. My wife is going to play golf in an hour and she is loving that."

In a city where the NBA champion Miami Heat overwhelm the sports conversation, the Hurricanes are carving a niche. For the first time ever, Miami sold out consecutive games, and for the first time since joining the ACC in 2004 the Hurricanes will not have the league's lowest attendance.

Students now line up for tickets, camping overnight between palm trees on "Larrañaga's Lawn," some wearing T-shirts

with the coach's face above the slogan "40 Minutes of L." The morning of the Duke game, Larrañaga and wife Liz stopped by Costco, picked 300 Krispy Kreme doughnuts and distributed them to the campers.

"We wanted to create a family atmosphere within the basketball program," Larrañaga said. "We wanted our students to also be part of our family -- to make them feel part of our success."

At Miami, Larrañaga has recreated his success in Fairfax. He's done it in a more competitive basketball conference, in an area less receptive to college basketball and at a school in need of an image makeover. Despite some raised eyebrows when Larrañaga took the job, no one was better suited for it.

"We built a grassroots network of people who support our program," Larrañaga said. "My staff and I have reached out to the local community to try to get young kids to follow our program. We had our first high school basketball game in the BankUnited Center. Those are the kind of people that want to become season ticket holders and fans."

As coach at Bowling Green from 1986 to 1997, Larrañaga saw how families involved in the basketball programs of his two sons were drawn to Falcons games. These days, Larrañaga goes to extremes to ensure his summer basketball camps are attractive to local youths. His players serve as instructors and role models in the summer, then as drawing cards in the winter. After games, children are invited to a designated area of the locker room for posters, photo opportunities and autographs.

To energize students, the Hurricanes conduct "dorm storms," with Larrañaga beckoning students to come outside and accept posters and T-shirts. It's reminiscent of his early days at George Mason when Larrañaga conducted karaoke nights.

The Canes are not only attracting families and students. The glamour set has taken note. Rapper Flo Rida and WWE star The

Big Show have checked into BankUnited. After a Heat game in which All-Star Dwyane Wade threw a pass off the backboard to feed a teammate for a flashy fast-break dunk, he told reporters he was inspired by Hurricanes sophomore Shane Larkin, who did the same at a game Wade and LeBron James had attended.

Many of the school's illustrious football icons are showing up. At the Duke game, NFL Hall of Famer Warren Sapp was seated near the Miami bench and when the rout was assured, he urged Larkin to slap the floor, Duke-style, before a defensive possession. When all five players complied, Sapp and those nearby had a hearty laugh and an amusing snippet with which to remember a transformational night.

Later in the evening, the revelry was transported to Sports Grill where Larrañaga got down to business.

"He's the best at going to every table and saying hello," assistant Eric Konkol said. "Now people count on us being there, talking about the game."

Longwood head coach Mike Gillian, who served under Larrañaga at Bowling Green and George Mason, says his promotional efforts are as detail-oriented as his game plans.

"In college sports, a big portion of what you do is community, fans, media. Jim understands that better than anyone," Gillian said. "Trust me. It's on a list. It's planned out. It's organized."

Given his deep roots in the community, Larrañaga's departure from George Mason was anything but a routine step up the coaching ladder. After leading the Patriots to the Final Four in 2006, he had fended off offers from big-conference schools and appeared settled in Fairfax. Moving to another job and doing it his way would be a massive undertaking.

But Larrañaga has pulled it off, turning another dormant community on to college basketball.

Larrañaga gets support from brother on Suncoast

ABC 7

Don Brennan

April 3, 2013

MANATEE COUNTY - The Final Four is set, and the University of Miami is not in it. But under head coach Jim Larrañaga, the Hurricanes won 29 games in their best season ever. And here on the Suncoast, his biggest supporters had a front row seat.

"If I go down there, I want to spend time with Jim. He's my brother before he's a coach, and so if I can't spend time with him, I have a better seat here, looking at a 52" TV," says John Larrañaga.

He and Jeannie are almost always camped out to watch the 'Canes games. They are always in the same spot, but not always in the same seat for each game. "I sit here, and Jeannie sits here, or vice versa. Souffle is in the middle between us."

The Larrañagas are a close family, and older brother John has watched Jim on the court from the time he was a child, through high school at Archbishop Molloy, through college at Providence, and now up to this 'Canes successful season. "Really exciting; I mean it gives me chills all the time. When he was growing up and played ball in high school, I saw virtually every game he played."

This season, the 'Canes beat a #1 ranked team for the first time ever, they went 29-7 overall, reached the Sweet Sixteen, and won the ACC. "Jim instilled man-to-man, not zone. He instilled defense; keep the other team scoring at 60 points or less. And it became a winning formula. He knows exactly what he wants, and he gets that from our father."

As the younger brother coaches, the two older brothers sit, watch, and dissect.

"We got on the bus to go to the game. He turned around to say to Bob and I: 'I don't want you guys coaching me. You just watch, I'll do the coaching.' I said to Bob, okay we got the message."

Jim Larrañaga has a place near his brother in Lakewood Ranch, but he only gets up here a few times a year.

"We're really proud of him. Win or lose... he's always our brother. We are very proud that he has accomplished what he accomplished."

Feel the Love

Sports on Earth
Chuck CluPPER
March 28, 2013

AUSTIN, Texas -- Twenty-five years in the wacko practice of seeking quotations from athletes at their lockers, and somehow I happened upon my all-time favorite team when I wasn't looking.

It's not my alma mater. It's not a team from a place I have resided (although I wish I had). It's in either my fourth- or fifth-favorite sport to cover, depending on which week you ask. It's unforeseen, objective love, and it hit fast and hard with one night in Miami and February and four hours of access sprinkled across an Austin weekend.

I've seen umpteen teams with camaraderie, collaboration, cohesion, chemistry, heard untold "we-are-a-family" testimonies. Hell, I just got finished swooning three weeks ago as the Washington Nationals extolled their esprit de corps. But this finds a fresh level. In all my quote-scribbling years, I just never heard quotations quite like these.

Come to the Miami Hurricanes' basketball locker room. Feel the love.

Twenty-three-year-old senior big man Julian Gamble: "We love each other so much and that extends so far beyond basketball that it's really hard to put into words."

Twenty-two-year-old senior guard Trey McKinney Jones: "I can honestly say it's something like I've never experienced before. It's relationships we're going to have for the rest of our lives, and we understand that."

Twenty-three-year-old senior big-big man Reggie Johnson: "Now, from the standpoint of people saying, 'College is the best years of your life,' now I really understand what that means."

Twenty-one-year-old junior guard Rion Brown: "Man, this is the funnest thing I've ever been part of in my life."

They're uncommonly engaging. They're unusually aware. They're unquestionably ambassadors. They're bonded in a way you can feel in the air at a level previously unfelt even in all the years. They might remind you why you ever liked sports.

When the starting five goes out for a tense second half against Illinois, somebody says something and they break into a laugh. When they have an on-court issue with each other, they tend to gather in a circle and say it like gentlemen, inaudible to opponents. Nobody feels insulted. When they have an off-court time and they go to wherever teams go after practices or games, they go together. "This morning, everybody just went to Kenny's room," Johnson said last Saturday, referring to the Cameroonian senior big man Kenny Kadji. "He put a beat on. Everyone was just freestyling."

He added: "There's no one who veers off. No one. Not one person. This team has no cliques. It's not Trey and me over here, this other clique over there ..."

They dance as a team, and sometimes 63-year-old head coach Jim Larrañaga dances in front of them, and when that happened after the second-round win over Illinois, their essence seemed to gush right out of the video snippet.

If they lose and this ends, they're going to feel sadness. If they win four more games and this ends, they're going to feel sadness. They want to win to advance, but not as much as they want to win to sustain this time.

Maybe it's simple. Maybe it's bracing because in college basketball anymore, some players stop by for such a short time that entire teams don't get this much time to grow acquainted. "I really think it's having six seniors," Larrañaga said. It also could be having six seniors plus a roster full of guys who weren't humongous recruits jaded with the humongous-recruit process. It also could be having six seniors plus their various travails with injuries such that Larrañaga lists them and says, "That's a lot of knees."

It also could be having six seniors plus a sophomore point guard who fits so agreeably into his gathering stardom.

View the general conditions of Shane Larkin's upbringing, and the forecast might call for entitlement: son of a famous athlete, lucky childhood, days at baseball spring training chasing balls and taking batting practice from stars, nickname ("SugaShane") bestowed by one Deion Sanders, even a story in which a Little League coach opined that whoever had taught Larkin to

hit knew nothing about hitting, when that teacher happened to be Pete Rose.

That forecast, like many, would be wrong. Even as the son of the retired Cincinnati Reds' 12-time All-Star shortstop Barry Larkin came to be the kind of athlete who can make you gasp, who adored being chased at football until he broke his ankle at 14, and even as Larrañaga insists Shane could go right across to big-time baseball -- "tremendous lateral quickness," "tremendous anticipation," "great hand-to-eye coordination," "great speed" -- Shane also brought along his gracious father's tutelage.

"He was always, like, cool," Shane Larkin said of Barry Larkin. "He never showed out. He was a humble guy." The son reels off the advice, for dealing with media and teammates and sports: "'Be friendly. Don't get on anybody's bad side. Always be willing to talk. Don't make predictions. Don't be a bad guy. Be humble.'" And: "'Have fun. Don't put too much pressure on yourself. There's always going to be another game, going to be another season, the next play.'"

"No one was hating on him or not liking him or not trying to accept him," Johnson said. "The first year, we tried to get him to be more vocal, but he didn't want to step on any toes." He played behind former All-ACC point guard Malcolm Grant; he didn't start until late January 2012. "He was the same player last year," Johnson kept going, "and he was just falling back and not trying to step on toes. The fact [is] he didn't come in trying to say, 'I'm the big point guard here.'"

"I'm his big brother," Johnson said. "Most teams don't really have that. This is the first year Miami really has that."

Miami has something else, for sure. My objectively favorite team has something alluring. It's something that makes you picture these guys as older men, maybe at weddings, maybe in their forties, maybe in their fifties, still in each other's lives, still getting together, still talking about 2013, still sitting at tables you'd feel lucky to join.

Bronx-born Larrañaga has Miami flying high

New York Post
Steve Serby
March 27, 2013

On The bus that was about to take him from Coral Gables to the airport for the flight to Washington and a Sweet 16 showdown with Marquette and maybe beyond, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga wasn't only taking a fun bunch of driven college basketball players with him, he was taking the voice of the late Jack Curran, too, a legendary New York voice he will never stop hearing.

"The last time I spoke to him about the team was after the Duke game, I called him, we lost by three points at Duke," Larrañaga said. "He said, 'Larry, you didn't play any defense.' I said, 'Mr. Curran, Duke's pretty good.' He said, 'Didn't you tell your players [Ryan] Kelly can shoot? I was yelling at the TV, 'Kelly can shoot!' Kelly was killing you.' It was a great conversation. He had me laughing the whole time."

WELCOME BACK:

Miami coach Jim Larrañaga returns this week to Washington, where he orchestrated one of the most memorable Cinderella runs in NCAA Tournament history in 2007, leading George Mason to the Final Four. Larrañaga is New York all the way, from 1501 Metropolitan Ave. in the Parkchester section of The Bronx, living out his dream of doing for others in basketball what Curran had done for him, all the way back to Archbishop Molloy High School. Seven years ago, Curran beamed with pride as Larrañaga wrote his Cinderella story, taking George Mason to the Final Four in 2006. "He would say, 'You guys are pretty smart,'" Larrañaga recalled. "'I like smart teams. Smart teams can win.'"

Curran liked this Miami team, too. "He would love the competitiveness of our guards and he liked the size and versatility of our team," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga likes his team plenty, likes how it has overcome injuries and adversity.

"Life is 10 percent what happens to you," he tells you, "and 90 percent how you handle it."

So you ask him: Could this be a Team of Destiny?

"William Jennings Bryan says, 'Destiny is not a matter of chance. It's a matter of choice.' It's not something you wait to have happen. It's something you go out and earn."

They've earned this right to a magical journey and laughed every step of the way. I asked Larrañaga what his wife thought about his Ali Shuffle in the locker room after the 'Canes had survived Illinois.

"My wife watched it repeatedly," he said. "She absolutely loved the players' reaction. She said, 'They're jumping for joy. That's what it's all about.'"

The funniest thing he heard about it came from a grad assistant named Chris Alvarez, who asked Larrañaga: "Coach, did you know it went viral?"

"I said, 'What the hell does that mean?'" Larrañaga said.

"It's all over the Internet," he was told.

"I said, 'You're kidding,'" Larrañaga said. "If you can't find anything more entertaining than me doing the Ali Shuffle..."

Larrañaga, 63 years young, is as fierce a competitor now as he was back in the East Quadrant, where the best basketball could be found, where the opposition could have been Dean Meminger or John Roche or Dave Wohl or Gary Brokaw.

"Parkchester was divided into four quadrants — North, South, East and West," Larrañaga said. "Each one had its own park."

He looks for every edge, whether it be through statistical analysis or seeking advice three times a week from renowned sports psychologist Dr. Bob Rotella. Every

day brings a quote of the day the players have to memorize. What was yesterday's quote of the day?

"Defend the drive, block them out, rebound," Larrañaga said.

Asked why, he said, "Marquette is the No. 1 offensive rebounding team in the Big East."

These are heady times in Miami with the Heat and the Hurricanes. Larrañaga talked about getting texts from Pat Riley and Erik Spoelstra and a tweet from LeBron James after beating Illinois. And Larrañaga reflected back on a talk Chris Bosh gave the 'Canes two summers ago right after Larrañaga took over. Bosh had been working out with some of the team and told Larrañaga: "I'd never get a good workout when we scrimmaged."

So Bosh became the only person outside the program asked by Larrañaga to speak to the team. "He gave the best five-minute, 10-minute talk I ever heard," Larrañaga said. "He talked about how badly he wanted to win a championship, and the regrets he had playing the way he played in the sixth game against Dallas. He wasn't gonna let that happen again. He let it be known to these guys if they want their dreams to come true, they better start working a lot harder."

Larrañaga and his team have made school history and now they are shooting for more. Shooting for the Final Four.

Said Larrañaga, "It would be the culmination of a tremendous amount of hard work, coming together and creating memories that last a lifetime."

Jack Curran would be so proud.

Larrañaga delivering

Toledo Blade
Dave Hackenberg
Feb. 13, 2013

Serving on the staff of the Michael Jordan Fantasy Camp in Las Vegas was a tough ticket. It helped if you coached in the NBA or were in the Basketball Hall of Fame. Then there was the case of Jim Larrañaga and some others who had coached in an NCAA Final Four.

He made that magical trip, a mid-major miracle of sorts, with George Mason University at the end of the 2005-06 season and found himself coaching at Jordan's camp the following summer.

There, he met two Miami businessmen, Jose and Jorge Mas, well-known Cuban-Americans in south Florida. They became friends, especially after learning the ties went even deeper.

You might not guess it from his last name or his Bronx birthplace or his New York City/Eastern seaboard accent, but Larrañaga's paternal grandfather was Cuban and immigrated to Key West in the early 1900s. The coach's father was raised there.

So when the University of Miami coaching job opened in April of 2011, Larrañaga knew what phone numbers to dial. It became a hurry-up process. The George Mason coach was traveling and didn't have a resume at hand. So he cut-and-pasted his Wikipedia page and forwarded it to the selection committee. To make a long story short, including a hearty recommendation from Boston Celtics coach Doc Rivers, he got the job.

Before becoming head coach at Bowling Green State University in 1986, Larrañaga had been an assistant under Terry Holland at Virginia for seven seasons. In four of those years the Cavaliers had, at one time or another, been ranked No. 1 in the country, and twice they went to the Final Four.

From the day he left he had one burning desire — to return to the Atlantic Coast

Conference as a head coach. A quarter of a century later, he owned 470 collegiate victories, had led George Mason to five NCAA tournaments, and in that regard was a hot prospect. He also had celebrated 61 birthdays and in that regard he was not.

For various reasons — storm clouds of an NCAA investigation that would envelop the entire Miami athletic department were brewing, minimal interest in a basketball program that had never been competitive in the ACC — big names weren't exactly lining up for the job. After Coach L used his connections to crack the door, he blew 'em away with an energetic interview. As the school's new athletic director said at the time, age went out the window. He couldn't imagine not hiring Larrañaga.

Today, the Miami Hurricanes will play at rival Florida State as the No. 3 ranked team in the nation. They are 19-3, 10-0 in the ACC, and have made a wild, almost unprecedented climb the last five weeks going from unranked to No. 25 to No. 14 to No. 8 to No. 3. Their power ranking, strength of schedule and RPI are off the charts. Once a ghost town at a football school in a pro-sports town, fans now line up for tickets at the beautiful but fairly small (7,972 seats) BankUnited Center on the campus in Coral Gables. The NCAA tournament is a foregone conclusion; the discussion now is over a No. 1 seed.

Larrañaga said Tuesday he is not the least bit surprised; if not for injuries and suspensions he felt as if last season's team, his first at Miami that won 20 games and posted a first-ever winning record in ACC play, might have done the same.

"It's been great," he said via telephone. "When I took the job people said, 'You're never going to draw fans; you'll never create any interest in the program.' They told me the same thing at Bowling Green and George Mason. By the end, we were packing the place at both schools. This past Saturday, our North Carolina game (a blowout 87-61 win), we had LeBron and

Dwyane Wade sitting courtside. I think people noticed that. I know recruits noticed. I think the nation is noticing now."

When the Miami job opened, coupled with coaching changes at other ACC schools, Larrañaga said he saw a league in transition with Miami sporting a veteran team while sitting in the midst of a fertile recruiting area.

"It's the ACC, the best basketball league in the country, and I saw an opportunity to succeed," he said. "The first meeting I had with players at George Mason in April of '97, I asked them who had the best programs, the role models. The first two places mentioned were Duke and North Carolina. And I tried to build the program at Mason in their image, that ACC image. I loved every minute of my 14 years there, but when [the Miami] opportunity came up I very much wanted to achieve this goal.

"I envisioned success."

Larrañaga has always had a vision, even if it wasn't clear to others. Maybe never fully appreciated at BG — he is the second winningest coach all-time at 170-144 while operating in an antiquated Anderson Arena, but never took the Falcons to the NCAAs — many were surprised when he made what appeared to be a lateral mid-major move.

At George Mason Larrañaga saw a modern, 9,500-seat arena and a chance to make an impact at a school where no resources were siphoned off by football or hockey. Fans saw a lateral move to a fairly anonymous school in a similar, maybe then slightly better league; he saw potentially another Gonzaga or Butler. And, for the most part, he delivered.

Now, Larrañaga's latest vision is coming into focus. And he is delivering big again, finally back home, in the ACC and south Florida.

Larrañaga lands in dream job with Miami Hurri-

Miami Herald
Greg Cote
Feb. 5, 2013

The University of Miami men's basketball team climbed as high as it ever has Monday — to a No. 8 national ranking in The Associated Press poll — and the man who made that magic ladder appear, Jim Larrañaga, had just heard the news when we spoke.

"It feels great. I'm excited," the coach said. "It represents a major step forward."

I asked Larrañaga if he planned to break the news to his team. He smiled.

"Those guys know everything before I do," he said. "By now someone has texted it, tweeted it, Facebooked it or instant messaged it."

Nothing stays a secret for long anymore, and so these Hurricanes haven't.

Less than a month ago they were off the national grid, and barely making South Florida pay attention. Now they are one of the sweet stories in all of college basketball, rocketing up in the polls from nowhere to 25th to 14th to eighth in three heady weeks.

A signature 90-63 pasting of No. 1 Duke on Jan. 23 in Coral Gables made America take notice. Reggie Johnson's miracle last-second tip-in to win at No. 19 North Carolina State on Saturday made you wonder if this team wasn't charmed.

Football is done now. You ready to pay attention to something besides the Heat?

This is your team. This is the time.

Larrañaga's guys have won nine in a row entering Tuesday night's home game vs. Boston College. They are 17-3. They are 8-0 in the mighty Atlantic Coast Conference — the first ACC team other than Duke or North Carolina to do that since 1981.

The only other time the UM men ranked No. 8 was in March 1960, even before Rick Barry arrived. The Canes have never finished a season ranked higher than 10th.

This year, though, you get the idea anything is possible. You get the feeling March Madness

will very much include this team as a major player.

A couple of weeks ago there was speculation about this being a Sweet 16 team. Then came the stunning whipping of Duke. Then came the top 10. Now if you're talking Sweet 16 you seem to under-selling UM's potential.

Elite Eight, anyone? Final Four, even?

This is Larrañaga's problem at the moment. Well, his challenge, at least. The excitement of possibility nourishing this program is all good, but it also raises the stakes on the coach making sure his players keep their focus.

"Our point of view is to get ready for Boston College," he said Monday. "At any time, circumstances can change. We are not looking two weeks or a month down the road. The only thing [being ranked No. 8] does is fire up your opponent. The whole reason we are enjoying success is that we have prepared one day at a time. We do not get too full of ourselves just because somebody else has decided we're good."

The even keel is easier because five of UM's top six scorers are seniors — Johnson, Durand Scott, Kenny Kadji, Trey McKinney Jones and Julian Gamble — itself unusual (and pleasantly so) in the one-and-done NCAA.

That is also why this season figures to be Miami's best opportunity, although Larrañaga, 63, in his second season here, has earned the faith that he can recruit and win with his own guys, not just with the talent inherited.

This coach took a long time to get to his dream job, but he has arrived at it.

He is best known for coaching mid-major George Mason to the Final Four in 2006, but that was just part of the climb.

"I'm very goal-oriented. I was an assistant in the ACC at Virginia [1979-86], and when I left I wrote down that one of my goals was to become a head coach in the ACC," Larrañaga said. "So when the Miami job opened up I was very interested."

He did his research. He always loved the talent pool in Florida, and he found more than half the teams in the ACC had changed coaches

recently.

"I saw a league going through a transition period," he said. "If we were able to recruit well, we could do some damage in this conference. It seemed like an opportunity to come in and succeed very quickly."

Larrañaga had a very small inner circle of family and friends he consulted about the Miami job: his wife, two adult sons, Celtics coach Doc Rivers and sports psychologist Bob Rottella.

The conduit for Larrañaga coming here was Jose Mas, whom he had met while coaching at a Michael Jordan fantasy camp. Mas, the son of Jorge Mas Canosa, the former Miami business leader and Cuban exile fixture, called Larrañaga and invited him to forward his résumé to UM.

Larrañaga was traveling and had no access to his résumé so, at a son's suggestion, he copy-and-pasted his Wikipedia page and sent it to UM. An interview was set up. His hiring didn't take long thereafter.

(Speaking of Mas Canosa, it happens that Larrañaga is part Cuban. His father's father was Cuban, emigrating to Key West in the early 1900s.)

Larrañaga knew he was coming here to not just coach a team, but to grow a program in a city that hardly is a college hoops hotbed.

"I want everyone in this community to be dying to get a ticket to watch us play," he said. "At Bowling Green and George Mason everybody also told me we couldn't draw, but by the time I left the place was packed every night."

Coaching in the ACC had been Larrañaga's "ultimate goal to really test yourself." Now he is finding out the league isn't too big for him. He's big enough for the league.

I asked him if the satisfaction he feels is different now.

"Don't know yet. We are still in the process of competing," he said. Then he added something that should make Canes fans smile as much as that No. 8 ranking: "My career here at Miami has really just begun."

Larrañaga, Meier tour campus to rally support

CaneSport.com
Feb. 13, 2012
David Furones

Both the men's and women's basketball programs are hot right now. The women are No. 6 in the nation and have won 11 straight while the men are winners are five of their last six and are currently listed in Joe Lunardi's "last four in" to make the tournament. But neither team can seem to get warm bodies in the seats, especially in the student section.

On Monday night coaches Jim Larrañaga and Katie Meier, along with cheerleaders, Sebastian the Ibis and players from both teams, traveled to four different on-campus housing facilities meeting students and rallying support from the UM student body as part of the Buffalo Wild Wings Coaches Campus Tour.

The team's goal: get students to come out to men's home games Wednesday against No. 8 North Carolina and Saturday versus Wake Forest and the women's game against FSU Sunday.

"We're in the final push here and we just want to get the students out," Meier said. "When they do come, it makes a huge difference."

Members of the teams got on the residence halls' PA systems and called students out of their dorms and down to the lobbies to treat them to wings and pizza while pumping up the fans with a megaphone. They handed out towels and shirts to students who correctly answered trivia questions.

Larrañaga, who dropped by a flag football practice on the intramural fields to rally support, says this is an important event because it builds a bond between the team and the students.

"Students might watch a game on TV, but won't go across campus because they don't know the players that well," Larrañaga said. "Our players are out here trying to talk to the students, get to know them and encourage them to come out and cheer them on."

Larrañaga wants the students to feel as if they're part of the team.

"The most fun you have in college is being a part of something," says Larrañaga. "And if you can be part of a winning program, a team that makes the NCAA Tournament, creates some national news- that's the best, not only for the players and coaches but for the students as well."

Senior guard Malcolm Grant, who busted out the pom-poms to lead cheers at Hecht Residential College, agrees.

"When they come out and they see the players in their dorm and they're trying to get them to come to the game, it makes them feel like they're wanted and that's the whole idea," Grant said. "We want them to come out, we want them to feel the support and understand that we need them to win."

Meier says building relationships with students is critical for support in the long run.

"You can invite a thousand strangers to a game, and they come one time and they don't understand why they're there," Meier said. "Or you can get the students to get real involved, build relationships with them and see the growth of the team."

So, after storming the campus dorms, what kind of a crowd does the men's team expect for the home game against UNC?

"I'm hoping for a big crowd, the biggest

crowd I've ever seen since I've been here," Grant says. "Usually it's always a good crowd when we play [North Carolina], but I want to see it packed, like every seat I want to see somebody in it cheering, going crazy."

Shenise Johnson, who leads a women's team that has won 38 consecutive home games, talked about how helpful it can be to have a hostile environment behind the team.

"It gives us that sixth man, that person off the bench," Johnson said. "It gets us excited and makes us play a lot harder when we have our peers supporting us."

Larrañaga says he will coach until at least 2019

Sun Sentinel
Jan. 27, 2012
Steve Gorten

CORAL GABLES – Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga will be 69 years old when his new three-year contract extension, signed Wednesday and announced today, expires on April 30, 2019.

Will he still be coaching then?

"You know, I talked to my son Jay last night and that question kind of was posed in the opposite," Larrañaga recounted. "Jay basically said, 'You're a lifer. You're going to coach until the day you die.'

"That's just what I love to do. So I expect to coach at least that long [2019], if not longer."

At least that long?

"It just proves how much he loves the game and how much passion he has, how much he wants this school to become a great school," freshman point guard Shane Larkin said with a smile. "I know Coach is very passionate, so I think he'll definitely finish the deal, and if he can, he'll sign another extension after that."

Larrañaga joked that his wife, Liz, tells him "I don't do anything else but coach," adding he tries to coach her on driving while she's behind the wheel and on the golf course, even though he knows "nothing about golf."

"[Coaching] has been in my blood for a very long time, and I'll expect I'll be doing it as long as I can," Larrañaga added.

This is, after all, a man who sees his mentor and former high school coach, Jack Curran, still coaching basketball and baseball at 80 years old at Archbishop Molloy

in Queens, N.Y.

The average age of NCAA men's basketball coaches in 2010-11 was 49.65 years old.

The oldest active NCAA men's basketball coach is Jackson State's Tevester Anderson, who'll turn 75 on Feb. 26. The next oldest, Miami (Ohio) coach Charlie Coles, will turn 70 on Feb. 6. Connecticut's John Calhoun will also turn 70 in May. San Diego State's Steve Fisher will be 67 in March, the same age as Syracuse's Jim Boeheim. Florida Atlantic's Mike Jarvis will turn 67 in April.

So Larrañaga finishing his new contract is quite possible. If he does stay at Miami through the 2018-19 season — there's no reason to believe he'll leave, considering his affinity for the ACC and ties in Florida — and doesn't retire, he will not only turn the Hurricanes into a consistent winner, but more importantly an established program a high-profile coach would want to take over.

He knows the game as well as anyone, and he teaches it as well as anyone, which means players will develop — something that too often hasn't been the case here.

Now, it will take time. This isn't a one-year or two-year project, but rather a "long-term project," Larrañaga acknowledged today, adding, "We want to build correctly."

It's hard to have patience if you're a 'Canes fan, considering that was the mantra during Frank Haith's tenure the past seven seasons and the 'Canes made the NCAA Tournament just once — 2007-08.

Unfortunately, it's necessary.

"We want to help develop a brand that the community wants to follow," Larrañaga

said. "People tend to follow winners and we want to build a winning program that people will be excited about. It doesn't happen overnight, but we did it at two other institutions.

UM athletic director Shawn Eichorst made a good move offering Larrañaga an extension and making a commitment to him.

The timing might seem peculiar, considering the 'Canes are just 11-7, 2-3 in the ACC in Larrañaga's first season, but with the injuries and off-field issues he's encountered, he's done an admirable job. And there are signs this team will continue to improve.

When Larrañaga was hired in April, I figured he would need five years to establish this program. Now he has eight years to work with. Retirement? It just got pushed back.

Even without rhythm, Larrañaga in tune with his players

Sun-Sentinel
January 6, 2012
by: Steve Gorten

The man lacks rhythm.

You might expect that from the 62-year-old, gray-haired New Yorker, who's unfamiliar with just about all of the hip-hop songs his players choose to play in the locker room before games.

Miami Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga sure tries, though.

"We're all sitting there and listening to the song, and out of nowhere, he'll just start clapping," forward DeQuan Jones said, grinning. "It's so off-beat to the point where we're just looking around, like..."

"Coach L is a funny guy," center Reggie Johnson said. "That right there lightens the mood."

Added Johnson, "I don't think he knows that he's totally off-beat, but I'll tell him one day."

Players laugh at Larrañaga's lack of rhythm, but are impressed by his effort. It was at George Mason that he started the tradition of having players pick one song to play in the locker room before each game.

"He says music is one of the great motivators," guard Shane Larkin said. "If you play an upbeat song, it can really get you going."

Just as he did in 14 seasons at George Mason, Larrañaga has found a way to relate to his new players.

He has amused them by his quirkiness, endeared himself to them with an act of compassion and intrigued them with his immense desire to teach all things basketball and life with a creative touch.

"I compare him to Phil Jackson," forward Kenny Kadji said of Larrañaga's approach.

"And even on the court, the way he handles himself on the bench," Kadji added. "He never yells. It's like he knows how the game's going to go before the game is even played. He has a lot of knowledge."

Like the Zen Master, Larrañaga is a philosopher. He quotes Confucius and Aristotle, and has used some of what he has learned in his coaching. During one of his first team meetings at UM, he shared a

section from Malcolm Gladwell's book "Outliers."

"He does a lot of teaching," Johnson said. "We have meetings about personnel, and the next thing he's talking about bankruptcy or something like that."

When Miami traveled to play Charlotte [N.C.] last month, Larrañaga took the team to tour Red Ventures, a highly successful marketing services company.

The day after the Hurricanes played at Memphis in early December — on the way to the airport to fly to their next game at Purdue — he took the team to the Lorraine Motel, the historic site where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968.

Larrañaga has done most of his teaching at UM on the court. He always posts a "Thought of the Day," something he also did at George Mason, on a board in the locker room before practice.

The first one of this season: "Begin with the end in mind."

When the team gathers in a circle on the court, Larrañaga will ask a random player what the quote of the day was. If you don't remember it, you must run sprints.

The same goes for if you curse during practice. Larrañaga doesn't allow it. It's something he says he picked up from his mentor and high school coach at Archbishop (N.Y.) Molloy — Jack Curran.

Larrañaga will stop practice frequently to make a teaching point, something that wasn't the case as much under former coach Frank Haith the past seven seasons.

"Coach Haith would stop things, but I think Coach Haith, he had so much confidence in us that sometimes we'd make a mistake and he would let it go by because he knew we'd make up for it," guard Malcolm Grant said.

"But Coach L, he stops every little thing and he harps on it. He's been to the Final Four, he's been to the tournament almost every year, so he knows what it takes. I think he's trying to ingrain that into us."

"There's always a lot of teaching. The question is: is there a lot of learning?" Larrañaga quipped.

"My high school coach taught from the very first day of practice to the very last day of practice. We never stopped learn-

ing. He told me, 'If you ever stop trying to improve as a coach, you might as well quit.'"

Jones says players took to Larrañaga quickly, noting, "we did our research and his track record speaks for itself. He's a winner."

Added Jones, "It's easy to buy into someone who has a history of winning and being successful. Once we started practicing and he started showing us a lot of different things, it was, like, 'OK, this is our guy right here.'"

It took Johnson perhaps the longest to make the transition from Haith to Larrañaga. Johnson didn't attend Larrañaga's first meeting with UM players — he was home in Winston-Salem, N.C. for spring break. Larrañaga flew up there to meet with him personally.

"It took me a while honestly," Johnson said, noting Haith gave him a chance out of high school when other coaches didn't want to because of his weight issues. "So I was real close to him. It kind of hurt. I still miss him to this day, but Coach L is probably the best thing for us as a program right now."

Johnson, like his teammates, was especially touched by Larrañaga's decision to attend the funeral of Grant's older brother in New York the day before UM played Appalachian State at home Dec. 30. Larrañaga missed a practice for the first time in eight years to do so.

Grant said Larrañaga kept calling to check up on him and wanted to know when and where the funeral would be.

"Just him coming up shows the type of person he is — true class act," Grant said. "My whole family really appreciated it. ... You're at a funeral home, a sad time, and I look over and see my coach. It brightened me up a little bit just to see him there."

Sometimes, just making an effort can leave an impression. And if it makes your players laugh, even better.

Miami Hurricanes' Larrañaga a master motivator

Miami Herald

Nov. 7, 2011

By Michelle Kaufman

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

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

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

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

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

Number cruncher

But his favorite thing to talk about is the subtle complexity of the game of basket-

ball. He has dissected it like a Wall Street analyst does the stock market, and compiled hundreds of pages of notes and formulas along the way. He majored in math and economics at Providence, and remains a number cruncher. His staff keeps detailed stats at every practice, and posts them for players to examine.

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

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

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

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

He is particularly concerned with UM's alarming turnover rate. The Hurricanes, who won 21 games but finished ninth in the ACC last season, ranked 205th out of 336 Division I teams in turnovers. His George Mason team ranked No. 22. UM ranked 271st in assists per game, so the assist/turnover ratio ranked 248th.

Game technician

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

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

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

After resurrecting GMU, Larrañaga faces new challenges

Washington Post
October 10, 2011
By Amy Shipley

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

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

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

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

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

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

Other setbacks came on the court: losing star center Reggie Johnson to a knee injury in June that will keep him out until December or January, and for-

ward-center Julian Gamble for the year because of a torn anterior cruciate ligament. Larrañaga said he has tried to respond by leaning on sound work habits honed over 27 years as a head coach, with 11 at Bowling Green before he joined George Mason in 1997 and kicked off 13 straight winning seasons.

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

Planning ahead

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

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

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

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

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

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

George Mason Athletic Director Tom O'Connor disputes the assertion that there was anything slow about the school's response. O'Connor claimed he

had to wait on Larrañaga's own lawyer, but yet pushed the process of getting raises and contract extensions for Larrañaga — who last year earned \$525,000 — and his assistant coaches as fast as he could get approval from above his head.

"I wanted to make sure we were doing the right thing," O'Connor said. "Everyone wanted Jim to stay."

Difficult decision

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

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

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

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

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

"That's something my wife says to me," Larrañaga said. "Can we do it all again?"

Rebuilding The Hurricanes

ESPN.com

July 28, 2011

Andy Katz

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski and North Carolina coach Roy Williams were in attendance, as were Florida State's Leonard Hamilton, Ohio State's Thad Matta and Pitt's Jamie Dixon. Alabama and NC State were represented as well.

Sitting among the headline names at the HP Field House on the campus of the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex was Jim Larrañaga, adorning a freshly acquired bright orange golf shirt with a "U" embroidered on the left chest, the traditional moniker for the University of Miami.

For 14 years as the coach of upstart George Mason, Larrañaga relished his role as the underdog, most notably when the Patriots embarked on a historic run to the 2006 Final Four. He cashed in on that achievement by becoming a successful motivational speaker with a Washington, D.C.-based speakers group.

Larrañaga had carved out his niche. George Mason was a Colonial Athletic Association power and a regular contender for an NCAA tournament berth. The Patriots are expected to be a preseason Top 25 team this season, and one that could possibly go on another magical March run.

He was 61. Yet he wasn't satisfied.

"I loved my 14 years at George Mason, and I know a lot of coaches say this: 'Don't mess with happiness,' and I was very, very happy at George Mason," Larrañaga said. "I'm very goal-oriented and I wanted to take a shot at a league that gives you a chance to win a national championship."

Larrañaga had an opportunity to return to his alma mater, Providence, three years ago when the Friars fired Tim Welsh. He turned them down.

"I've always been driven by the opportunity to succeed in your own league, so when I was being courted by my alma mater, Providence, in the Big East I knew the money was substantially better, but the opportunity to win the Big East for Providence would have been a stretch. To compete with teams like Connecticut, Syracuse, Georgetown and Louisville?" Larrañaga said.

So Larrañaga stayed on at Mason in the CAA. The league put another team in the Final Four in April when Virginia Commonwealth made an improbable run from the inaugural First Four to the Final Four. That means the CAA has put two teams in the Final Four in a five-year period; Miami has four NCAA tournament wins in its history.

And let's be honest: Miami isn't beating North Carolina or Duke for the ACC regular-season title any time soon. But getting access to an NCAA tournament berth should be easier out of what is currently a rather pedestrian ACC once you get past the Blue Devils and Tar Heels.

After former coach Frank Haith was scooped up by Missouri, Miami initially flirted with Harvard's Tommy Amaker, but to no avail. Then Miami president Donna Shalala and her top administrators got word of some interest from Larrañaga and, suddenly,

there was a match few would have predicted.

"Every individual is on their own journey," said Larrañaga, who consistently speaks as though he were giving a motivational speech. "I've never been driven by money, and when other schools came courting everyone thought I would move for the money."

"Right now, the ACC is going through a tremendous transition with eight new coaches [over the past three seasons], and any one of those eight could jump up into the upper echelon and make themselves a national contender," Larrañaga said.

The theory that a coach has to move to a power-six job to compete for a national title seems to have less clout. Larrañaga, in large part, helped start the trend that has since been followed by Butler's Brad Stevens and VCU's Shaka Smart.

But one thing that hasn't changed is access to players. Recruiting at a high level remains difficult, and in most cases out of reach for schools outside the power six.

"The quality of the player that receives our phone calls and shows genuine interest is different," Larrañaga said. "We're now in the battle to get the really good players. Our football team has won five national championships. Our baseball team has won titles. In my mind, and the coaches here feel the same way, there's no reason why we can't compete with the best teams in the country to win a national championship. That's our goal."

Larrañaga is no stranger to the ACC. He was an assistant to Terry Holland at Virginia in the 1980s when Ralph Sampson starred for the Cavaliers. But Duke wasn't Duke then. Now, North Carolina and Duke aren't going anywhere but the top of the ACC. The rest of the league is trying to catch them, with each taking a rotating turn in the chase. Maryland is going through a transition with the departure of Gary Williams and the arrival of Mark Turgeon; Hamilton has made Florida State consistently good; Virginia Tech has been a thorn in the side of all the above teams under Seth Greenberg but hasn't been able to get through to the NCAA tournament; Clemson made a smooth transition from Oliver Purnell to Brad Brownell and should be a regular in the postseason discussion; Virginia appears to be on the verge of a breakthrough under Tony Bennett.

It's too early to judge Steve Donahue at Boston College, but he is facing an overhaul of his roster. Mark Gottfried and Brian Gregory just arrived at their respective schools, NC State and Georgia Tech. Wake Forest is facing a major rebuild under Jeff Bzdelik.

"I love the challenge of now recruiting against the best teams in the country," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga's current team took a major hit when one of the best big men in the ACC, Reggie Johnson, went down with a knee injury (torn meniscus) that will sideline him until January at the earliest. Johnson, a 6-foot-10, 305-pound center, averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds for the Canes as a sophomore.

"Reggie was going to be an impact force for us in the low post and could have been the leading rebounder in the league," Larrañaga said. "Because of the sensitivity of the knee and the decision to

repair the cartilage they need four to five months for it to heal properly. He weighs 300 pounds and that can pound on his knee. So it will take three to four weeks to get him in playing shape.

"The earliest is Jan. 1 for a return, but it's more realistic to think mid-January," Larrañaga said. "There will be a transition when Reggie comes back. He'll have to shed the cobwebs from being out for six months. Then we'll have him hopefully for the close of the ACC season in February, the ACC tournament and hopefully the postseason."

Larrañaga will be counting on Florida transfer Kenny Kadji -- who never realized his potential with the Gators -- senior Julian Gamble and sophomore Raphael Akpejori to fill in for Johnson. All are about 6-10 to 6-11, but none have proved themselves at this level.

Getting shooting guard Bishop Daniels to keep his commitment was one of Larrañaga's most significant coups after he got the job. Daniels will join an experienced roster in the backcourt with Malcolm Grant, Durand Scott and DeQuan Jones, and there's an expectation that UMKC transfer Trey McKinney Jones will have an impact, too.

Miami had the talent a year ago to be an NCAA tournament team, but the guard play wasn't strong in late-game possessions, notably early in the season at Memphis. That contributed to a bizarre season in which the Hurricanes finished ninth in the ACC at 6-10 overall, yet finished 21-15, enough to earn a bid to the NIT, where they lost to Alabama in the quarterfinals.

"Miami did win 21 games last season, but they did finish [ninth] in the ACC, and that concerns me," Larrañaga said. "I think everyone thinks we'll be better this season, but it's a new system and a new philosophy and there will be an adjustment. They played a lot of 2-3 zone, and we'll only play zone in an extreme situation."

Larrañaga said the Hurricanes will have multiple seasons within one -- the nonconference, the early ACC without Johnson, the latter part of the ACC with him and the ACC tournament before possibly the postseason. To reach that postseason goal, the Hurricanes will have to make some noise in the nonconference schedule. The ACC ranked 16th in nonconference scheduling last season. The Big East was No. 1. That was a major issue at the annual spring meetings. The ACC had four NCAA tournament teams. The Big East had 11.

Larrañaga knows about scheduling into the NCAA tournament. He had multiple at-large berths at Mason, including in its 2006 Final Four run.

This season, the Canes will play Purdue, Memphis, West Virginia, Rutgers, Ole Miss and UMass in non-conference play.

"If we can succeed without Reggie in the nonconference then we should be able to set ourselves up to compete for postseason play out of the ACC," Larrañaga said. "I've never had the ambition to retire. I love coaching. I have the passion to keep doing it and see players develop and mature."

Larrañaga ready to put UM on national map

CaneSport.com

April 22, 2011

Jim Larrañaga was introduced today as the Miami Hurricanes' new men's basketball coach. And he has lofty goals for UM's program.

"I am very excited to be here, there ain't no question about that," Larrañaga said. "(This) offers a tremendous opportunity to compete at the highest level of college basketball. The ACC since the day I arrived at Virginia in 1979 is the best basketball league in the country. And it is our opportunity now as coaches, players and a community to get behind the program and do something very, very special. It's going to take a lot of work, but the reason I came here is because of the people.

"We have a lot of hard work in front of us, but I'm excited to get started."

Larrañaga pointed out how his George Mason team was being ranked in the early top 25 for next year and said, "I would not have left that caliber of team if we didn't feel we had that caliber of talent already here at the U, if we had the capability of challenging the very best teams not only in the ACC but also the entire country. Our challenge is to build a program that can (be successful) over an extended period of time so everyone in this community will be dying to get a ticket, get a seat to watch us play. You may say 'that ain't going to happen here.' I heard it at Bowling Green and George Mason (and fans packed the stands there). We want to create that atmosphere here."

Larrañaga also joked that "It didn't take me long to feel part of the program when Malcolm Grant greeted me as I walked into the office and tried to pronounce my name correctly."

Larrañaga addressed trying to get more students show up for games by saying "My staff and I will be in the dormitories recruiting students. We will work with the faculty.

"We need to reach out to the community of Coral Gables, the people who make up the community. My wife is the social director - I guarantee she will know more people in the community in the next year than some people who have lived here their whole lives.

At 61 years old, Larrañaga was asked why he wants to take this job at this point of his career.

"I'm crazy," he said to laughs, adding, "I love a challenge. I thought about my own career, what goals I wasn't able to accomplish in my 40 years. And one was I'd love to coach in the ACC, take a team to Cameron Indoor Stadium or the Dean Dome. At this time in my life I felt once I talked to Shawn Eichorst and could hear the energy in his voice, to find out things about the other basketball program here, the job that Katie Meier has already done - it showed if the women can do it the men should be able to do it. It's a challenge for me, but something that excites me very much. It's like the last piece in a coaching career to finalize what I hope to be all about. When I first arrived at George Mason I said we wanted to do something very special,

and our run to the Final Four was that moment. But we didn't win the national championship, and quite frankly that irks me. I think being a member of the ACC, with the opportunities to recruit nationally but with a focus locally and regionally, with the talent already on hand, we can be headed in the right direction to challenge the best programs in the conference and the country."

* Larrañaga said that when the UM job opened up he inquired about it through friends that were tied to a Michael Jordan camp "as coaches do - who is going to get the job?" Larrañaga said. "They shared a name with me (who was being looked at), it wasn't me. And then they called me back and said 'Hey, would you be interested.' So I made contact with the University to let them know of my interest."

* Larrañaga addressed the team, which met with him before the press conference and then attended it as he spoke: "The members of the team become our family," Larrañaga said. "We will have the players to my house. My wife will cook for them - you will love her chocolate chip cookies."

- Reggie Johnson wasn't at the press conference - Larrañaga said he remained home in North Carolina.

* Two of Larrañaga's players at George Mason were from Florida, and he made it clear that recruiting Florida is his No. 1 priority.

"We will actively recruit in-state players to try and build our program with a very strong foundation of local recruits," Larrañaga said. "We want to develop the relationship with youth league coaches, high school coaches, AAU coaches."

* Larrañaga addressed leaving George Mason, saying, "The players that I leave behind at George Mason are an incredible group of young men. They just finished the best season in school history in terms of record. I thank those players who made my job so much fun every day. I told those players today that when we met in Fairfax in our locker room that I was going to become the head coach of the U basketball program. Every one of them hugged me and wished me well, and I did the same to them. But this opportunity is very, very special to me. ... I love coaching, helping players be the best that they can be."

* Larrañaga's grandfather on his father's side was from Cuba, and Larrañaga said "I'm very proud of my heritage, of having grown up spending time in Kissimmee and Key West and in the State of Florida, because that's where my father vacationed every year. And now I feel I'm back home at the University of Miami. We're going to put together a fantastic Hurricane team."

* First-year athletic director Shawn Eichorst said of his decision to hire Larrañaga that "I was asked what we were looking for in our next men's basketball coach - we are delighted to say we have found it, and it's Jim Larrañaga. (He) is a fundamentally sound teacher of the game and will positively lead our student-athletes with a tremendous amount of passion, integrity and dedication. Jim is a man of great

character who will be a first-class ambassador for the University of Miami and our basketball program. He has successfully transitioned two other programs at George Mason and Bowling Green. And he is no stranger to the ACC having served as an assistant coach at Virginia - they won three ACC championships and finished in the top five of the AP rankings. Jim is a tremendously gifted speaker and communicator. His players follow his philosophy and play fundamentally sound basketball, take care of the basketball, play fierce defense and are very efficient on the offensive end of the court.

"This is an exciting day for the University of Miami."

* Football coach Al Golden attended today's press conference, giving Larrañaga a hug before it began.

* Of his basketball philosophy, Larrañaga said, "I have two boys - when my wife and I were raising our sons the two things we stressed (were) we wanted them to grow up to be happy and successful. But to accomplish both those goals they had to be great students and use those smarts to advance themselves, enjoy their life. That's the same approach we take as a coaching staff with this team. Basketball is a game, it should be fun. We emphasize attitude, commitment and class. Attitude, we ask our players to have a positive attitude, talk about life being 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react to it. Second we talk about making a total and unconditional commitment to being the best at everything you do, every aspect of your life. The third is class - we want our players to always behave in a first-class manner.

"As far as basketball is concerned, I'm a big believer that defense wins championships. And we are coming here to compete and win. That means we have to be fundamentally sound on the defensive end of the floor. We have to be able to guard the basketball but also help the guy who guards the basketball. Players will hear me and my coaching staff say 'one man guards the basketball and four men help him guard the basketball.' Our choice is to be an up-tempo team. The defense will create the offense. One part of our offensive opportunity is to create fast-break layups and open threes in transitions. That will not change.

"The scramble defense - I'm hoping to implement that to a degree so it can become a weapon and something the opponent has to prepare for. But it will depend on the work ethic of the team, because it forces the players to play at a high level of intensity for a (long) time. It requires a deep bench. My Bowling Green teams scrambled 70, 80 percent of the time. My George Mason teams of recent years have scrambled less because we were so strong in the half court."

* Larrañaga said he's still in the process of putting together his coaching staff.

* Larrañaga has a home in Sarasota that he purchased from Dick Vitale's daughter (Vitale is a friend of his).

UM embraces new men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga

Palm Beach Post
April 22, 2011
By Jorge Milian

CORAL GABLES — So why would a 61-year-old guy leave a cushy job at a top mid-major college basketball program to coach a team whose history is mostly forgettable?

"I'm crazy," Jim Larrañaga said a couple of questions into a news conference introducing him on Friday night as the University of Miami's men's basketball coach.

Anything but, although Larrañaga certainly has plenty of personality.

During his question-and-answer session with reporters, Larrañaga quoted Confucius, emphasized words by unexpectedly shouting them out and broke out into a little Spanish.

"You can tell he's going to be a lot of fun," said senior guard Malcolm Grant, who was in attendance Friday with most of his teammates.

Judging by his history at George Mason, Larrañaga will do far more than act colorfully. In 14 seasons, Larrañaga coached the Patriots to five NCAA tournaments and famously led his 2006 team to the Final Four before it lost to eventual national champion Florida.

After passing up other intriguing offers during his tenure at George Mason, most expected Larrañaga to remain at the Fairfax, Va., school until he retired.

"I started thinking about my own career, where I am and what goals have I not been able to accomplish during the course of my 40-year career in coaching," said Larrañaga, who also coached at Bowling Green

and Division II American International. "One thing kept coming back in my mind, that I'd love to coach in the ACC.

"It's kind of the last piece of a coaching career"

Larrañaga inherits a team that is expected to return virtually its entire roster, including Grant, an All-ACC third-team selection last season. But, like his predecessors, Larrañaga will also be tasked with selling a program whose existence has been marked by apathy.

The Hurricanes shut down the program from 1971 to 1985 and have ranked last in ACC attendance since joining the league in 2004. UM rarely attracts more than a few hundred students to games even though they are admitted for free and are further enticed by offers like free pizza.

"It's going to be hard," said Sammy Hernandez, a member of George Mason's Final Four team who attended Friday's news conference. "But when I was at George Mason in 2005-06, I was a freshman and our stadium is the way you guys have it now — empty seats. By 2007, there were huge crowds. And not because of the Final Four, but because of him."

Larrañaga, whose father is from Key West and grandfather was from Cuba, promised to build a team in which "everyone in this community is going to be dying to get a ticket and a seat to watch us play."

Larrañaga's signature style is what he calls "scramble defense," a high-intensity, full-court press that demands extreme fitness and a deep bench.

"I'm a tremendous believer that defense wins championships," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga's deal is for five seasons and

will pay him \$1.3 million per season, according to The Washington Post. Last season, Larrañaga earned \$700,000, including incentives, on a contract that ran through the 2015-16 season.

Larrañaga said he made it known through a search firm used by UM that he was interested in replacing Frank Haith as the Hurricanes' coach. Haith resigned earlier this month to become Missouri's coach.

UM athletic director Shawn Eichorst and Larrañaga spoke on Wednesday and a deal was in place by Thursday evening.

Eichorst said he didn't allow Larrañaga's age to concern him.

"For me, age is a number," said Eichorst, named UM's athletic director 10 days ago. "That's not a factor for me. He wanted to be here and we wanted him to be here."

The hiring drew rave reviews around the college basketball world.

ESPN analyst Dick Vitale referred to the move as a "grand slam for Miami."

"Jim is going to bring a certain spark," Vitale said. "He's got a personality. You'll see them playing exciting basketball and, more importantly, with Jim, they'll play winning basketball. You have to get people excited about basketball and, in Miami, they have not been excited about college basketball."

Larrañaga's hiring completes a major overhaul among UM's most prominent positions in the athletic department. Al Golden was hired in December as the school's football coach. Eichorst replaced Kirby Hocutt, who quit in February to become athletic director at Texas Tech.

NCDS: Miami's Eric Konkol on "Roles"

College ChalkTalk

Staff

Jan. 9, 2013

As non-conference play transitions to the conference season, players are settling into a specific role on their respective teams. Over the years, I have found that the teams with the most players who have "fallen in love with their role" have been the most successful. Deciding who plays is the most difficult aspect of game coaching. Putting the best lineups on the floor with buy-in from each member is vital for success. Our staff spends a great amount of time communicating with our players about their role on the team and the level of performance we expect from them. Players typically fall into the following roles:

1. Scorer
2. Defender
3. Rebounder
4. Transporter
5. Energy giver

Of course, the best and most complete players have qualities of each of the five roles, but many players have special skill sets. Some players can really score and others are most gifted as lock down defenders or counted on to clean up the glass. You may have players who are proficient at finding teammates good shots or keeping the ball moving as a transporter. Most of all, you want each player to give energy to one another by being enthusiastic each day no matter what the role and how much or how little they play.

When our staff makes decisions on playing time and role definition there are times we want to educate them on why we make the decisions we do for the benefit of the team. We also want to provide them goals on how to expand their role for the future.

Here is an example: Shots

Everyone wants to score and we had a player who saw himself as a perimeter shooter and wanted more shots even though he was a career 15% three-point shooter. He could score around the basket, was one of the best rebounding guards we ever had, and was a very good defender.

We did a simple exercise with him about his shot attempts and the shot attempts he felt each of his teammates should get per game. We asked him how many fast break layups he should get, half court driving layups or floaters, pull up jump shots, and three point attempts. He also did this for each member of the team. After his calculation, he came up with himself shooting 15 shots per game, our leading scorer 22 shots, and our team attempting over 120 shots per game!

Of course, he was surprised to know that our leading scorer was shooting just 12 times per game and we were averaging close to 55 shots per game as a team.

To show him what he was best at, we calculated each player's rebounds per minute played and he was our leader. He was exceptional at this and we wanted him to love being good at this skill and not focused on being someone he wasn't at this point of his career.

Numbers tell a story and there are times like this where we like to bring players into the coaching world of decision making. We also like to give players something to test themselves on and strive for so they can work daily toward expanding their current role. Players should dream about advancing their game and we want to help them achieve those dreams.

When it comes to shooting the three, we have a simple test to gain the green light to shoot three point shots in games. It is

called 5 Minute Threes.

It requires one shooter, one ball, and one rebounder for five minutes. The shooter can be anywhere on the arc and even stay in one place. They shoot for five minutes and if they can consistently make over 50 threes in five minutes they have the green light to shoot open threes in games. If they are in the 40s they have the yellow light. They can take one wide open three and shoot another if they make it. If a player makes 39 or less consistently in five minutes, they have the red light and that of course means no threes in games. We have had players start in the 40s and are now consistently in the 60s. Last season Malcolm Grant set a record by making 85 threes in 5 minutes. We chart the results for each player over time and post it in the locker room. This helps each player see where they are at as well as their teammates. It's important for each player to know who our best three point shooters are.

Big Picture -

A player "falling in love" with their current role while having goals to expand or change that role down the road is a big part of our player development. Evaluating a player's strengths daily, having them understand what they do well and what they don't do well, will help them recognize how they can help the team succeed. Roles can change during the season. You see teams that have players improve, regress, become injured or healthy, transfer, or become eligible or ineligible mid-year. Constant communication with the players is vital to a team first environment and will help them be ready to step into a new role if the opportunity calls.

Best wishes to you and the team you coach or cheer for.

- Eric Konkol

NCDS: Miami's Eric Konkol on what drives him to coach

College Chalktalk
Editorial Staff
Nov. 17, 2012

Each morning my three and one-year old boys wake me at the crack of dawn, sometimes earlier, and once they are busy playing and ultimately breaking something, I take a few minutes to check emails and plan my day. Quite frequently, I receive an email from someone who is interested in getting into college coaching. When replying to these emails I'm reminded of why I wanted to get into coaching, why I love what I do, and the people that have helped me tremendously along the way.

During the summers before my junior and senior years in college, I worked basketball camps at my school, the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, and several others around the country. For each of those two summers I worked 10 weeks of camp. After my first week I was hooked. I loved working with the kids, talking hoops with the coaches that had been doing it for years, and seeing just a slight improvement in someone during the week was very gratifying. It was also much more fun than the construction and waiter jobs I had the previous summers!

After college, I started as graduate assistant and was fortunate to work with some great people. Looking back, I was so focused on doing whatever I could to help the coaches win games, secure recruits, and not much else. Being focused is important, but it wasn't until a few years into my career that I realized the greatest satisfaction in coaching – helping our players. The impact we have on our players is tremendous and the amount of development between 18 and 22 years old can be life changing. Helping players improve their game, advising them through adversity on and off the floor, watching them graduate,

and staying in touch with them through their adult life is the ultimate for me.

I'm a believer that there is no such thing as a self-made man. You must have help along the way. I have been fortunate to play for and work for great coaches that have helped shape who I am. My high school coach Gregg Jensen, college coaches Bo Ryan and Terry Gibbons, and the head coaches I have worked for in Ed Conroy, Buzz Peterson, Ken Novak, Saul Phillips, and Jim Larrañaga. The camaraderie of a team and the friendship you build with the other coaches on the staff makes the long hours and tough losses seem insignificant. I really can't imagine doing anything else.

Thank you to Chris DiSano for allowing me the opportunity to once again take part in the College Chalktalk NCDS to take a few moments, step back, and think about the big picture. Good luck to everyone this year!

Larrañaga Assistant Talks Scheduling and More

CaneSport.com
Oct. 31, 2011
by Matt Shodell

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It's a different philosophy than that of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

what's a direct flight, easy to get to, all those things."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chris Caputo Is Living His Hoop Dream

Westfield State Communications Office
Mickey Curtis
Dec. 20, 2012

It is a full court shot from Parenzo Hall Gym to the big time world of college basketball, but Westfield State alumnus Chris Caputo is living his dream as an assistant coach at the University of Miami.

Caputo, a 2002 Westfield State graduate and a four-year letterwinner as a reserve point guard for the Owls, has been in sunny south Florida for the past two years. Prior to that, he was a member of the George Mason University coaching staff in Fairfax, Va., for nine years. The 32-year-old Caputo already has many memorable moments in his short basketball odyssey: Miami's upset victory at Duke last season, George Mason's remarkable run to the NCAA Division I Final Four in 2006, and his four years at Westfield State.

"I've seen a lot of great places like Duke and North Carolina and I have been to the Final Four, but I wouldn't trade those for my time at Westfield; it was special and worthwhile," said Caputo the day before the Miami Hurricanes departed for a Christmas Tournament in Hawaii.

Caputo's passion for coaching began at an early age and continued at Westfield State. As a seldom-used point guard for the Owls, Caputo was a keen observer on the bench as a member of Westfield State head coach Rich Sutter's first recruiting class in 1998. In between classes he was a regular visitor to Sutter's office, peppering him with questions on coaching strategies. Caputo also watched a lot of game tape on Westfield opponents and gave Sutter detailed scouting reports. "I don't know if he used them," said Caputo with a chuckle.

Interestingly, Caputo stresses his academics at Westfield State also played a pivotal role in preparing him for the 24/7 world of big-time college basketball.

"My time at Westfield was really valuable," said Caputo. "It's a place where you cannot get lost because it is a smaller school and a lot of demands are put on you academically. I was a finance and economics major where I had to grind it out and fight through it studying, especially near the end of the semester. That's helped me today."

Caputo's connections (he and Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga both graduated from Archbishop Malloy High School in New York City where they played for the legendary coach Jack Curran), coaching passion and work ethic landed him a job straight out of Westfield State as a volunteer assistant coach for Larrañaga at George Mason. The Elmhurst, N.Y. native toiled as an unpaid assistant for three years before becoming a full-time staff member at George Mason in 2005. He even turned down several full-time paid positions at other colleges to remain at George Mason because it was such a priceless training ground.

"Ten years ago there were not as many NCAA restrictions and I was able to do more things," said Caputo in explaining why he didn't take the money and run. "In addition to breaking down film, I could make calls to recruits, work camps and recruit off campus within 30 miles of the school. Plus coach Larrañaga is a great mentor and a veteran in the business."

Caputo's main duties at the University of Miami are recruiting and scouting opponents. He admits the pay and perks are good; his per diem is a lot more than the \$7.00 meal money he received at Westfield State. But the lifestyle isn't always glamorous and the pressure to win is enormous as Miami is a member of the Atlantic Coast Conference.

"It's more than just two hours in suits coaching basketball," said Caputo. "There are late nights watching film, countless trips to see high school recruits that you are not going to get, and hours of sacrifice and family time missed. It is a tough profession and a very workmanlike job. But being at Miami has been great and the school has such a name brand – five football national titles and four baseball national titles. And the ACC is the best basketball conference in the country. Every night is a moment in this league. It's a great city with great weather and an exciting place to be."

Caputo's first "coaching moment" came when he was a sophomore in high school. In March of 1996, he and a friend went to the Hilton in midtown Manhattan, the headquarters for the NCAA Final Four. Caputo watched in awe as a who's who of coaches roamed the lobby.

"I saw coaches like Mike Krzyzewski and

Jerry Tarkanian and I said this is what I want to do, this is cool," said Caputo. "Then 10 years to the date I was living out my dream of walking around the lobby at the Final Four as a coach."

One day Caputo dreams of strolling the lobby and the sidelines as a Division I head coach. He is realistic that may not happen for some time, if at all, because head coaching positions are scarce and highly sought. But he does point out that that four of Larrañaga's former assistants during the past decade are currently head coaches. A content Caputo just bides his time, works hard, and continues to network and make new friends in the coaching profession. He frequently sends text messages to Erik Spoelstrag, the head coach of the 2012 NBA champion Miami Heat.

"Anyone who is in this business does it to become a head coach," said Caputo. "But if I become a head coach it has to be the right fit for me; I am big on that. I am also big on knowing what the commitment is from a school. But if nothing comes along I will also be happy to work with Coach Larrañaga."

Commitment and loyalty are constants for Caputo. He remains good friends with his

Westfield State teammates, in particular Phil Connors (Class of 2002). And two other Owl teammates – Kris Kachelmeyer (2001) and Jon Mazzone (2001) – visited with Caputo when Miami played at UMass Amherst in early December. Wherever Caputo's coaching odyssey takes him, Westfield State will be of big part of it.

"A lot of nice things happened to me at Westfield State and playing there was a great experience," said Caputo.

Hoops Recruiting: UM wants "State of Miami"

CaneSport.com
Oct. 30, 2011
by Matt Shodell

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With one exception: Center.

"The only thing that's different is the size in the front court (in the ACC) - there's a little

bit more of a need defensively to match up with some of the size," Caputo said. "Like in the CAA, for many years centers in the league were 6-6, 6-7 - they could pass, shoot, score around the basket."

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

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

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

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

"Things like that - you're trying to put your best foot forward," Caputo said.

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

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

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

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

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

And keeping in regular contact with high school coaches also plays a major role for the

coaches. The UM sports information department says hoops coaches send out approximately 1,000 e-mails to high school coaches every day - typically a motivational quote, an offensive set or different ways to do things.

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

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

* The system in place for giving a scholarship offer?

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

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

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

Tonye Jekiri at home on basketball court

CaneSport.com
Staff
Oct. 24, 2012

The culture shock for Hurricane center Tonye Jekiri when he arrived in Miami from Nigeria three years ago?

All it took was the twist of a shower handle.

"I remember I took a shower, was wondering where the water was coming from," the freshman Jekiri said. "In Africa you go fetch it with a bucket, or you see a tank that stores the water at the back of the house. Over here I was asking where the water was coming from. I kept looking because I'd been in the shower for so long and the water just kept coming out, didn't run out. That was one thing I was shocked about it."

Another shock (literally): Nonstop electricity.

"I kept waiting for it to be turned off at some point," Jekiri said. "Certain hours of the day it would come on back home."

Other adjustments: Air conditioning and supermarkets with fresh produce. Jekiri was used to roadside markets and people running up to the family car hawking fruit and vegetables.

"The supermarkets there sell things like cologne, no food," he said, adding that "It was a change in food here. My native food I would normally eat soup ... and the way the rice was made with spices was way different - it was a change. It was difficult for me those first months. I had to adapt to everything.

"Even the roads - in Africa they have potholes, and you only have one major road that will take you to your office and every-

thing is on it; you're stuck in traffic for an hour or two."

Jekiri's road to Miami began at age 16 when one of his soccer coaches said based on his size he could be a basketball player in the States. Arrangements were made for him to be evaluated at an American camp.

"It was because of my height," Jekiri said. "One of my soccer coaches started working with me on fundamental things like catching the ball, dribbling."

Soon after Jekiri packed his 6-foot-11 frame into a coach seat for the 19-hour flight in hopes a high school coach would take a chance on him. On day 1 of the camp he got his first five-on-five real game experience.

"I was just running the floor and getting rebounds, that was it," Jekiri said. "Coaches liked me because of my energy. They said I ran nonstop."

A coach at Hialeah (FL) Champagnat Catholic asked him to attend the school, and Jekiri and his mother agreed.

"It was a small private school, and we liked that," Jekiri said. "The coach was there watching me, said he'd love me to come to their school. When I went back home my mom decided that would be good for me."

When Jekiri moved to Miami for good, he faced a big academic challenge.

"It was difficult - the first months I was struggling with the educational system," Jekiri said. "So many classes I hadn't taken in my country I had to take like history, and I didn't know much about the United States. And I had to take Spanish."

The transition on the basketball court wasn't much easier. Starting out as a junior he struggled.

"I couldn't even make a layup then," he said. "On game time I had butterflies bad, struggled for seven to eight games. After that I had a good season just running the floor and getting rebounds. I had little schools looking at me then, like FIU."

As a senior he made big strides, opening eyes by averaging 20 points, 12 rebounds and five blocked shots. It all started clicking for him, and he wound up rated the nation's No. 17 center prospect by ESPN.

"Miami, they came by during my senior season, watched me play and offered me a scholarship during the season," Jekiri said.

He wound up with 17 scholarship offers and took visits to George Mason, Clemson and Miami before settling on the Canes.

He says he chose UM because "The weather is the same as in Africa, warm. I've never experienced coldness, how that would affect my breathing. That was one reason I love Miami and decided to stay. Miami was my third visit, was the place I wanted to be and play ball."

Now Jekiri is focused on making a sizable impact when he's in games.

"I'll come off the bench, will help the team - I know I'm going to have a big role to play," Jekiri said. "I'll be getting rebounds, blocked shots."

He adds "I'm really happy to be a Hurricane. Putting on the jersey with my name on it, I was really happy. I just thank God for everything."

Jekiri Looking to Fill Role

InsideTheU

Chris Stock

Oct. 12, 2012

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Tonye Jekiri is Miami's lone true freshman and is looking to be a key role player this season.

Jekiri is a 7-foot, 227-pound shot-blocking center and solid rebounder originally from Nigeria before he moved to Miami and played two seasons at Champagnat Catholic.

As a senior, he averaged 20 points, 12 rebounds, and five blocks per game leading his team to a Class 2A state final.

"The biggest adjustment (from high school to college) was going from weightlifting to practice, it's not the same in high school," Jekiri said. "In high school I never lifted weights and went to practice. From weightlifting to practice to class to study hall, it was really tough for me. But I've kind of gotten used to it."

Head coach Jim Larrañaga has been impressed with Jekiri's progress since he arrived in the summer.

"I like the progress Tonye Jekiri is making," Larrañaga said. "We have worked exclusively on him developing a great jump hook because I think that will be his greatest weapon throughout his college career. He's got a nice jump shot, but a guy with his size and versatility in and around the basket, to be able to just jump hook over people would be very, very effective and he's working very hard to develop that shot as his bread and butter move."

Since arriving at UM, Jekiri has been praised Larrañaga and the players for listening to instructions without any questions.

"With me playing basketball I'm still trying to learn because it is my third year playing basketball," Jekiri said. "I'm trying to learn rather than talking. I really believe you learn more when you listen instead of talking more. There's not too much I can say because they have been in the game more."

Jekiri is one of five post players on the team with three—Reggie Johnson, Kenny Kadiji, and Julian Gamble—leading the way as seniors.

"They really have showed me what it really takes to be a Hurricane player and how hard it is going to be for me even when I go ahead with more expectations when they leave, the coaches will be looking for me to step up and take that role," Jekiri said. "They have been really pushing me when it comes to practice and weightlifting. They have also told me about their past experiences and how they fought through all of the things, they have been a big help for me."

Jekiri is making sure he's improving daily not just for a role this season, but in the future when he'll have a larger role after the seniors depart.

"I really do think about that right now," he said. "Even when I come off the bench, it's still a big role for me. I always think about when I come into the game and how I'll have to step up. I always think about that and the future too when I'll have a bigger role."

To help Jekiri learn the game more, he spends time watching NBA and college games. In particular, he likes watching Kevin Garnett and Dwight Howard play.

"I like how they play, how they are leaders on their team and have really learned from them," said Jekiri, who also liked watch-

ing Thomas Robinson and Jared Sullinger in college.

Miami hosts St. Leo on Nov. 2 at 7 p.m. in their lone exhibition game. Regular season action begins Nov. 9 as the Hurricanes look to make a run towards an NCAA tournament appearance.

"As a team my expectations is for us to get to the NCAA tournament and the Sweet 16, 8, or 4 and I think we have weapons to get there, we just have to put ourselves together," Jekiri said. "Mostly we want to win back our fans because we need our fans to support us in every game. As a player my expectation is stepping up in every game, filling the roles, and being aggressive in every game."

SG Adams Preparing for Next Season

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 22, 2013

After an injury-riddled junior season, Garrius Adams had offseason knee surgery in September prior to the 2012-13 campaign.

Unfortunately for Adams, he was informed in the preseason by the coaching staff that he would be redshirted as he recovered from the injury.

"At first it came as a shock," Adams said. "Then you understand it's for the better to get healthier and help the team in the long run."

With five seniors graduating, Adams, a 6-foot-6 guard, would step in next season as someone expected to have a large role on the team.

"His conditioning has improved dramatically and we're starting to work with him individually," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "Coach (Eric) Konkol had him out working on his ball handling because chances are next year he'll be in Durand Scott's role. I say that in the way Durand has so many aspects of his game. He's such a multi-facet player.

"If you watched (Scott) the other day his defense on Joe Harris was incredible. His effort at the defensive end was awesome. He's also our best guy at just attacking, getting into the open court and making all kinds of different lay-ups. He's our best perimeter rebounder and Garrius Adams needs to be that guy for us next year."

Last season as a junior, Adams averaged 4.5 points in 19 games as he dealt with injuries. The injuries affected his playing time and effectiveness after averaging 7.3 points and 3.7 rebounds as a sophomore starter.

"My whole junior season I battled injuries from the beginning of the summer until my last game," Adams said. "I never played a game injury-free at all. The next coming year will definitely be different. I feel great right now."

Adams has been the point guard on the

second unit during practices while his most natural position is shooting guard. Lately, he has been concentrating on a variety areas of his game such as spot-up shooting, creating for his teammates, and working on being a primary ball handler.

Garrius Adams averaged a career-high 7.3 points as a sophomore in 2010-11 making 24 starts.

"Now is the time to get ready for next year," Adams said. "I can't wait to start in the summer. I have to start now and that's what I have done. I have worked with the coaches ever since I started feeling better on a daily basis. I have been doing a lot of individual work with the assistant coaches just not waiting until the summer to get better, but starting now."

It's been challenging for Adams in practices going up against one of the best backcourts in the country in Shane Larkin and Durand Scott.

"Going up against the guards that we have is challenging every day especially because they're playing with some great confidence and I have to stop on them on defense or score on them on offense, it definitely helps me every day to practice against these guys to get better," Adams said.

Larrañaga and players have raved about the work Adams is putting in as a scout team player.

"He's running the green team (the second unit) and he's playing great," Larrañaga said last month. "He played point guard the other day as (Duke's) Quinn Cook. He was tough and we are had a hard time stopping him. In fact we didn't stop him. He scored on us like every time."

"He was (Virginia Tech's) Erick Green and he was cooking, he was (North Carolina's) P.J. Hairston, and Garrius really plays those roles well in practice," center Reggie Johnson said. "He's really vital to us helping prepare because most people don't have a guy like that in practice to really help them. Garrius reminds us of Erick Green, the leading scorer in the nation. He

played that role well, scoring, getting to the rim, and getting off picks."

With Miami ranked No. 2 in the nation with a 22-3 record, 13-0 in the ACC and recording wins over perennial powers Michigan State, Duke, and North Carolina (twice), it hasn't been easy to watch from the sidelines.

"There's definitely some times that I feel like that I'm redshirting and never had any part of the team's success, but coach lets me know that I am part of the team and I am part of the team's success," Adams said. "It makes me feel good that coach knows that."

Center Julian Gamble, who has known Adams for years as the two grew up together in North Carolina and played on the same AAU team. At one point, they lived down the street from one another. The two have maintained their relationship at UM and Gamble knows what Adams is going through as Gamble missed last season with a knee injury.

"I know how it feels, I know how bad he wants to be out there especially when you see your team doing great things like we are doing now," Gamble said. "Garrius is always in my ear. I talk to him all of the time. He's like an extension of the coaches and he tells me what they're saying on the sidelines. He's been invaluable to our team and he knows that and even when we're in practice he helps us improve every day."

Adams is still receiving treatments every day, but says he's been able to practice close to 100 percent for the last couple of months.

"I haven't had any soreness or pain so that's a smile on my face," Adams said.

When healthy, he has the chance to be a key player for next year's Hurricanes as they'll look to carry over their success.

"I don't think anybody knows how good Garrius is and how versatile he is," Gamble said.

UM's Brown busts slump with inspiration from father

Sun Sentinel

Michael Casagrande

Jan. 9, 2013

It's been rough for Rion Brown this year.

Nothing was falling for the Miami sharpshooter. Nothing — as in 14 straight missed 3s over a six-game span. So he switched it up. Before playing in front of 40 hometown friends and family last Saturday at Georgia Tech, Brown hit the gym at 8 a.m.

And something clicked.

Playing on the same floor his father, Tico Brown, starred for the Yellow Jackets a generation ago, Brown nailed 4 of 6 from the perimeter and scored a career-high 22 points. Three of his 3s came in the second half when the Hurricanes pulled away for the 62-49 win. The family connection can't be ignored, coach Jim Larrañaga said.

"That actually inspired him," he said. "When he went by to shoot, he saw that his father was an All-American there. He saw his jersey was retired. His photo was up on display and you get excited about that."

Larrañaga even joked about bringing a wallet-sized photo of Tico Brown everywhere Miami travels to keep the mojo alive. It would be in Chapel Hill, N.C., on Thursday as Miami (10-3, 1-0 ACC) faces North Carolina at 7 p.m. on ESPN.

Brown, who was a 39 percent 3-point shooter last season, said his dad served as more than inspiration during the early season slump. They'd talk regularly on the phone about breaking the streak.

"He really tells me to concentrate on something else," Rion Brown said. "Don't always go into the game thinking about

your shooting. So, going into that game, the first thing I was thinking about was I'm just going to play great defense and get as many rebounds as I can. Next thing I know I hit the first shot."

The slide ended 11 seconds after checking into Saturday's game. By halftime, he had a team-high 11 before making three more 3s in the second half.

With senior center Reggie Brown sidelined for several more weeks with a broken thumb, shooters like Brown could be the key to staying in the ACC race. The team's collective 0-for-15 night from 3-point range against Indiana State led to a 57-55 overtime loss on Christmas Day.

Brown has a good idea what was going wrong at that point.

"It's definitely mental," he said. "Earlier in the season it was getting to me. All I'm thinking about is how many shots I've missed and I can't think like that. I'm a shooter, I have to think 'keep shooting,' and the next one is going in."

Every possible solution was in play. He'd spend 10 minutes before each game silently visualizing making shots. But they weren't falling in reality and it became more of a challenge to keep pulling the trigger.

Could Erik Swoope be another Jimmy Graham?

State of the U.com
Jerry Steinberg
Nov. 18, 2012

We caught up with Miami's talented 6'6 junior forward Erik Swoope and asked him about the current state of the team, his incredible athleticism, his potential to play another sport down the line, and much more.

Much like Jimmy Graham, Swoope is a high energy player who can guard multiple positions, and play above the rim. Swoope had an excellent performance in Miami's win over Jacksonville Friday night providing energy with 7 points, 2 thunderous dunks, and 2 steals. Additionally he is a very good interview.

Here is our full Q&A with Erik Swoope:

SOTU: We talked with Bishop Daniels a few weeks back and asked him who was faster between Shane and him, and your name came up. So among Shane, Bishop, and yourself, who is the fastest?

ES: Oh man, its very close. If we had a footrace Bishop would win by a very small margin and Shane and I would be tied. We did actually get timed earlier in the summer in three-quarter court sprints, and actually I had the fastest time at 2.99 seconds. Shane was right at 3 flat, and Bishop was at 3.01. I wouldn't mind seeing us do a 40 yard sprint and see.

SOTU: It would be cool to see the three of you on the break and see who gets the alley-oop.

ES: Yeah, exactly (laughs)

SOTU: This is a very difficult question, but

we have to ask. What has the team been doing to overcome the slow start? Are there any major adjustments or changes we can expect?

ES: I think we need to just learn what's best for us. We have some new guys in Tanye and Bishop and we're missing Durand as well. Right now we are just trying to build a stronger chemistry. Coach L is doing everything he can to help us understand how important the little things are like winning the free throw battle and boxing out. It is starting to slowly come together. I think between the new guys and all of the seniors we will come together.

SOTU: How do you see your role on this team?

ES: My role is mainly to come in and provide as much energy as possible. I may need to match up with guards, wings, bigs, so I make sure I am prepared to contribute offensively but also guard all 5 positions. I focus on offensive rebounds, and guarding the other team's best guy. Something like a Dennis Rodman,

SOTU: Can you tell fans a little about the mohawk?

ES: Yeah I had never done anything like that before, and I thought would be fun. My family also encouraged me to do something different. I actually just recently cut the mohawk, I'm looking to try some new styles.

SOTU: That's very cool and fits the Dennis Rodman mold just a bit?

ES: Yeah. (laughs).

SOTU: Considering your incredible athleticism, ever consider pulling a Jimmy Gra-

ham, and giving football a shot?

ES: That would just depend on if the opportunity came up. That is something I have contemplated. I'd have to talk to my family, but I haven't had any formal communication with the football staff. But yeah, there's maybe a possibility.

SOTU: Hey maybe we can send a note to Al Golden on your behalf. Although Coach L would probably take care of that?

ES: Yeah I'm sure they would.

SOTU: Any final message for the fans?

ES: Come and support the team. It means a lot. We will do everything we can to give them a great show. Going back to last year, when we played Florida State. It was the first sell out of the year. And the team, and the coaches, we really fed off of it. When an opposing team comes in they feel the energy, and we'd like to get that every night.

Well there you have it Canes fans. Erik Swoope and the Miami Hurricanes are looking for you to come out and support them. We certainly appreciate Erik taking the time to do this Q&A with us, and wish him good luck during the season and in all of his endeavors.

Canes Bringing Style to the Court

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 1, 2013

When you watch the Miami Hurricanes basketball team play, there's one thing that stands out.

Their shoes.

As one of the nation's hottest teams at 16-3 and a perfect 7-0 in ACC competition, the 14th-ranked Hurricanes are also one of the most stylish teams.

Each player brings a unique style to the court with them as the UM coaching staff doesn't restrict the players from only wearing team shoes or even team colors.

Lately, two players—Shane Larkin and Durand Scott—have been rocking a bright neon yellow pair of shoes with Larkin in the Nike Air Zoom Huarache 2K4 and Scott in the Nike Zoom Hyperdunk 2011.

Larkin and Scott first broke out the pair of highlighters two weeks ago in their win over No. 1 Duke.

"I didn't even know coach was going to let them do it, but it looked good out there," McKinney-Jones said.

Larkin spotted his shoes at nearby Sole Fly, a sneaker boutique store specializing in unique shoes and the latest designs. The shoes immediately caught his eye and he took a picture of them to send to assistant coach Michael Huger, who has to approve each shoe. Huger gave the Larkin the go-ahead and Larkin got the bright pair of shoes.

"A lot of people like the bright shoe," Sole Fly store manager Tony Perez said. "So the guys have got them to wear in the games. There's a lot of stuff in here and the guys come in saying they need a shoe for game day."

Not only did Larkin and Scott look good on the court, the backcourt duo combined for 43 points, 16 rebounds, and nine assists in Miami's first ever win over a No. 1 Duke as the Hurricanes blew out the Blue Devils, 90-63.

As Mars Blackmon would say, "It's gotta be the shoes."

Scott was planning on wearing his bright

yellow shoes last season in a game against Memphis, but head coach Jim Larrañaga, who was in his first year at UM, wasn't comfortable with the idea so the staff had Scott change into a different pair before the game.

"We were coming from George Mason so we weren't used to that," Huger said.

Since then, Larrañaga put Huger in charge of which shoes can and cannot be worn. Huger receives plenty of requests and suggestions from the creative group of players looking to lead Miami to its first NCAA tournament appearance in five years.

"I use it as an incentive and say, 'Hey, if we win this game, you guys are allowed to wear the lime green shoe that's how they came into play (against Duke),' " Huger said. "We were at Boston College and the guys weren't as sharp in our practice and shoot-around so I gave them a little extra motivation and said, 'Hey if we win this game you guys can wear those lime green shoes that you want to wear so badly. We wound up winning by one point.'"

Larkin and Scott had the brightest shoes on the court that day against Duke, but the other Hurricanes deserve high marks for their style as well.

Most notably, Julian Gamble. While the highlighter shoes might stand out the most, devoted sneakerheads will be proud of Gamble's shoes. Gamble has been wearing a special-edition Solefly x Jordan Spizike shoe. There are only about 60 pairs in the world of the impressive orange, green, black and grey shoe.

Trey McKinney-Jones wore the Air Jordan 11 "Cool Grey" and Kenny Kadji was in a pair of the Nike LeBron X id shoes to round out Miami's starting five against Duke. Then there's Rion Brown, who has been wearing a Nike Kevin Durant orange shoe throughout the season and Erik Swoope has had a unique mix including seen in Kobe's "Christmas" shoe although Huger wouldn't let him wear a "Gym Green" pair of Foamposites.

"Everybody has pretty good style," Larkin said.

McKinney-Jones led the shoe charge in Miami's next game against Florida State wearing a pair of Nike KD 5 "DMV" shoes that pays tribute to Kevin Durant's home-

town. McKinney-Jones scored game-high 15 points in the win over the Seminoles in his orange and blue colorways with a neon logo, which were released in December.

"Me, Shane and a few other guys on the team are real big shoe fanatics so we like to stay up on what is in with Jordans, Nikes, and switch it up for the games, especially the big games that are on TV," McKinney-Jones said. "We like to pull something nice out of our closets."

Larkin switched it up against Florida State as he put on a pair of Nike Air Foamposite One "Polarized Pink" shoes and had the socks to match.

"I like wearing shoes that nobody has and it catches my eye," Larkin said. "Hopefully I keep window shopping and I find some more crazy stuff."

For the majority of the season, Larkin has been wearing a pair of orange Chris Paul's CP3 VI shoes, but has been switching it up lately. He has a pair of highlighter orange shoes in his locker that he'd like to wear at some point, but says he needs time to break them in.

As far as other plans for the future, Larkin has ideas in mind.

"I have tricks up my sleeve that I already have," Larkin said. "I don't want to spoil the secret of the shoes I'm going to wear, but I'm definitely going to be pulling out some crazy stuff down the road."

The players are enjoying being able to show their creative side on the court.

"They're having a lot of fun," Huger said. "Winning solves everything and when you win, the team, coach L, everybody is happy about the program, the university, the students, and everyone is showing up to the games. We just have to continue winning and playing together, that's the key. And then the shoes speak on their personalities on the court and I want to continue with that. I give them some freedom with the shoes and colors. I won't let them go over-the-top, but when we win, I'll give them a little more freedom."

Miami basks in post-Duke glory, hoping for bright future

SportsIllustrated.com

Brian Hamilton

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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."