



University of Miami
Men's Basketball Clips
2016-17

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Reed is Recipient of ACC's Skip Prosser Award

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University of Miami senior Davon Reed is the recipient of the Atlantic Coast Conference's 2017 Skip Prosser Award, presented annually to the top scholar-athlete in ACC men's basketball, Commissioner John Swofford announced Wednesday.

Reed, a 6-6, 200-pound senior from Ewing, N.J., will graduate in May with a degree in sports administration and double minors in communications and marketing. A three-time All-ACC Academic selection, he is also one of four of the league's top 20 scorers to be named to the 2017 All-ACC Academic Team.

"Davon Reed is the epitome of what a great student-athlete is all about," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He's been our captain for the last three seasons because of his tremendous leadership qualities. He has been a Dean's List student since the day he arrived on our Miami campus. He's not only a great student, but he's also a tremendous basketball player. Davon is a complete player. He can score at the rim or from 3-point range, and he's a relentless defender and rebounder.

"But what separates Davon from other great student-athletes is his leadership off the court, on campus and in the community. He works tirelessly with the youngsters in Coral Gables and has been an inspirational leader for our Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. Skip Prosser would have loved to have coached Davon. Skip would be happy to have Davon's name on his award for the role model he's been the last four years."

Named an ACC Postgraduate Scholar for

the 2016-17 Academic Year, Reed is also a member of the National Association of Basketball Coaches Honors Court. He has been named Academic All-District 4 by the College Sports Information Directors of America, which makes him eligible for Academic All-America honors. Reed has been named to the Dean's List, Athletics Director honor roll and is a Book Buster at Miami, and is a member of the university's Student-Athlete Advisory Committee.

Reed ranks among the top ACC players in five statistical categories. He is 17th in scoring, eighth in free throw percentage, ninth in 3-point field goals made and fourth in minutes played. He joined Miami's 1,000-point club earlier this season and has helped lead the Hurricanes to a 20-9 record and No. 25 national ranking.

In addition, Reed is an elementary school pen pal, has volunteered at the Miami Rescue Mission Homeless Shelter and is an intern in the athletics marketing department.

Davon Reed is known as Mr. Dependable on the men's basketball team, due to his professionalism in his daily life and the consistent leadership he provides to his teammates. He chose to attend the University of Miami for its mix of academics as well as athletics, after attending Princeton Day School, where his peers are accepted to Ivy League schools. As a sophomore Reed was dealt an injury that could have cost him an entire season, but with his work ethic and determination, he only missed eight games that season.

The Skip Prosser Award is presented annually to the top scholar-athlete in ACC men's basketball. It is named in memory of Wake Forest head basketball coach

George Edward "Skip" Prosser, who passed away on July 26, 2007. Prosser compiled a 291-146 career record in 14 seasons as a head coach, including a 126-68 mark in his six years with Wake Forest. Every Wake Forest senior he coached graduated, and the Deacons placed nine players on the annual All-ACC Academic Basketball Team during his tenure.

To be nominated for the Skip Prosser Award, a student-athlete must be an upperclassman with a grade-point average of 3.0 or better – both in his career and in the previous two semesters. Sixty percent of the award is based on academic achievement and 40 percent on athletic accomplishments.

Clemson guard Cliff Hammonds (2008), Miami guard Jack McClinton (2009), Virginia center Jerome Meyinsse (2010), North Carolina center Tyler Zeller (2011 and 2012), Duke center Mason Plumlee (2013), Pitt guard Cameron Wright (2014) and North Carolina's Marcus Paige (2015 and 2016) are past Skip Prosser Award recipients.

Mr. Dependable: Davon Reed

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Morgan Meehan
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Along with being named team captain three years in a row, head coach Jim Larrañaga and the rest of the coaching staff refer to senior Davon Reed as “Mr. Dependable”.

This is a result of the consistency he exhibits in all aspects of his life and his undeniable leadership skills. There is a big responsibility that goes along with his nickname and Reed is grateful to have earned it from Coach Larrañaga and the coaching staff.

“Coach L doesn’t just give anybody anything,” the team captain said. “Since I stepped on campus, he has always insisted that he doesn’t care who you are, you have to earn whatever you receive. So to earn that from him has been an honor.

“It’s a big responsibility, but I’ve always been a leader - I’ve always had to be a leader,” Reed said. “People have always looked to me, for some reason. It is just one of the qualities that God has blessed me with, I guess.”

From the court to the classroom, the New Jersey native has shown persistent success over the last few years. In his senior campaign, he ranks in the top 15 in the ACC in scoring, 3-point shooting (percentage and made), free throw percentage and minutes played. He became a “grand man” in December, scoring his 1,000th point against George Washington and has notched five 20-point games this season. As a junior, Reed was third in scoring, following two Canes players who are now competing professionally. He started all 35 games for a team that played in the NCAA Sweet 16 and tied for second place in the Atlantic Coast Conference. During his sophomore season, Reed had an early-season injury, almost forcing him to redshirt, but still managed to be named to the NIT All-Tournament Team. The same season, he improved from 2.4 points and 2.4 rebounds per game in five non-conference games to 9.2 ppg and 3.6 rpg in ACC play, helping Miami advance to the NIT championship game. Throughout his first season as a Cane, Reed was able to work his way into the starting lineup, despite being on a team with six experienced upperclassmen.

Not only does Reed have a jam-packed basketball schedule, he also works in the athletics’ marketing department and has still

managed to earn a 3.374 GPA while majoring in sports administration with a double minor in marketing and communications. He was named to the College Sports Information Directors of America Academic All-District 4 men’s basketball team, which makes him eligible for Academic All-America honors. Over the summer, he was named to the National Association of Basketball Coaches Honor Court, a national award “recognizing the talents and gifts that these young men possess off the court and the hard work they exhibit in the classroom.” Reed is also a two-time All-ACC Academic Team honoree and has been listed on the All-ACC Academic Honor Roll all three seasons at Miami. He was named on the Dean’s List (3.5 GPA) twice, Athletic Director’s List (3.2) six times and has been on the Book Buster Honor Roll (3.0) six times.

Reed’s former high school coach, Paris McClean, commented, “I value that [Reed] puts the student first in student-athlete. He is a heck of a basketball player, but he is also a beast in the classroom.”

Assistant Head Coach Chris Caputo goes on to say, “Davon is one of the guys doing homework on the plane ride home late at night, after playing a game. He is very workman-like in everything he does.”

Caputo believes his success both in the classroom and on the court is directly correlated to his intelligence.

“One of his biggest strengths on the court is his brain. He knows how to play. He takes good shots. He can play multiple positions. He values the defensive end of the floor. He is a communicator. All of those things that go along with being highly intelligent, he brings out on to the court. He has a great size for his position, and great length. He has got athleticism, and a high skill level, but I think what sets him apart, and what has made him a successful player for us, is that he is highly intelligent.”

As Caputo said, his intelligence is a huge factor in his game, but so is his dedication and love for basketball. After his freshman year, Reed and his father, David Reed, were less than thrilled with his performance.

“My dad was a little bit upset my freshman year because I settled too much on just shooting and pigeon-holing myself as being a shooter, when I have way more in my game than just that,” Reed said. “Every off season I have been dedicated to improving on different areas of my game and making

sure that I am that versatile player that I have always been.”

When looking at his stats and accomplishments, it is obvious that his time and commitment are also huge factors in his game. He has his eyes set on the prize, and that focused mindset is why he has seen so much success. But he isn’t done yet. When asked where Reed sees himself next fall after graduation, he responds without hesitation, “suiiting up, getting ready for training camp to play in the NBA.”

Whether the NBA is in his cards or not, Caputo isn’t worried about him after graduation.

“He has been such a good student and a mature individual that when the ball stops bouncing for him, he has a very bright future in any endeavor.” Caputo said. “Generally, intelligent, serious-minded, mature people have an opportunity to do well in life.”

Along with Caputo, McClean is also confident in Reed’s bright future, as he is a “tireless worker” and a “confident professional.”

“I know that playing at the highest level is one of his dreams, it always has been,” McClean said. “And I know that is something he’ll strive for; though I don’t think something like that would ever define Davon Reed. Davon defines Davon Reed.”

As the Miami Hurricanes take the court every game with an inexperienced team, Caputo is happy to have Reed to lead the less experienced players to another successful season, since Reed is a natural in that area. The bench and the court consist of an even amount of upperclassmen and newcomers, which is a learning experience for the Canes. Miami’s team has had to learn how to blend together to have success.

“Last year, we had a team full of veteran players. That particular group had been playing together for about two years, so we had a lot of camaraderie and experience. We still had some things we had to work through, but we had each other figured out,” Reed said. “This year, we have a new team, new rules and new expectations.”

Back to Brooklyn - The Kamari Murphy Story

HurricaneSports.com

Amanda Alvarez

March 7, 2017

The days of waking up early to shoot some hoops at the Canarsie courts, then grabbing a soda pop and heading back to the courts to play basketball until the street lights came on, are just a few of his favorite memories from Brooklyn, N.Y.

Kamari Murphy has only made short trips home since graduating from Abraham Lincoln Senior High. This week he returns as a six-foot-nine-inch forward for the ninth-seeded University of Miami Hurricanes. This week he will compete in the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament in his hometown of Brooklyn.

The redshirt senior has received a lot of affection from his hometown neighborhood, called East New York.

"I am very excited to be going home. I get to see old friends and family members," Murphy said. "There is a lot of love from the people in the neighborhood that have seen me play on TV."

Prior to his playing days at Miami, before the quintet of recorded double-doubles, being named the MVP of the Hoophall Miami Invitational and the captain of the Hurricanes, Murphy was not known for being the athlete he is today.

Basketball was not his original calling. It was not until his stepfather pulled him off the couch from playing video games, at the age of nine, that he began his career as an athlete.

With limited knowledge of the game and experience playing on an organized team, the sport of basketball did not come easy to him, though. At the time, Murphy loathed the idea of being forced

to play hoops.

The star forward accredits his success to an organized league, which really put the training wheels on for him, as those coaches took the time to develop his skill set. Since then, his love for basketball has evolved.

"I couldn't dribble and I had a low basketball IQ. The organized league really gave me some roots in the game," Murphy said.

Describing the neighborhood he grew up in as a very rural area controlled by a considerable amount of violence, Murphy did not have it easy growing up. He confesses that leaving Brooklyn is difficult, and being in the wrong place at the wrong time can lead to a bad situation.

"It is really tough to get out of Brooklyn. They say you have to be an artist or an athlete to get out, and nine times out of 10, it is true," Murphy said. "Basketball kept me out of trouble. And now I take Brooklyn with me everywhere I go."

The reality of his upbringing in Brooklyn did not take a toll on his aspirations to succeed. In fact, he is motivated by the opportunities that arose from playing the sport.

"I have met people that I should have never met, and I met them because of basketball. I appreciate that," Murphy said. "I am going to keep using basketball to be successful and travel the world and meet different people."

As he reminisced about his hometown, Murphy admitted there are a lot of good things that Brooklyn has to offer. He recommends that tourists visit the Barclays Center in downtown Brooklyn

where the ACC Tournament will take place. He also suggests that tourists pick up cheesecake from his favorite place in Brooklyn, Junior's Restaurant.

"There are so many neat things to do in downtown and Coney Island that tourists need to experience," Murphy said.

Murphy is looking forward to DBQ's barbeque where he raves about his favorite wings, and of course is beyond excited about being able to compete in front of his hometown.

"Never in my basketball career have I been back to play in my hometown. I am looking forward to everyone coming out to watch me put on a show," Murphy said.

Murphy and the Hurricanes open tournament play on March 8 at noon against eighth-seeded Syracuse.

Bruce Brown - No Books, No Ball

HurricaneSports.com

Steven Preciado

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Selection Sunday.

A day that college basketball student-athletes dream of. Where some schools are watching with hopes of reaching the Tournament, for this Miami team it's a matter of whom they'll play, rather than if they'll play.

With the Band of the Hour playing the fight song as the men's basketball team walked into the Rathskeller full of their fans cheering them on, the Canes took their seats as the Selection Sunday show on CBS started.

Following the East Region reveal, it was now on to the Midwest. With the 1-16 matchup set, then came the announcement for the next matchup: No. 8 seed Miami Hurricanes versus the No. 9 seed Michigan State Spartans. Players and fans jumped for joy, high fives all around.

While guys like Ja'Quan Newton, Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy were here for last year's tournament, there are plenty of new faces making their NCAA Tournament debut this season and one of them has been making quite a name for himself in his first year with the Hurricanes.

"I honestly didn't know what to expect coming into this season," said Bruce Brown, the Hurricanes' freshman shooting guard.

The Boston native recalled to his first moments when he started playing basketball at the age of six, watching his father and cousin play.

"They used to play ball in this grown man league," he said. "They used to just throw me a ball and I would try to dribble and do moves that my dad would do, but I couldn't do it at first because I was so small. As I got older I eventually got the hang of it and got really fast. I was short, but I could score the ball."

Brown then started playing in a league that was called No Books No Ball in Roxbury, a neighborhood in Brown's hometown of Boston.

"My uncle, Tony, taught me the fundamentals of the game," he said. "He taught me how to pass, shoot and dribble."

But when it came to his first true love of a sport, the ball wasn't round, but rather oval shaped.

"I really liked football before basketball," he said. "I felt I was better at the sport and I loved it more."

As Brown got older, taller and longer, he decided that he would stick with basketball. Transferring from Wakefield Memorial High School to Vermont Academy also helped him make that decision.

"When I went to boarding school, they didn't have football," he said. "I would've pursued it for sure because I was really good in high school."

When the recruiting process came along, Brown stayed pretty quiet on the visits he was taking.

"During the recruiting process, I really didn't answer the phone," he said.

This is something that Coach Jim Larrañaga could attest to.

"We tried recruiting Bruce throughout the spring and summer," Coach L said. "I would text him and call him, but he would never return my calls. I thought he had absolutely no interest in us."

To much of Coach L's surprise, he finally got a call back from Brown in September asking if he was going up to see him.

"I was like, 'What?' and then he told me we were one of his schools. Then I told him, 'Bruce you never returned a text or a call' and he said, 'Yeah that doesn't matter,'" Coach L said.

From that point on, Brown loved Miami.

"It was great talking to Coach L," Brown said, "He seemed to have great energy, and it was great having him come see me and talk to me."

Coach L serves as a great mentor for Brown, as he learns things from him every day as a man and basketball player.

"I could go to him and talk about anything," he said. "He's always there for me, whatever I need. If I'm sick, he cares for me. He'll tell me to take a day off, so it's great."

Brown has accomplished quite a bit during his freshman year at Miami. Just nine games into his season, he had a triple-double, the second one in program history after Anthony King had the first one in 2004. Brown was also named ACC Rookie of the Week twice and had career performances against both Duke and North Carolina, against whom he averaged 22.8 points, 5.0 rebounds, 4.0 assists on 65.4 percent shooting from the field and 57.1 percent shooting from long range in the four games against the two ACC powerhouses.

"It was great," Brown said in reference to his 30-point game against UNC. "I just played hard and competed, and my body just felt good that day. I don't know what it was, but I just felt different. Plus, the way they played defense on me, where they tried to deny, it was easy for me to get into the lane and finish layups that I know I could make."

Then about a month later, Duke came into the Watsco Center and after the Canes' victory, the fans and students rushed the court, which was a great feeling for him.

"As a young kid, I grew up watching Duke and all their games," he said. "Now being on the other side and actually playing them, I always wanted to play well because I never got recruited by them. So, I knew that game was a mark on my list to show the world that I'm actually a good player."

But no achievement was greater than the one he received at the end of the regular season, being named to the All-ACC Academic Team, on which he was joined by teammate Davon Reed.

"It was shocking at first," said Brown. "I didn't even know that I was in the running for it. I found out through our staff, and was surprised because I've never been on an academic team in my life. It was a great feeling for me and my parents."

Once he found out the news, the first people he called were his parents.

"My mom started crying," he said. "My dad just told me 'that's great' because he wanted to be strong and not cry on the phone. But he probably cried after I got off the phone with him."

The one that was the happiest for him was his brother.

"He struggled in college and eventually had to drop out, so it was great to have the feeling of my family being happy for me," he said.

Getting the grades was not easy for him early on his life.

"I didn't do well at all, until I got to boarding school," Brown said. "My mother would worry that once I would get to college that it would be really tough for me."

The way he was able to change all of that was by going to study hall every day and working extra hard.

"We have to get eight hours a week, but due to my first-term grades, my hours got reduced to four," he said. "But I'm there every day doing something. Even if I don't have an essay due that week, I'm doing something to prepare for the essay or just meeting with my tutors, mentors and academic advisors."

He feels the gratitude he gets for this accomplishment feels a lot better than the gratitude he gets for his on court abilities.

"A lot of people don't know me off the court, so to have this kind of accolade is great and people know that I'm a true student-athlete, and that I'm working hard in class and on the court," he said.

With the madness of March looming closely and Miami's game against the ninth seed Michigan State Spartans just a day away, Brown is just happy to be here.

"I'm really excited," he said. "Obviously, it's my first time in the NCAA Tournament. I'm always watching it and now to be a part of it, it's just a great feeling."

Fast Breaks: Kamari Murphy

Kamari Murphy
Hometown: Brooklyn, N.Y.

My hometown is Brooklyn, New York. I grew up in an area called Eastwood New York, on the border of Brooklyn and Queens. There is a lot of love for the people in the neighborhood that have seen me play on TV.

My family is big. I have five brothers and a step sister. I currently live with my mom and my stepdad.

I started playing basketball at the age of nine. My real dad signed me up for this recreational league where I was thrown in the fire to see what I had. I didn't like it because I didn't know what I was doing, so I stopped playing and went back to playing video games on the couch. One day my stepdad walked into the house and said he was tired of me playing video games, so he put me on an organized team where they took the time to teach me some skills. I couldn't dribble and I had a low basketball IQ, but the organized league really gave me some roots.

When I was younger I wanted to do something with cars. My stepdad always took me to car shows in New York. I was always fascinated by the inside and outside of the cars, rims and stuff like that. I was mainly attracted to concept cars and the futuristic cars that hadn't come out yet and will probably never come out. I would sit in them and then take the manual books home and study them.

My high school was a big high school. I went to Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn and it had four floors including a basement. It was a very diverse school and I had to travel maybe an hour and 15 minutes to get there. That just shows how big the city is. That wasn't my first high school though. I went to a catholic school called Bishop Ford in Parks Slope, Brooklyn. I was there my freshman and sophomore years. I had a change of heart and transferred to Lincoln and that is where I graduated from.

Now that I am older it is not as hard to be away from home. I remember it being hard my freshman year. It was an adjustment being away from family and not always having them at my games like in high school. I like to think I mature quickly so I really wasn't homesick that much. I would always want to see them, but after that I became real independent. They have come to watch me play in Miami more than when I was at Oklahoma State and I appreciate that a lot from them.

Playing basketball has given me a lot of opportunities. If I wasn't playing basketball, I would be like most of my friends who are back home in Brooklyn. On top of that, I would have to work a 9-5 job and I can't see myself ever having a regular job and having to clock in and out. I have met people that I should have never met, but I met them because of basketball and I appreciate that. I am going to keep using basketball to be successful and travel the world and meet different people.

When I played basketball growing up I pretended to be Kevin Garnett. He was my favorite player back then because he was exciting to watch. He was confrontational. I felt like I was similar to him because I like talking trash to the other teams and he does stuff like that, so I always pretended to be him. Then LeBron came into the league and I quickly switched over to pretending to be him. My game is nothing like his, though. He was the first player that I recognized that came from high school. I thought he was the first player to come out of high school, but he wasn't, and I was attracted to that. In his first game he had scored a lot of points and he would dunk on people and had his own shoe already, so I was attracted to him really quickly and he is still my favorite player.

When I was first introduced to Coach L, I was confronted by this older, but very cool, guy back in high school around junior or senior year. Michael Huger was the main connect to Coach L, but I would talk to Coach L all the time. The crazy part about it, it was Oklahoma State or Miami my freshman year but I made the mistake of just going to Oklahoma State. I had taken the visit there first and I just fell in love with the place and I didn't give Miami a chance. I probably upset Coach L a little, but when I was transferring it was a different story. I

automatically talked to Coach L and the conversation wasn't much, but I remember him saying, "you better not pass up on this again." So I already knew where I wanted to go, and where I wanted to be.

I am Hurricane because I play for The U, and because I have enjoyed my experience. I will carry that Hurricane brand with me as long as I go on. I graduated with a degree from the U, so I have that to show for. I think some of my best years of basketball came last year and this year, playing with Miami basketball.

When I think about the U, I think about tradition. I think about the football program and a prestigious university. When I first applied I had to get so many recommendations just to get in and it made me realize how prestigious this school is. I definitely appreciate being a part of The U. All around the world, people know about The U and I am just glad to be a part of that.

The city of Coral Gables is nothing like Brooklyn. I feel like the city of Coral Gables recognizes The U athletes. It is a small little town but there is a lot of support in it.

Playing for Coach L, I have learned how to be a better person off the court. I have a daughter now, and I just look at things differently, like how I want her to be raised. I have taken some of the morals he has instilled in us during meetings and have applied them to her life now. He is a teacher besides a coach.

One thing everyone should know about UM hoops is that we are going to compete every night. UM hoops is one of the top programs and kids coming out of high school should look at Miami as a school they want to play at.

I want people to appreciate what I have done during my career. I am not going to give you 30 points every night. I am not going to hit a buzzer beater for you. Those are more memorable plays. But I bring it every day at practice and I bring it every game. I just want the people on the outside looking in to appreciate my hard work and what I put into the program.

To be a Miami Hurricane means you are held to a higher standard. You can't do things regular people do. You have the spotlight on you at all times, even if you think you are just hanging out at the beach. If you have something with The U on and you look like an athlete, you have a spotlight on you. You are held accountable for your actions more often than not, and at the same time it makes you want to be a better person. I have learned some things the hard way, but I now know how to carry myself and be approachable.

Coach L is a teacher, a coach, a father figure, someone you look up to, someone you trust, someone you depend on. He is a terrific coach, one of the best coaches I have ever played for. He is one of those original sincere guys that when he says something he means it. He isn't going to sugar coat anything when I comes to your game and your life and what's best for you. Nine times out of 10 he is correct because he has been through a lot. He is a wise guy so he knows a lot. Coach L is definitely the G.O.A.T.

My favorite thing about the U family is the connection I have with the players and coaches, and even the administration that does all of the work behind the scenes. There is no one I dislike. When I come into this building I see everyone and I talk to everyone. There is a family atmosphere. Some of my best moments in life have been with my U family, so I will always appreciate that.

I am closest on the team with Davon Reed this year. We are two of the captains. We talk, we text each other about the upcoming games and we plan what we need to do with this younger team. Off the court, I am always with him.

Dunking is one of those emphatic feelings, and it gives me more energy. Dunks are some of the most exciting plays in basketball, unless you are hitting a buzzer-beating three. Dunks are always exciting to watch. I have a few dunks that I do, but dunking on someone is probably the best one. It gets

the crowd hyped and the team hyped.

If I wasn't playing basketball, I would probably be doing something with cars. I don't think it would be mechanic work, but maybe something with designing, remodeling or customizing them. My stepdad also works in real-estate and it is something else I am interested in. He buys and sells houses and he has taught me a few things about it, so that is something else I could see myself doing after basketball.

My number one goal is to be successful for my family. I don't want to be that person that leaves and graduates and doesn't do anything with his life. I want to be able to provide for my daughter, so I want to be a great dad and be there for her. Ultimately I want to be in the NBA and get the chance to play in the league. I think I have worked hard for that chance.

I never thought that I would be on TV playing basketball. I never thought I would be good enough to be in this position and be in the NCAA Tournament going to a Sweet 16. Or even playing against Duke and North Carolina. These are things I never imagined myself doing.

I secretly wish I could shoot better. I watch DJ Vasiljevic shoot and I think to myself, "Wow I wish I could do that". I know it's something I can work on, it is just going to take some time. I don't think I will ever be like DJ, I mean if I could shoot like that, I probably wouldn't even be here right now. And I secretly wish I could win the lotto, too, but that's probably not going to happen either.

I like to watch Animal Planet and Discovery Channel. I used to like swimming, too, but ever since Navy Seals training, I look at the water differently. When I see the pool I am just like, "I'd rather not". I don't know if this is weird or not, but I hate a dirty car. For any little thing, I go and get my car washed or vacuum the inside. I wish I was like that with my room, but with my car, I feel like it has to be spotless.

My favorite holiday is Thanksgiving. The food is always amazing and I love being around my family. The jokes, the food, the memories, you can't beat them on Thanksgiving. I at least have three plates of food.

Becoming a man is not just about getting older. Becoming a man is one who handles his responsibilities - If you mess up in life, being able to handle it, adjust, and bounce back. If you have children, taking care of them, making sure you are there for them. Being honest with your life is another part of being a man. If you try to cheat life, you're not being a man. At least that is what I was taught growing up.

After college I want to make a lot of money. I am hoping it will come from basketball, but if not, I will find another way. I need to have enough money where my family can live comfortably. I want to be able to support my mom, my daughter and my brothers.

Fast Breaks: Davon Reed

Davon Reed
Hometown: Ewing, N.J.

My hometown is Ewing, New Jersey. I've lived there all of my life. It's a small town and where I fell in love with basketball. It's a sports town - football and basketball - but basketball is big in Ewing.

My family is everything to me - my mom, dad and little brother. All of my immediate family lives close to me, including my grandma, my aunts and my uncles. We always get together for the holidays and for birthdays. My family is a very big part of my life.

I started playing basketball when I was five years old. I started playing organized basketball when I was in second grade. Obviously I'm still playing and I still love the game as much as I did then. It's taken me a lot of places and I'm sure it will create a lot more opportunities for me. I love the game to death.

My high school is Princeton Day School. I went to high school in Princeton, N.J. It's a small day school and it was one of the best decisions of my life to decide to go there and not go to public school. That's no diss to any public school I would have gone to, but it was a great opportunity to go there and get a great education from one of the best schools in the country. The people I met there and the experiences I had at Princeton Day were amazing and life-changing.

When I was younger I wanted to be an NBA player. I always wanted to play in the NBA. That's been my goal always, and that's still my goal. I'm steadily working towards that.

The hardest part of being away from home is not having a chance to see my mom, my dad, my little brother, my family, period, and my best friends. I don't necessarily miss home per se, but I definitely miss them everyday.

My little brother and I have grown closer over the years, especially with me not being home. I enjoy just seeing him grow up, to talk to him on FaceTime, things like that. He's becoming a man right before my eyes.

Playing basketball has given me too many experiences and opportunities to count. It's taken me all over the world: Spain, Puerto Rico and pretty much every state across the country. It's given me the chance to get an education at Princeton Day and here at the University of Miami. The game is giving me so much I can't even put it into words.

When I played basketball growing up I pretended to be Allen Iverson at first. I had a lot of NBA players I looked up to, though. I'd have to say Vince Carter, Tracy McGrady and LeBron James.

When I was introduced to Coach L, the first time I spoke to him over the phone was after an AAU tournament. I liked how he obviously complimented me on my game, but instead of telling me everything I wanted to hear, he told me I needed to be rebounding more and this is why he was recruiting me. Most coaches just try to sell you a dream and tell you what you want to hear. To see that he cared about my game was important to me and I liked that. And now he's the best coach I've

ever had. He's allowed me to become a great player and have a great career. I wouldn't be here at this level, playing in the ACC and getting the chance to play in the Sweet 16, without Coach L.

I'm a Hurricane because I wanted to play in the best conference, the ACC. I wanted to play for Coach L, one of the best coaches in the country. I wanted to be in Miami. I felt like it was a great fit for me, and it has been nothing but that.

The U will be a part of me forever. This community, this school, welcomed me in with open arms, the way it all just worked out. Even though my first year we weren't as great, we've steadily gotten better each year. Just to see the change in the atmosphere of the program and now Coach L getting the best recruits in the country - McDonald's All-Americans - it's great to say I was a part of that and helped build that foundation here.

The city of Coral Gables is a quiet little area. When I first was thinking about Miami, I didn't really know what Coral Gables was. I like the dynamic between South Beach and here.

Playing for Coach L, I've learned so much on and off the court. He's not only just a basketball coach, he's been like a life coach to all of us on the team. He's constantly telling us stories and giving us life lessons. I just look at the game a lot differently now, stuff you don't even think about before you get to college. The different games within the game. If you stick to the game plan, the score will take care of itself. The different ways, numbers of everything, how it changes your perspective on the game, is amazing.

One thing everyone should know about UM hoops is that it's on the rise. In years to come, Miami will be considered a powerhouse and a top-tier program in the country.

I'm happy to be a part of some great experiences and history here at the University of Miami. I'm proud to say I'm a Hurricane and proud to have scored 1,000 points wearing this uniform. I'm looking forward to trying to win an ACC Championship, and that will make me happy and feel like I left my own legacy here.

To be a Miami Hurricane means representing this University every time you step on the court and every time you go to class. Everything you do, it's that pride to be a Hurricane. I think everyone who comes here and plays for this University feels that.

Coach L is the most different coach I've ever had. He's like a father figure, and he relates to us even though he's a lot older than us. He's a great coach and a great person, and I'm glad he was my college coach.

My favorite thing about the U family is when I see the fans outside of the games, in the community or somewhere, and they come up to me and show their support or their love. Those are the moments that mean the most to me. It's cool to see everyone cheering at the games, but when they actually recognize you in public and want to come talk to you and want you to take a picture with their son or daughter, those are the best moments to me.

I'm the closest on the team with Kamari Murphy, Ja'Quan Newton and Anthony Lawrence.

Dunking and threes both have their own feel. A three can be a dagger. There's just something about a three. It's worth more points and I like to shoot threes, a three is a big thing for me. It gets me going. When you get a good dunk, though, maybe dunk on somebody, that adrenaline rush, you get to scream. A dunk is a different feeling.

If I wasn't playing basketball I'd still be in college. I went to Princeton Day School. Going to college was always mandatory. My mom always said I was going to college. I wanted to, and I'm very goal oriented. I would definitely still be in college right now.

Some of my personal goals are to win an ACC Championship this year, I obviously want to graduate, too. I'll be graduating this May. I want to play in the NBA for as long as I can, and have a happy and healthy career. I just want to be successful. I want people to remember me as a great person. I want to have kids and raise a family. I want to raise them and teach them the things my parents taught me, and see them live their dreams.

If I see something and I want it, I do my best to go get it.

I like to have fun with my teammates, have a good time, listen to music and shop. I love R&B and hip hop. I like concerts and going out having a good time being with good people, and my family.

My favorite holiday is Christmas, but Thanksgiving, as well. There is nothing like being home and having a big family.

Nobody knows that I can juggle. I can juggle a little bit.

Becoming a man, this is a never-ending thing. You can learn something every day. Becoming a man is something I take pride in, something I've done a good job at so far. Obviously my parents and my family have done a good job at creating a foundation for me becoming a man, and being here with Coach L and this coaching staff, they have definitely contributed a lot to me becoming a man and growing as a person. You can never be too much of a man.

After college I want to be happy. That's the best way I can say it. I want to play in the NBA. Not only make as much money as I can, but be happy and be healthy. Whatever I want to do as a career after basketball, I just want to be happy. My mom says, 'do what you would do for free'. Ultimately I just want to be happy, and I don't have all of the answers for that right now.

Fast Breaks: Ja'Quan Newton

Ja'Quan Newton

Hometown: Philadelphia, Pa.

My hometown is very tough, very rough. Sometimes it's hard to make it out, but basketball is the reason why I made it out and the reason I'm here today.

My family is wonderful. It was wonderful on my mother's side, as well as my dad's side. My whole family is just wonderful and I love them.

I started playing basketball probably when I was six or seven. That's when I really started playing.

My high school was Neumann-Goretti High School. It was a great high school, and a Catholic high school. It was very educational and taught me a lot. And our basketball program was one of the best in the country, so it was great.

When I was younger I wanted to be an NBA player or an NFL player, but I took the basketball way.

The hardest part of being away from home is being away from my family. I just miss my family. My sisters and my brother, stuff like that.

Playing basketball has given me a lot. It's given me the opportunity to meet other great basketball players, to meet great NBA players, to play against great NBA players and to travel around the world.

When I played basketball growing up I pretended to be no one really. I wasn't that type of guy growing up that wanted to be somebody. My favorite player now is LeBron, though.

When I was introduced to Coach L I thought that he was a great guy. He's very humble, very kind, very nice, and

he's always going to tell you the truth. I've trusted him since day one.

I'm a Hurricane because I love the city of Miami. I love the school, and it's a great education. I love the campus and obviously I love the basketball program.

The U means a lot to me. I don't know how to explain it, but it's going to be a part of my life forever.

The city of Coral Gables is nice and calm. It's quiet, no violence. Where I'm from, it is very different. I love the city of Coral Gables.

Playing for Coach L at Miami, I've learned how to be a better leader, a better teammate, a better person and my IQ on the court has gotten better since playing for Coach L.

Once thing everyone should know about UM hoops is that we go out and play hard every night. We're going to give it all we have got. We don't care about individual stats and we just want to win for the team.

My favorite thing about the U family is how we are all a brotherhood. We are brothers and everybody just takes care of one another.

I'm closest on the team with Davon, Kamari and Amp.

I wear jersey number 0 because... well, I wanted to wear 20 because I was 20 my whole career, but somebody had it so I was trying to think what to do. I was either going to wear 2 or 0 and I just liked 0. So now I use it as 0 excuses. That's why I wear it.

Dunking feels great. I'm not a guy that's a crazy high flyer or anything like that,

but if I get an open fast break or an open lane, I will dunk it and it just feels great. It gives me more energy. It gets me hyped and it gets the team hyped, the bench and everything.

If I wasn't playing basketball I don't know what I'd be doing.

Some of my personal goals are to be an NBA player. You always have got have a plan B obviously, but I always said growing up that I didn't want a plan B, that I wanted to achieve my goal, and I'm going to do everything to achieve my goal.

I secretly wish that I was rich and that I had a whole bunch of money, like billions and I could do whatever I wanted to with it.

I like to play video games. I'm a big 2K basketball fan. I also play Madden, FIFA and UFC. I play against my teammates all the time. I can't win at UFC since it's a fighting game, but in 2K I got them.

My favorite holiday is Christmas, because you get a bunch of gifts.

Becoming a man is being responsible and taking advantage of things that have been given to you in life without messing it up. When you do something wrong you own up to it and you don't make excuses. A man takes up to his responsibility; if you do something you do it. A man should never make excuses and a man should never have "no" in his vocabulary or "I can't" do something.

After college I want to be an NBA player or a professional basketball player.

Fast Breaks: Ebuka Izundu

Ebuka Izundu

Hometown: Lagos, Nigeria

My hometown is Lagos, Nigeria. I lived there until I was 16 years old before I moved to America. Nigeria is very similar to Miami, but it is definitely not as hot, closer to 100 degrees usually in Lagos.

My family is my parents, my brother and my sisters. I have one brother and four sisters. Most of them are not here in America with me, but I love my family so much and they helped push me to do this.

I started playing basketball when I was 16 years old, in Lagos, and then I came here.

My high school was a small Christian high school in Charlotte, North Carolina. I went there for two years before enrolling at the University of Miami.

When I was younger I wanted to be a professional soccer player. However, I grew to be too tall and started to play basketball. I played soccer almost my entire life and still love to play it occasionally.

The hardest thing about being away from home is not having the food and the music from Lagos.

When I played basketball growing up I pretended to be Kevin Durant. I loved the way he plays and when I was younger, I was skinny like him and I tried to do everything the way he did.

Playing basketball has given me joy, happiness and everything I have always wanted.

When I was introduced to Coach L, I was amazed by him and who he was. He is always so happy. I remember he was so

happy to meet me and I was happy to meet him for the first time as well. He kept talking to me and I love to always say that I gained interest in coming here from speaking with Coach L.

I am a Miami Hurricane because I love the U, while the U means everything.

The city of Coral Gables is lovely and small. There are so many things to do around here and I just love the community.

Playing for Coach L at Miami, I've learned a lot. He is such a great coach and he treats all of his players as if they were his own kids. I love being around him.

One thing everyone should know about UM hoops is that we are coming for anyone that we play.

I am closest on the team with DJ [Vasiljevic], Mike [Robinson], Rodney [Miller], and really everybody to be honest.

I wear the jersey number 15 because, originally I wanted to be No. 5 but Davon Reed wears that number. So I just wanted something with the number five on it.

Dunking feels like the whole world is cheering for you.

If I wasn't playing basketball I would be playing soccer.

Some of my personal goals include trying to get my degree from the University of Miami and to be playing professionally somewhere.

I never thought I would be playing basketball, to be honest.

I secretly wish to own a Lamborghini.

I like to cheer on my teammates, play in games with them and to just play basketball.

My favorite holiday is Christmas, because I celebrate God and I go to church on Christmas day.

Nobody knows I can play soccer.

While becoming a man I have learned a lot from every situation I have been in, during my life.

After college I would like to play basketball professionally.

Fast Breaks: Anthony Lawrence, Jr.

Anthony Lawrence, Jr.

Hometown: St. Petersburg, Florida

I started playing basketball when I was four. I continued playing at Lakewood High School in St. Petersburg. Since then, I have always dreamed of playing in the NBA.

When I play basketball I pretend to be LeBron James. I idolize the way he plays. I have watched him play for years now and he has been the best player in the league since I started following him. I don't try to shoot like him but I am inspired by his grit and attitude on the court.

The hardest part of being away from home is missing my family and friends and just the feeling of being home.

Playing basketball has given me the opportunity to obtain a scholarship at a top 50 institution, play college basketball and travel all over the country.

I was first introduced to Coach L in eighth grade, that is when he started to recruit me.

I am a Hurricane because of Coach L. I like the way he coaches and his style of play.

The U is part of who I am, I have always been a U fan growing up. My dad and my uncle both attended the University of Miami. The U is in my legacy.

Playing for Coach L, I have really learned that to be successful you have to work on your own time. I try to shoot every day before practice, after practice and on the weekend.

Everyone should know that UM hoops is a family, we all bond together. We are

together all the time, on campus you never see anyone walking alone. We are always together. I am closest to Ja'Quan Newton; we are always together.

I want people to remember me as the guy who can play the one through four, and guard multiple positions.

Coach L is one of the nicest coaches I have ever played for. I have only ever played for coaches who like to argue with me but coach L isn't like that. He talks you through things in a way that he can get his point across and make you want to do better, and he lets you play the game.

Dunking feels like I just bought a new pair of shoes.

If I wasn't playing basketball, I would be fat because I like to eat a lot and I can be lazy.

My personal goals before I graduate are to score 1,000 points and to be on the All-ACC team.

Most people don't know that I love shopping. I like to shop for clothes and shoes. I like foreign, brand name shoes.

My favorite holiday is Christmas. I love receiving gifts and being with my family.

After college I want to continue to play basketball. I hope that I don't have to work a 9-to-5 job, but if basketball doesn't work out, my second aspiration is to be a physical therapist or something in the sports training field.

They call me Amp because most guys named Anthony in my area, at least back home, were called AMP and the nickname just followed me here. Nobody calls me Anthony anymore, so when I do hear the name I'm like, "Who's that?"

Fast Breaks: Bruce Brown

Bruce Brown

Hometown: Boston, Mass.

My hometown is Boston. It is where I was raised and where I learned to play the game of basketball. It is where I learned just to be myself.

My family is everything. They made what I am today, and in the future they are going to be there by my side. I can always count on them.

I started playing basketball when I was six, in the league called No Books, No Ball. My uncle Tony taught me the fundamentals of the game: how to pass, shoot and dribble.

I went to high school at Vermont Academy, and at Wakefield Memorial High School. I went to public school, a private school and boarding school. I miss both of them. I wish I could go back, but not right now.

When I was younger I wanted to be a police officer because I always saw them on the corner and I thought it was cool to go fast in the car with the lights on and people move out of the way.

The hardest part of being away from home are the home-cooked meals. My mom is a really good cook so I really miss her food. A lot.

Playing basketball has given me opportunities I never thought I would get. Coming to a college for free, going to boarding school for free and seeing the world. I've even travelled to Italy for basketball.

When I played basketball growing up I pretended to be like Rajon Rondo because he played for the Celtics. He was big at the time and I wanted to shoot like him so I used to shoot from the side of my head sometimes to be like him. He is also the reason why I wear a sleeve.

I am a Hurricane because honestly, it's a great school. For my mom, she thought I would do well and for basketball it is The U.

It is known everywhere.

For me being from Boston, The U is known for football, and they have won a lot of National Championships. We have a great football team and great talents.

The city of Coral Gables is a very nice city. It is quiet and has really nice homes and cars. It is a very chill place to be.

Playing for Coach L at Miami, I have learned to have fun on the court, play my game and know the numbers and strategies that the other team has. Coach L is very into numbers.

One thing everyone should know about UM hoops is that we are a family. We embrace everyone into our locker room. We have our own style among each other and our own way of doing and saying things.

To be a Miami Hurricane means a lot to me because they gave me the opportunity of being here for free and to play the sport I love.

I wear jersey number 11 because my aunt passed away in 2011. So it was either 20 or 11, because I can't wear 2011, and my friend was wearing 20 in high school, so I just decided to wear 11. It is a great number. It just looks good.

Coach L is a great person to be around and a great person to learn from. He brings so much energy and passion to the game that it strives me to do better in everything I do.

My favorite thing about the U family is everyone is nice and everyone embraces you, and talks to you, and wants to get to know you.

I am closest on the team with the freshmen because we do everything together. We are always around each other and we have classes together.

Dunking feels great. It is an energy builder. The momentum comes on your side when you dunk the ball, especially on the fast

break. It makes everyone scream and cheer and it just feels good. Everyone gets up and stands up. The crowd loves it.

If I wasn't playing basketball I would be playing football. I was really good in high school and I would have pursued that for sure. I love football.

Some of my personal goals before the season were to average two steals per game and just play well. I want to help the team, to help them win. I also wanted to do well in academics and be more of a people person on campus. I want to talk to everyone and get to know the regular students here.

I never thought that I would be starting during my freshman year in college basketball. I also never thought that I would be on the All-ACC Academic Team.

I like to play 2K and other video games like FIFA and NHL. I like to walk around campus because it's a beautiful view.

My favorite holiday is Christmas because when I was back home, I liked the white Christmas because it was snowing and it just felt like Christmas. And because we got sugar cookies. Sugar cookies are my favorite snack.

I had to learn to become a man at a young age. My mom had to tell me things, and I had to pick up things myself as I went on in my life. I also had to learn from my older brothers as well as my father, who helped me become a man by talking to him about the things he went through in his past, and how to handle that adversity.

After college I want to play professionally in the United States, in the NBA, and hopefully that works out for me in the long run.

Fast Breaks: DJ Vasiljevic

DJ Vasiljevic

Hometown: Calgary, Canada

My hometown is Calgary, Canada, but I currently live in Melbourne, Australia. My parents fled the war from former Yugoslavia to Canada where they had me and my sister, and then they moved to Australia because my dad got a job there and so did my mom.

My family is the most important thing in my life. They motivate me and I love them to bits. During my basketball career, they have told me what to do, driven me from practices to practices and supported me along the way. I'm just happy and grateful I have them in my life. When my sister was six – I was playing soccer at the time – she told me to go play basketball in the junior leagues and that's when I got serious about it. I thank her for influencing me to play.

I started playing basketball at the age of 11 on the outdoor playgrounds with my dad and a few of my close friends.

I went to high school in two different places. I went to one of them as a freshman and sophomore and they retired my jersey there. I had fun playing for them and they helped me with academics as well. I played for Australia travelling around the world at that time, too. Then I went to Lake G, where I'm originally from. That's where all the athletes go in Australia because they give you a scholarship to the Australia Institute of Sport and I won a high school championship with them. It's a memorable feeling.

When I was younger I wanted to be a waiter because when I traveled the world back in Europe with my mom and my dad, I saw the waiters carry around all the food and carrying a lot of cash in their pockets. I thought I might as well be a waiter, but then I realized how difficult that job is, so I just stuck to basketball.

The hardest part of being away from home is not being able to be there with my family during the holidays, like Christmas, New Years and Thanksgiving. Having to call them over the phone is probably the hardest thing.

Playing basketball has given me a lot of opportunities to see the world. Right now I'm in New York. I have been here once before. I've been to Italy and France. Basketball takes you to so many places.

When I played basketball growing up I pretended to be Drazen Petrovic and Kobe Bryant. Kobe because he had that mentality of winning. Petrovic was probably the greatest shooter in his time when he played. He probably would have been the greatest shooter of all time if he wouldn't have died in a car accident.

When I was introduced to Coach L he was like a father figure to me, like my second dad. He told me the truth and there were no lies. He was honest in saying that I had to deserve the minutes to get

to play, whereas some of the other schools lied to me. He would help me and talk to me when I was back home. He was funny and relaxed. He's a cool guy to be around and he cares about those around him.

I'm a Hurricane because it was the best choice for me. I'm happy I am at The U. Everyone supported me and told me to go here and I'm happy to be here.

The U is another part of my basketball journey, and academically as well, because I'm going to get a degree.

The city of Coral Gables is friendly. A lot of people know us. It's a friendly community.

Playing for Coach L at Miami, I've learned a lot of things. All the stories about him coaching a long time, the way he plays, and about him and the other coaching staff is interesting to me.

One thing everyone should know about UM hoops is that we are on the rise. Coach L has taken teams to the NCAA Tournament before. He has had five 20-win seasons in the past six years. We're on the rise. We're getting good five star players, and we are getting good international players.

My legacy is just to be who I am. I'm not trying to change for anyone. I just want to have a legacy of my own.

I am grateful to be a Miami Hurricane. With all of the great players, including James Jones and Sheldon McClellan, I'm just trying to follow in their footsteps.

My favorite thing about the U family is that we're so versatile. Everyone is friendly. Everyone is good at something they do. We're like a big family always doing stuff together and talking.

I'm closest on the team with Mike Rob, Buka, and Bruce. Bruce is pretty much my older brother. I'm always with him no matter where I go, as well as Mike Rob and Buka. I'm always with them in the locker room and Bruce as well. We go watch movies together, and also go out to eat. I'm always with them.

I wear jersey No. 4 because Drazen Petrovic wore number four back in the day. It's the number I've always worn since my junior year to now.

Making 3-pointers - it's a game changer. It can silence the crowd. It can get us back into it and it motivates me because once I hit one, I know the next couple of them are going in no matter what.

If I wasn't playing basketball I would probably be doing nothing. Probably sitting on the couch playing video games. I've never really thought about anything else I do other than play basketball.

Some of my personal goals are to just try and be who I am. I'm trying to create a legacy of my own

and not trying to be anyone in particular. I just want to be myself. I want people to look at me and know I went in my own direction.

I never thought I'd be able to travel the world so much with my friends and my teammates and being able to go everywhere and every part of the world.

I secretly wish my family lived closer to me, somewhere in America. But it is what it is.

I like to watch TV, Facetime people and hang out. I definitely like talking to my parents. My favorite TV show is The Fresh Prince of Bel Air. As a kid growing up, my parents used to show Fresh Prince of Bel Air to me. It's entertaining to me.

My favorite part about the holidays is being with my family traveling everywhere. We used to go to my dad's hometown in Bosnia and my mom's hometown in Croatia. We also went to Macedonia and Serbia, all areas of the former parts of Yugoslavia. We went to the beach as well. I like being able to spend time with them.

Nobody knows that I am a versatile player. Everyone knows me as a shooter, but now I'm driving the ball and I'm a defender, too. I compete to win. Some people underestimate me because of who I am or where I'm from.

Becoming a man is about having your own responsibilities, taking care of yourself and growing up. It's also about looking out for those around you and making sure you're a figure to them and someone they can look up to.

After college I want to play basketball professionally, but also see where my degree takes me. I'd like to do that too. Right now, I'm majoring in business management and a minor in economics. If I graduate early, I can do another major, like sports administration. I'm just trying to be versatile and see where it takes me. When basketball is over, I'd like to run my own basketball company or just a company in general.

Fast Breaks: Dewan Huell

Dewan Huell Miami, Florida

My hometown is Miami, Florida. I was born and raised here in the 305.

My family is Christina, my mother, and Dewell, my dad. I also consider my friends, my team and everybody my family.

I started playing basketball in the seventh grade.

My high school was Miami Norland Senior High School. I went there all four years.

When I was younger I wanted to be the president, an astronaut or a firefighter.

Playing basketball has given me the opportunity to change my whole life. Without basketball, I don't know what I'd be doing right now. Basketball changed my life.

When I played basketball growing up I pretended to be LeBron James. He's the greatest basketball player alive right now.

When I was introduced to Coach L I think it was at my high school in Norland in ninth grade. To be recruited, that was a great feeling. He's a great coach. He was recruiting me while Shane Larkin was on the team and that's when they really had a big run.

I'm a Hurricane because I'm a hometown kid. I want to be in my city. I think it is a great brand. Staying home and being a hometown Hurricane helps my brand. That's one of the reasons I came here, it's one of the reasons why I'm a Hurricane.

The U symbolizes greatness.

The city of Coral Gables is where I stay at right now. Real quiet, peaceful.

Playing for Coach L at Miami, I've learned how to slow down and let the game come to me. I now play to my strengths and avoid my weaknesses.

Once thing everyone should know about UM hoops is we will always put up a fight, no matter what.

I wear jersey No. 20 because I wore 20 in high school and decided to stick with it. But I've been thinking of changing it to No. 1 because that's the number I wanted going into high school.

My legacy is just getting started. I'm building my legacy right now and it will be great. Trust the process.

To be a Miami Hurricane means to work hard, to fight, never give up, to be a student-athlete, to be coachable. It means you're high class on and off the court.

My favorite thing about the U family is the bond and the relationship we have between everybody.

I'm closest on the team with the freshmen, particularly Bruce and Rodney.

Dunking feels great! It makes you feel like you just amazed the crowd. I like doing trick dunks on the open court.

If I wasn't playing basketball I would be probably playing football.

Some of my personal goals are to be able to play in the NBA and to make millions of dollars.

I never thought I'd be this good at basketball because I didn't grow up

watching basketball. I didn't see myself as a D-I athlete probably until high school.

I secretly wish that before I leave, I can make it to the Final Four.

I like to watch Netflix and chill.

My favorite holiday is Christmas. I love giving and getting presents.

Nobody knows that I can dance ... not! Let me stop lying. Nobody knows that I can dress nice.

Becoming a man has been a fun process. You learn from your mistakes that you've made as you are growing up.

After college I want to play professional basketball in the NBA.

Fast Breaks: Rodney Miller

Rodney Miller
Laurelton, N.Y.

My hometown is Queens, New York. Laurelton to be exact. I was born in Brooklyn and I'm just a kid from New York.

My family is my support, they hold me down. My mom and dad, we have a really tight circle and they're with me every step of the way. They really root for me, as well as my sister.

I started playing basketball around the age of 11 or 12. That's when I really started to play basketball at Riverside Church with the AAU program that I played with, and that's where my journey really started.

My high school was Oak Hill Academy. I was there for three years. It's a great school, a great program, and Coach Smith is one of the best high school coaches in the country, so it was an amazing experience and really set a winning mentality for me. There's nothing else like playing for Oak Hill.

When I was younger I wanted to be myself. I never looked to be someone else.

The hardest part of being away from home is missing my family. I went to boarding school for most of my academic career so I'm used to being away from home.

Playing basketball has given me so many opportunities in life and connections. I met so many amazing people through the sport of basketball, and I hope it just keeps opening up doors for me.

When I was introduced to Coach L it was a real genuine introduction. He seemed

like a straightforward guy. He's always kept it real with me. I speak highly of him. He's a great guy and a great coach.

I'm a Hurricane because I want to represent the city of Miami, as well as my family in New York. So that's why I'm a Hurricane.

The city of Coral Gables is a beautiful city. Nothing more to say, it's just very beautiful.

Playing for Coach L at Miami, I've learned patience, taking your time and really simplifying things. I try not to overthink, just play the game and have fun.

One thing everyone should know about UM hoops is it's a real organized program. We compete at the highest level and we hold ourselves to a real high standard.

To be a Miami Hurricane means being a leader, being accountable, responsible and holding yourself to a higher standard.

My favorite thing about the U family is the brotherhood. The relationships between the coaches and the players, that's really my favorite thing. I love that about Miami. It's a real tight knit group and I like it that way.

I'm closest on the team with no one in particular. We're all brothers. One day I might be at one teammate's apartment, the next I'll be at another teammate's place. I'm really cool with everyone on the team.

Dunking feels very exhilarating. It's even more exhilarating when you're in front of a crowd and you hear a whole bunch of people roar when you dunk. It's a crazy feeling.

I first dunked in a little league game when

I was 12. It just happened randomly. It was cool. I was 6'7 at 12 because I remember the Lil' Wayne song '6-Foot, 7-Foot' had just come out.

If I wasn't playing basketball I would be an entrepreneur or a business man.

Some of my personal goals are to make it to the NBA, win an NCAA Championship and just make my family proud.

I secretly wish to be the best, the best big man ever. It's actually not really a secret.

My favorite holiday is Christmas, because it's around my birthday.

Nobody knows that I'm double-jointed.

Becoming a man means to take care of your responsibilities and do what you have to do to succeed.

After college I want to hopefully be in the NBA, be able to support my family and do what I have to do to make them proud.

Fast Breaks: Chris Stowell

Chris Stowell Stratton, N.H.

My hometown is Stratton, New Hampshire. Stratton is a very small town with not much to do. It is very different from Miami.

My family is funny. Both my mom and dad are really funny and so is my older brother. It's always great to see them because it always involves a lot of laughter.

I started playing basketball in kindergarten, I believe. That is the first time I can remember playing organized basketball.

My high school I would say was a lot of fun. I went to two different high schools, but Exeter was the one I spent the most time at. It was a smaller school and my classmates and I just had a lot of fun.

When I was younger I wanted to be a professional golfer. We had a "What you want to be day" at school and I remember coming in with a visor and a golf club. I don't know why I wanted to do that, but it was the dream.

The hardest thing about being away from home is not being able to see my family. I love being around my family, they have taken good care of me. Spending time with them is so much fun, and it's hard not being able to see them.

When I played basketball growing up I pretended to be a lot of different players. But the main one would probably be LeBron James. I remember playing pickup in my driveway and LeBron being the one I would always try to impersonate.

Playing basketball has given me a lot of good memories, especially being here at the tournament this season as well as last year. It is so much fun being here with the guys and creating lifelong memories.

I was first introduced to Coach L over the phone. I was nervous, because I had never spoken to him before. I knew he was this big star, here at The U. The first time I met him was actually during my first trip to campus, when I was with my parents.

I am a Miami Hurricane because the University of Miami is a great place to be. It's a great school and we have a great basketball team. I am in the business school, which is awesome, and a lot of great people convinced me to go here.

The U is becoming a great basketball affiliation. It used to always be about football at the U, but we are starting to make it about basketball at the U.

The city of Coral Gables is historical. My girlfriend

is really into the history, so she has taken me to a lot of the historical places in Coral Gables. There is so much history here, which is really cool to see. One thing that we did, involved walking through the different villages in Coral Gables. There is a Chinese village, as well as these Old Dutch villages where they have houses that represent different parts of the world.

Playing for Coach L at Miami, I've learned a lot. He is just a wealth of basketball knowledge. All of the experiences he's had, that he has been sharing with us. I can't pick one thing in particular, because there are so many things he's taught us and not just about basketball, but about life as well.

I hope my legacy involves being a good person, a hard-worker and just doing what I am supposed to do.

To be a Miami Hurricane means a lot. We carry a big reputation here, especially with the success of the program over the past few years. It really means a lot to me to represent this program and Coach L. It is a team that is going to continue to get better and hopefully become one of the biggest programs in the country.

Coach L is fun. I definitely think he has a lot of fun. I remember looking at all of the memes and gifs that have been created regarding his locker room dances. He definitely makes playing basketball here about having fun.

My favorite thing about the U family is about how big it is. When we were at the NIT a couple years ago, Michael Irvin came and talked to us before the game. He talked about how the U family is worldwide, and he wouldn't just be at the game, but people all around the world recognize the U, understand what it stands for and what it means to be a part of it.

I am closest on the team with Mike Robinson. He is my roommate during road trips and we live together during the summer. I spend a lot of time with him. We have a lot of similar interests, including the fact that we are both in the business school and we do a lot of studying together.

I wear the jersey number 35 because of Kevin Durant. When I was younger, I used to think my game was like KDs, so that is why I took his number. Which I didn't even think about before, but I was really skinny and long when I was in middle school and high school and always tried to play like Durant.

Dunking feels great. Although, I do it more sparingly now that my body is getting older, unfortunately. So I only do it sometimes. But it feels great when you get a good jump and flush it through the net. It feels awesome.

If I wasn't playing basketball I would probably be working. I would have a job somewhere, most likely, to help get myself through college. I would still be studying, but I would definitely have a job.

Some of my personal goals include starting up my own business. I am studying entrepreneurship so I am hoping to own my very own business or several different businesses someday. Another goal is to get married and eventually raise a family of my own.

I never thought I would be a part of basketball program like this. When I was in high school I was getting recruited by a lot of DIII schools that were local to my area. So I never pictured being a part of a nationally recognized program, going to the NCAA Tournament or the Sweet 16.

I was secretly wishing that we were going to be playing in Buffalo, N.Y., during the first two rounds of this seasons NCAA tournament. That is because my family could come to the games that way. All of the other locations were too far away, which means they are not able to come, which really stinks. I would have loved for them to come.

I like to watch a lot of different sports on television as well as go to sporting events. I am big baseball fan, so I go to the Hurricanes baseball games as well as Marlins games, in Miami. I also love to watch football and play golf with my friends back home. My favorite baseball team is the Yankees. I am a huge Yankees fan thanks to my mom. My dad grew up in New Hampshire and was a Red Sox fan, but my mom grew up in Pennsylvania, so she was a Yankees fan. My house was slightly divided because of that, but somehow she got both my brother and I to become Yankees fans.

My favorite holiday is Christmas, because I always get to go home and see my family at Christmas. Especially now since I don't get to make it back as often, so it is really a special time.

Nobody knows that I can write computer code. I took a computer class last semester so it is kind of an interesting thing I know how to do. I can't do it that well, but I at least know the basics.

I pictured becoming a man as getting a job, starting a family and being able to support them, and still do.

After college, my goal is to become a Rhodes Scholar. I have been nominated for it, so I am hoping to earn that in order to travel to England and study.

Fast Breaks: Mike Robinson

Mike Robinson New Britain, Connecticut

My hometown is New Britain, Connecticut. It is literally the center of Connecticut. There are not too many opportunities in New Britain, so I wanted to get away. I noticed I liked the heat, so Florida was my option and Miami was just – Miami. Self explanatory.

My family is fun. I love my family. There are a whole lot of comedians in my family, and everyone in my family is an athlete. My parents were athletes. Everyone played football. I had two uncles who played basketball and then football in college so they backed me up seeing that this is a football family. I love my family. They visit before the school year starts, every August.

I started playing basketball when I was five. My brother actually put the basketball in my hands. We had a little Fisher Price hoop in my house and my brother would keep telling me to try to make it. And then it soon got to the point where he said just keep trying to dunk the ball. That's basically where I got my jumping ability from. My brother started it all. As far as watching basketball, my favorite team is the Lakers because when I was five it was the Shaq and Kobe era.

My high school is very diverse. It's extremely big and I think it's the biggest public high school in Connecticut. I don't have a favorite subject, but I would probably say math since I'm good at it, so any type of math subjects, calculus, math, whatever type of math it was. The French teacher was probably my favorite teacher because she was always fun filled. She made learning fun. She loved basketball, so she would talk in French about basketball and it made us understand it a little bit better.

When I was younger I wanted to be an NBA player, of course. I just wanted to be famous. But then as I got older I started noticing that fame comes with a lot of extra tension. NBA dreams are still around, but I'm not just going to settle on it I have learned to focus on school first. I learned that in eighth grade, to focus on school first because you can get anywhere with it. It's dependable.

The hardest part of being away from home is missing my Mom's cooking.

Playing basketball has given me opportunities because basketball is basically a life lesson. Things you do on the court you can do in life. Say for instance you're playing offense in basketball, you have to adjust to whatever the defense gives you in order to try and score the ball. Whereas in life, you have to adjust to what life gives you in order to be successful. It's basically a life lesson type thing.

The University of Miami was my dream school and basketball did bring me here because of Coach L. He was the coach at George Mason, and he led them to the Final Four. I knew he had to be a great coach because no one had ever heard of that program until he came through. So when he came to Miami, I started watching

Miami basketball. It was just a dream school of mine, then when I visited the campus it was a done deal. I had to come here.

When I played basketball growing up I pretended to be Kobe. He's my favorite player, nothing else to say.

When I was introduced to Coach L it was different. It was instantly a comfortable meeting, but very professional. With Coach L it felt like business. We talked about basketball, then talked about life, and that was it. It was a different experience but I loved it.

I'm a Hurricane because I've always been a Hurricane. My high school is the Golden Hurricanes so I'm not going to be anything else besides a Hurricane.

The U is small but iconic and unforgettable. Ever since I've come here I've met a lot of people who are doing things with their life now. Basically if you go to The U you are getting out successful. I don't have words for representing the U. It's prideful to wear something that people recognize automatically, without any letters or definition for it, just the U symbol. People will know what it is. That's the University of Miami. So this is something I take pride in and I'll never turn that pride down.

The city of Coral Gables is extremely different than New Britain. It's small and safe, quiet and a nice scene.

Playing for Coach L at Miami I've learned life lessons. He teaches life lessons every single day. We always start our meetings with life lessons. Whatever the game plan is that day he will do a life lesson on that game plan. Every meeting he talks about the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. He talks to us about it every single day and we have 10 commitments that he posts every day during practice. It's the same 10 every day, and the same seven habits. My favorite one is "prioritize your priorities." So you have to put the first thing first, because if you try and start with the end, you're going to knock yourself off track. You're not going to be on pace for your ending result. Prioritize your priorities is always something that just stuck in my head with Coach L. He's a teacher both on and off the court and I love that about him.

One thing everyone should know about UM hoops is that we always have fun. We're brothers. We all know each other to a point where it's all fun and games. It's like we're kids; Kids waking up on Christmas morning and come into the locker room. That's basically how it feels.

My legacy... I hope people say that I will never stop working. I try not to think of anything as too hard. If I fail I'm going to keep going, try to succeed.

To be a Miami Hurricane means you get to represent something that not everybody can do. To be a Miami Hurricane means you had the ability to do something great.

Coach L is amazing. He's a life teacher. He's a professor on and off the court. He's also fun in locker rooms.

Those videos that you see, he does it all the time. Of course there's serious moments because you always have to get serious with basketball, but all in all, he is very fun.

My favorite thing about the U family is that it will always be a family. If you went to the U in 1945 you're still a part of the U family now, and we'll keep welcoming members of the U family.

I'm closest on the team with Buka and DJ. We do everything together. We're basically the closest one on the team.

Dunking feels amazing because first of all I'm 5'10" so it's a longer journey for me up to that hoop. It's like a shock factor. It feels like I'm flying through the air because sometimes I realize I actually got up there.

Making three pointers feels amazing and natural to me really. It's what I like to do. I don't really like to penetrate and go to the hole because then I have to adjust my shot in different forms because I have these 7-foot centers trying to block my shots.

If I wasn't playing basketball I'd be a football player because I was corner and receiver in high school. As far as life, if I wasn't playing basketball, I would just be a student getting straight A's and trying to make the best opportunities for myself.

My first personal goal is to graduate with a cumulative 3.5 GPA. Then my goal is to land a job at a Fortune 500. That's my end result goal, to land a Fortune 500 job in five years and then hopefully CFO. But that's far from now and I have many steps to take – I have learned that from Coach L.

I never thought I would be a Miami Hurricane because it's a hard thing to do. It's a hard thing to get in here, it's a hard thing to be affiliated with sports in here. I never thought I'd be able to continue the Hurricane legacy. But somehow I did it.

I secretly wish I could fly because there's no traffic in the air and I could get places fast.

I like to draw. I'm mainly good at drawing the Nickelodeon characters.

My favorite holiday is Christmas. I don't know who doesn't love Christmas but I love it. I just love the tradition and of course the food and everything.

Becoming a man is a hard transition because you still want to think you're young and free to do whatever but there's a part of maturity to being a man.

After college I want to be living the American dream, to have a wife and kids. I love to travel so I'd like to go to Dubai.

Mic drop

Projecting the potential 2017-18 Miami Hurricanes lineup

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 20, 2017

The Hurricanes were disappointed to lose the way they did, but they believe that getting to the NCAA Tournament in the first place was an achievement for a young team.

Since everyone not named Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy is expected to return, Miami will have higher expectations entering next year. Last weekend in Tulsa, there was loose talk on press row about the Canes being a top-15 team to start next season.

We'll see.

Jim Larrañaga hopes he sees a lot of player development this offseason, especially from a strength and conditioning perspective. Young talents like Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell must become forces with which to be reckoned. They, along with veterans Ja'Quan Newton, Anthony Lawrence and Ebuka Izundu, must learn how to lead. A ballyhooed freshman class led by All-American Lonnie Walker must acclimate quickly, because UM isn't deep enough to keep minutes away from anyone with talent.

In looking at who's coming back and what roles they could fill, it's important to note the Hurricanes have two open scholarships (after dismissing guard Rashad Muhammad and forward Michael Gilmore for program rules violations during the season). It will be interesting to see how they use them; hundreds of players each year transfer, and seven of ESPN's top 20 high school players for 2017 have yet to sign. It's unclear if any of them are involved with Miami.

Thoughts on each position entering the offseason:

Point guard: Larrañaga will lose a lot less sleep if Newton improves his ball distribution, cuts down on turnovers and grows into a prominent leadership role. The only senior on the roster, Newton (6-2, 195) will have a full year as full-time point to review his weaknesses and attack his offseason development. UM would love if he became an equal threat as a passer as a scorer. Freshman Chris Lykes (5-7, 160) will be limited defensively at his size, but is an excellent passer, has no fear of contact and should be an electric weapon off the bench. The thought of him running in transition with high-caliber athletes Brown and Walker is enticing.

Shooting guard: As a sophomore, Brown (6-5, 200) takes over as UM's top offensive weapon and do-it-all guard. He can handle the ball, score from the outside and produce acrobatic finishes inside, and defensively, will see a lot of the opponent's top scorer. This is his takeover season. The continued progress of D.J. Vasiljevic (6-2, 195) will be interesting; he proved to be an outstanding shooter, and added strength will make him more of a threat when he puts the ball on the floor (and on defense).

Small forward: Larrañaga is likely to start junior Lawrence, but freshman Walker (6-4, 200) is too good to keep on the bench. Lawrence (6-7, 210) played more power forward than ever this year and admitted he struggled to score against those opponents. He's more of a wing than a post, and looks more comfortable guarding the perimeter. Walker is a Brown-caliber athlete — which is to say, outstanding — and in tandem, those two could give opponent fits. Walker can shoot and make plays but excels in

slashing and finishing high above the rim, and his long wingspan could make him a strong perimeter defender.

Power forward: Huell showed flashes of what's to come, and must take the next step. He has an NBA frame (6-11, 220) but his moves in the post and defense are works in progress. He was often in foul trouble, as was center Izundu. If he can become a force in the paint, UM should be one of the top teams in the ACC. Brown-Walker-Huell is as athletic a trio as UM has ever had. Sam Waardenburg (6-9, 200) enrolled midyear and redshirted, which will help the skilled stretch 4 from New Zealand adjust to the ACC. Freshman Deng Gak (6-10, 200) is also skilled but skinny; like Izundu last year, he needs to add weight and strength in order to contribute meaningful minutes. He has potential at the 4 and 5 spots.

Center: Izundu (6-10, 230) needs to keep growing and learning how to play defense without fouling. He has a few crafty moves and can score in the paint, though he won't be the focal point of the offense. The junior will be a key rebound-grabber with Murphy graduating, and along with Newton and Lawrence, is one of three returning upperclassmen. Huell will see action here, too, and could start. Sophomore Rodney Miller (7-0, 258) is an interesting project; he is UM's most skilled big man, but needs to reshape his body. How quickly he can do that? Speculating: If it takes him another year, and Miami finds a big man who wants to grad-transfer to play with a potentially very good team, would Miller take a redshirt? That way, he would be a redshirt sophomore in 2018-19, potentially backing up a senior in Izundu.

UM's future looks bright with top recruiting class in school history

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
March 18, 2017

His University of Miami basketball team had just been bounced from the NCAA Tournament late Friday night after a 78-58 loss to Michigan State, one of its worst defensive UM efforts of the season, and Coach Jim Larrañaga chose to give his players a dose of perspective — something he has lots of after 33 years of coaching.

“I told the team I was really proud of them,” he said. “Back in September, October to think we’d make the NCAA Tournament with basically nine scholarship players would have been a tremendous accomplishment, and it was.

“I also told them we’re going to really miss Davon [Reed] and [Kamari Murphy] and the great leadership they provided and that the young guys have a lot of work ahead of them if they want to get us back in the Big Dance next year.”

Reed and Murphy are the only two seniors on the Hurricanes roster. Everyone else returns, and the team will be joined by what is being considered the best recruiting class in Larrañaga’s career. Lonnie Walker, a 6-5 shooting guard from Reading, Pennsylvania, is a McDonald’s All-American — the fifth in UM history — and ranked No. 19 in the ESPN Top 100, Miami’s highest-ranked recruit in 15 years.

Also in the class is Washington, D.C., point guard Chris Lykes, a 5-6 lightning-quick playmaker rated the 11th best point guard prospect by ESPN, and Australian power forward Deng Gak, ranked 93. Sam Waardenburg, a 6-9 forward from New Zealand, joined the team in January and will be eligible next fall.

The addition of Lykes should have an immediate impact, as the Canes this season lacked a true point guard after the graduation of Angel Rodriguez and transfer of Manu Lecomte, now with Baylor, a No. 3 seed in the NCAA Tournament. If Lykes can step into the starting lineup and distribute the ball, it will allow Ja’Quan Newton and Bruce Brown to do what they do best — drive and score.

“We’ve got a big recruiting class coming in, and we’re going to be really good next year, so I’m excited for that,” sophomore Anthony Lawrence said. “We’ve got a lot of experience with the guys coming back, so I think we can do better next year. I’m sad with how we lost [to Michigan State], but I think we did more than people expected.”

UM, which ended the season 21-12, was a No. 8 seed in the NCAA Tournament and played a spectacular first eight minutes against the Spartans on Friday night at the BOK Center. The Canes, capitalizing on Spartan turnovers, scored the first 10 points, went up 17-5 and Brown’s one-handed slam off a steal was season-highlight material.

But then Larrañaga, detecting that the Spartans were attacking the zone better, switched to man-to-man defense, a decision he later said was a mistake. Michigan State’s star freshmen Miles Bridges and Nick Ward got to the basket, “and carved us up,” in Larrañaga’s words. MSU ended the first half on a 30-8 run and never looked back.

Miami was held to a season-low 23 rebounds and one block, and was outscored 40-28 in the paint.

“I hate for us to go out this way, but my goal was to get back to the NCAA

Tournament and then see where we can do once we got here; so, the fact we got here, I’m extremely proud of these young guys,” Reed said. “I’m very, very happy to be part of this program. Sad to be moving on, but there’s nothing but success to come for this program. Coach L is the greatest coach I’ve ever had, his wealth of knowledge of the game. And I’m more than certain that he’ll take this program to even bigger heights, which he’s been doing since he got here.”

Expect Hurricanes to bounce back quickly after disappointing NCAA loss

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
March 18, 2017

The air was delicate, like a hospital waiting room. Those who spoke, did so in hushed tones. Any loss hurts, one that ends a season much more so, but for it all to happen that way made stares long and eyelids hang heavy.

As bad as Friday's 78-58 loss to Michigan State was, it wasn't hard to find hope in the Hurricanes' locker room. For them, there was little reason to leave the BOK Center in Tulsa and sulk for long.

"I'm real disappointed in this loss, but overall, we did way better than anybody expected us to," senior forward Kamari Murphy said. "That wasn't the goal, to make the tournament and lose like this. But I'm happy about these guys. I'm going to watch next year. They'll be even better."

That last thought is the key to understanding why UM won't be down for long.

Murphy and guard Davon Reed are the only departing players from Jim Larrañaga's team, which went 21-12 and won 10 of 18 ACC games, beat two top-10 opponents (North Carolina, Duke) and 18th-ranked Virginia on the road. They did so without a full roster; having lost several players to transfers and dismissals, UM started the year with nine players on scholarship. Six of them were freshmen or sophomores. Murphy, Reed and junior guard Ja'Quan Newton were the only ones who had played significant roles, and each was asked to perform new duties this year.

In a conference considered the strongest in the nation, Miami held its own. Nearly all of that group returns, and one of the league's best recruiting classes is on the way. Guard Lonnie Walker is the third All-American player UM has recruited in the past two cycles (guard Bruce Brown and forward Dewan Huell are the others). With the

continued development of big men Huell, Ebuka Izundu and Rodney Miller, point guard Newton (the lone senior on next year's team) and role players like swingman Anthony Lawrence and sharpshooter D.J. Vasiljevic, the Hurricanes have the potential to go much further than the first round in 2017-18.

That will depend on Newton becoming more comfortable at the point. He'll have waterbug freshman Chris Lykes, who goes about 5-foot-7, backing him up. Lykes should excite, but may not be able to play major minutes immediately. Newton, a scorer, must become equally good as a distributor.

It will depend on Brown climbing closer to his ceiling. The 6-foot-5, 200-pound combo guard showed what he can do against high-level opponents, like Duke and North Carolina. UM wants consistent excellence from him. Vasiljevic carved out a role as a shooter, with the ability to put the ball on the floor.

Walker, a high-flyer, and Lawrence will vie for time at the 3. Huell, an NBA-caliber athlete who is still developing his game, is likely to start at the 4. Sam Waardenburg, a 6-9 New Zealander who arrived midseason and redshirted, is likely to back him up. Izundu (6-10, 230) will be much tougher to defend as he gets stronger, since he has some crafty moves down low. An inexperienced player, he must learn how to defend without fouling. Incoming freshman Deng Gak (6-10, 200) and Miller (7-0, 258) give Miami options off the bench, but both are early in their development.

As with any college team, they must all grow, physically and skill-wise, in the offseason if they want to reach the tournament next year. This year's group did that, which is why few in that locker room hung their heads after the pounding they took Friday.

"Extremely proud of these guys," Reed said. "We never let that be a handicap for us, being a young team that was quote-unquote rebuilding. We just stayed resilient all year. We embraced that underdog role and kept

fighting every game. We had some huge wins this year. I know Coach L is going to do some great things with this program in years to come."

Reed, from Ewing, N.J., was a point guard as a freshman, a complimentary player as a sophomore and junior and became a larger part of the offense as a senior. Always a reliable defender, he finished 16th on UM's career scoring list (1,343 points).

"I'm grateful to be a part of this program," said Reed, who reached the NIT Final as a sophomore, the Sweet 16 as a junior and the first round as a senior. "It's sad to end it like this, but I got a chance to do a lot of things a lot of college basketball players can't say they've done."

He believes anything is possible under Larrañaga, who went to two Sweet 16s in four previous seasons but did perhaps his best job at UM this year. Every player on the roster improved, most significantly so Brown, who showed flashes of his potential as a high-level scorer, and Murphy, who added some shotmaking to his defense-and-dunks game. The Brooklyn, N.Y., native was UM's leading rebounder (7.3 per game) and had a late-season stretch where he scored in double figures six times in nine games.

RELATED

Photos: Game-by-game look at the 2017 NCAA Tournament

"He was playing as good as he can play, within himself," associate head coach Chris Caputo said.

Caputo, who followed Larrañaga from George Mason in 2011, said this season will be special regardless of the ending.

"There weren't many days where it wasn't fun," he said. "They cared. They developed. Whatever valley we got into, everyone was working on getting back up the mountain. That part's fun for everybody."

Larrañaga proud of young team for making NCAAs, disappointed in inability to play better defense

Sun Sentinel
Kelly Hines
March 18, 2017

After exceeding expectations throughout the year, the Miami Hurricanes got away from what propelled them to the NCAA Tournament, leading to their first-round exit Friday night.

“It’s disappointing to lose, certainly, but it’s more disappointing that we didn’t play the kind of defense that we’d been playing for most of the season,” coach Jim Larrañaga said.

While stumbling 78-58 to No. 9 seed Michigan State at the BOK Center, the eighth-seeded Hurricanes struggled defensively, allowing the Spartans to take control particularly during a second half in when they shot 64 percent from the field.

Miami (21-12) jumped out to a 12-point advantage in the opening minutes, cashing in on forced turnovers with 10 points. Everything changed when Larrañaga decided to switch to man-to-man defense despite finding success with his zone in the early going.

“We went from the zone to man-to-man, feeling like at some point we’re going to have to play it man-to-man, and I wanted to see how we would do,” Larrañaga said. “And once we did, Nick Ward came back into the game and really got it going.”

Ward, who picked up a foul two seconds into the contest and found himself on the bench, almost immediately took advantage of the switch. While pacing Michigan State with 19 points on 8-of-9 shooting, he helped to fuel a 30-8 run that changed the complexion of the game.

“Once the momentum shifted from our side – I thought we played very well the first 10 minutes – to their side, they basically totally controlled the last 10 minutes of the half and then were able to keep that control throughout the second half,” Larrañaga said.

Michigan State (20-14) came on strong on both ends, clogging the lane with its big bodies and shutting down the Hurricanes’ scoring options.

Photos: UM vs. Michigan State

“They did a really good job of packing the paint, making it hard for me to try to get into the lane,” Davon Reed said. “And they did a good job closing out on the 3-point look for me, so I just tried to adjust at halftime and tried to remain aggressive, but they played really good defense tonight.”

Reed concluded his college career with a 12-point outing that included nine points in the second half. Fellow senior Kamari Murphy couldn’t get going in his fourth NCAA Tournament appearance, finishing with one point from the free-throw line and going 0-for-6 from the field.

Although junior Ja’Quan Newton led Miami with 16 points, youth reared its head at a less-than-ideal time as the Hurricanes appeared to let up amid their double-digit cushion.

“Give Miami credit; they took it to us,” Michigan State coach Tom Izzo said. “And after that first seven or eight minutes, I thought we played some of the best basketball we’ve played not only this year but in a couple of years.”

With Friday’s outcome and a lopsided loss to North Carolina in the ACC Tournament quarterfinals, the Hurricanes dropped their final two games by 20 points or

more, a disappointing conclusion to an impressive season in which they defeated a trio of ranked teams while relying on only nine scholarship players who included four freshmen.

“I’m very, very proud of my guys,” Larrañaga said. “It’s a very young team that made it to the Big Dance.”

Miami's present, future bright under Jim Larrañaga

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 17, 2017

Together, the first weekend of March Madness and the celebration of St. Patrick's Day create one delicious cocktail.

So let us raise a toast: Miami keeps coming back to this party, and no one is surprised anymore.

Jim Larrañaga has made the Hurricanes relevant, regardless of a win or loss in Friday's late-night date with Michigan State. They are here, and it can be the expectation annually.

"What I really enjoyed," Larrañaga said Thursday, "was walking out on the (practice) court with our University of Miami band playing a Gloria Estefan song, 'Rhythm is Gonna Get You,' because as soon as I heard that ... knowing our team is representing our university and city, and competing against Tom Izzo and the great tradition he's built at Michigan State, it's very exciting."

It's a fun bandwagon to climb aboard, and Larrañaga's glad to have you.

But to truly appreciate his era of Canes basketball is to know the history, to understand why Miami's so lucky to have him.

He weathered off-the-court issues not of his doing, built a program off transfers and intelligent recruiting, and has taken Miami to places it has never been. That's the short version of a remarkable job. In his first season, 2011-12, players were missing games because of NCAA trouble. The next year, he won the program's first ACC title and made the Sweet 16. Then it lost three scholarships because of the Nevin Shapiro scandal, which hung over the UM athletic department for five years. Larrañaga and his staff — organized, structured and disciplined — created another Sweet 16 squad last March.

Now, supposedly rebuilding, the Hurricanes earned a No. 8 NCAA seed after winning 10 games in the brutal ACC and going 21-11 overall. Most of this group, bolstered by the most heralded recruiting class in program history, will be back next year.

He hopes that will help him in his quest to consistently fill the 7,972-seat Watsco Center. That is one of his major remaining challenges. UM lags behind other ACC schools in atmosphere, but it has been packed several nights this season. This is a team that played in high school gyms in the 1940s, an airplane hangar in the 1960s and went dark for 14 years. What would the late Bill Foster say about the delirious crowds that saw Miami beat Duke and North Carolina this year?

By the time of the Hurricanes' 1985 revival from that dormant period, college basketball had hit the big time. Foster coached while working out of a converted storage closet in UM's sports information department. His team practiced on an outdoor patio. He got a practice facility, but UM played its games at the James L. Knight Center, a converted auditorium in a downtown Hyatt hotel. It had velvet-covered seats and looked like a theater, not a basketball gym.

By 1990, they were playing in the 17,000-seat Miami Arena, and Foster left for Virginia Tech. UM hired 41-year-old Leonard Hamilton, who oversaw the move to the Big East. In 1999-2000, he brought UM to the Sweet 16 for the first time, and the NBA came calling. He left for the Washington Wizards, creating one of the juiciest what-if scenarios in program history.

In June 2000, according to multiple sources with direct knowledge, UM had a handshake deal with Rick Pitino, then coach of the Boston Celtics and part-time Miami resident. It was to stay hush-hush until Pitino could negotiate out of his deal, which had some \$15 million

remaining. The news leaked a day later. Pitino publicly confirmed his meeting with UM, but said he was merely advising friends.

After striking out on Pitino, a two-time national champion who has been at Louisville since 2001, Miami hired Perry Clark. Hamilton left behind future NBA players John Salmons and James Jones and recruits like McDonald's All-American Darius Rice. In four years, Clark managed a first-round exit as a 5-seed in his only tournament appearance, disappointing scarce crowds at UM's new on-campus arena.

The frustration mounted under Frank Haith, who went 43-69 in ACC play and bolted for Missouri amid heat from the NCAA.

UM then found an energetic 61-year-old with a booming voice known for taking little George Mason, which had never won an NCAA Tournament game before his arrival, to the Final Four.

Now his Canes are in Tulsa, 5 miles east of the university where Haith now toils after his rocky stint at Mizzou. This week, Haith's program (15-17 this season) isn't much of a presence downtown, where the BOK Center sits, splashed with March Madness branding for these first- and second-round games. Friends from South Florida who checked in with Haith this week say he's doing well.

Not as well as Larrañaga, 67 and still going strong. Whenever this is over, he will be remembered with Ron Fraser, Howard Schnellenberger, Sam Jankovich and Foster among the key figures in advancing UM athletics.

Cheers to that.

Walker stayed in troubled Reading to ‘inspire the youth’ -- and it’s working

Penn Live

Aaron Kasinitz

March 24, 2017

Lonnie Walker understands the scarred perception and daunting reality of his hometown.

That’s why the 6-foot-4 all-American said he spurned countless offers to leave Reading for a private school with a more prestigious basketball program.

Reading’s rate of violent crime is more than double the national average and dwarfs Pennsylvania’s, according to NeighborhoodScout.com. Meanwhile, 40 percent of the city lives in poverty, the Atlantic reported last fall.

But over the past two years, locals say, the 18-year-old Walker has emerged as a transcendent force in a city that needs one.

The smooth wing player with a high-top fade said teachers thank him for providing a sense of motivation to students, who often have their educational drive sapped by the tantalizing pull of misbehavior.

Fans say it’s difficult to find a blacktop in the city where kids aren’t envisioning themselves wearing Walker’s No. 4 jersey and hoisting the same shots the Red Knights’ all-time leading scorer does.

So after Walker poured in 35 points Tuesday to lift Reading to a 57-51 victory over Archbishop Ryan in the PIAA semifinals, the Miami signee discussed the joy he felt in lifting the Red Knights to their first state title game in 44 years.

He reiterated that he never considered leaving Reading. And he imagined what it would mean to the city if he could deliver the first state championship in school history Saturday night.

“Reading High is specifically known for not having a great background within our community,” Walker said. “But having me stay home, I wanted to see if I could bring motivation, inspire the youth and bring back our community.

“I am beyond proud of myself for how kids see me. It’s like, ‘Yo, we can do anything from Reading.’”

Sporting a Reading T-shirt, Mara Scull sat next to her dad, Steve, at Philadelphia’s Liacouras Center, waiting for the Red Knights to square off against Archbishop Ryan. That’s when she faced a question that made her tilt her head and scrunch her face, the way 8-year-olds do when they want to say “no duh” without verbalizing it.

“Lonnie Walker is my favorite,” she said.

That’s a common sentiment among Reading fans, especially the younger ones (as Mara said, “He can really dunk”). Mara’s father said he graduated from Reading in 1987 and holds season tickets. He and his daughter have been to nearly all of the team’s games this season and roared throughout Tuesday’s victory.

Steve said that under coach Rick Perez and behind Walker’s lead, the Red Knights have reshaped the role of a high school sports team in their community. Walker and his teammates often read to kids at the local elementary school or coach basketball camps.

“Lonnie always goes out of his way to see kids and take pictures with them,” said Scull, who’s been attending Reading games since the 1970s. “This whole team, if there was a snowstorm, they’d be out shoveling.”

That reputation, coupled with Walker’s on-court prowess and Reading’s rich basketball history, has led to a rarity in the sports world: Walker, fans say, is the biggest athletic star in town. His celebrity exceeds that of pro athletes in nearby Philly.

Even family members have morphed into local stars. Walker’s grandma, Eleanor Carter, sat on the concourse of Temple’s basketball arena about an hour before Tuesday’s game, when a young girl sprinted toward the 63-year-old and launched into her arms for a hug.

Several seconds later, a preteen boy strolled by and waved. Then, another smiled and giggled at Carter.

That’s what happens when you’re in Walker’s orbit.

“When they see me, like that little girl that was just here, it’s always like, ‘That’s Lonnie’s grandma! That’s Lonnie’s grandma!’” Carter said. “The kids are like, ‘I’d love to play ball with him or read with him.’”

After his 35-point performance Tuesday, Walker greeted a group of kids and tossed his headband to one of the shouting youngsters.

Walker’s future coach, Miami’s Jim Larrañaga, witnessed several similar scenes on a recent recruiting trip.

In 46 years, Larrañaga said he’s never recruited a player that means so much to his hometown — and he helped lure Ralph Sampson to Virginia.

“When we were in Reading, the number of young kids and adults that came up to him wanting to do selfies, wanting his autograph, and he was so polite, so mature, so mannerly,” Larrañaga said. “He always took time.”

Even Walker’s Twitter account hints at how he affects Reading-area kids in a manner that’s different than so many other sports stars in their hometowns.

His profile picture is a drawing that an elementary school student sent him. The scribbled illustration shows Walker — his hightop fade and all — dunking a basketball.

Underneath is a message written in crayon: “I love the Red Knights, because I want to be a basketball player like Lonnie.”

And his background picture shows a note from another Reading fan.

“I’m going to miss Lonnie Walker a lot,” it reads. “You make a lot of dusks. I will miss you in Flaradia.”

“Never had no problems”

Herbert Carter, Lonnie’s grandfather, said it was clear about a decade ago that Walker was destined for stardom.

When he was 8 or 9, Carter said, Walker had a natural feel for the game and head-turning athleticism that seemed well beyond his years. It helped that he had older brothers to compete against on blacktops and good genes, Carter said.

But what sticks with Walker’s grandparents is that his personality started to round out near the same time his athletic future began to crystalize.

Walker’s infectious smile, his conversation skills and maturity showed up before he got to middle school.

It never seemed like he was drawn toward the misbehavior that characterizes many of Reading’s kids, Carter said.

“He just don’t get in trouble,” Carter continued. “And he don’t hang out in the streets. Never did. Never had no problems. At all.”

Larrañaga credits Walker’s people skills to his supportive family. Walker grew up with parents, grandparents, siblings and dozens of aunts, uncles and cousins, who provided a base for the young star to lean on as he ascended to star status.

Plus, Walker’s dad, Lonnie Walker III, was an accomplished Division III player at Alvernia, and grew determined to nurture his son’s talents.

The younger Walker said that as he grew older, his basketball teammates morphed into another sturdy support system. When Walker chose to stay in his hometown instead of bolting for a hoops powerhouse like Oak Hill Academy, he chose to continue competing with the same kids he’s known since elementary school, he said.

In fact, Eleanor Carter said that nearly every member of the Red Knights calls her “Nannie.”

Once, she even had the entire team over for a feast that included pot roast, fried chicken, macaroni and cheese and cabbage.

“Lonnie and those boys in there,” Carter said, “every last one of them, they’re my babies.”

Carter said days like that illustrate how Walker has sidestepped the risky temptations that permeate Reading. With a willing support system and an obsession like basketball serving as an outlet, Walker never needed to stray from the straight-line path he’s marched down.

“Honestly,” Herbert Carter said, “it’s a blessing.”

“They’re going to remember the smile”

Tim Profit, a 1999 Reading grad, was amazed at Tuesday’s pregame scene in a parking garage near Temple. He kept running into people he knew. He saw friends from school or the community or clients at his car dealership.

Reading basketball has always drawn a crowd, Profit said, but the support in Philly still surprised him. With Walker emerging as a bona fide star and the team on the doorstep of its first title, enthusiasm has skyrocketed.

“Reading has an amazing heritage of basketball, and heritage of sports,” Profit said. “I don’t live in the city anymore, but I still go to a lot of the games. I have season tickets. It’s neat to watch these kids this year carry this on.”

The fan support, Profit said, has plenty to do with the Red Knights’ on-court success, but he suggested that the personality of the players also makes it easy for the town to rally around the team.

A city like Reading needs that, Profit said. It can benefit from athletes who are involved in other school events and gracious toward those around them.

“Reading gets a bad rap because we do have some crime in our area, and the school in itself gets a bad rap,” Profit said, “but these kids are showing the positive light.”

On Tuesday, deafening screams accompanied Reading’s brightest moments on the hardwood.

As the Red Knights stormed ahead of Archbishop Ryan behind Walker’s 15 second-quarter points, the crowd was buzzing. Walker capped the impressive period with a steal and slam that led to a thunderous eruption.

Though Archbishop Ryan’s campus sits about 14 miles from Temple, while Reading’s is 63 miles away, it was, as Larrañaga put it, “a home game” for the Red Knights.

“Wherever we go, Reading fans are going to be everywhere,” Walker said.

After the final buzzer blared and Reading’s trip to the state finals was cemented, fans began hurling Hershey’s Kisses onto the court. The Red Knights are headed to Hershey, where they’ll play Pine-Richland at the Giant Center at 8 p.m. Saturday in the PIAA Class 6A championship.

The public-address announcer asked the crowd to stop hurling chocolate, but it wasn’t easy to temper those emotions. Walker rejuvenated a fan base, helped it balloon beyond what some thought was possible and pulled his team into the title game.

And kids in Reading aren’t just watching that action on the hardwood, Perez said. They’re learning how to act, finding an avenue to channel their emotions and pondering their own futures.

They’re reaching for Walker’s autograph or offering him high-fives while they do it, too.

“They’re not going to remember the details,” Perez said. “But they’re all going to remember the hug, they’re going to remember the smile.”

Eleanor Carter agrees with that sentiment, and she knows she’ll always hold dear the people drawn to her simply because she holds a prominent spot in Walker’s life.

When Walker finally departs to embark on an ACC basketball career, Carter knows her grandson will leave the city with an imprint that shows no signs of fading.

“These boys did it,” Carter said.

Then she let out a soft chuckle: “They brought Reading together.”

With his next coach on hand, Lonnie Walker IV puts on a show

Reading Eagle

Beth Hudson

March 22, 2017

Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga landed in Philadelphia around 5 p.m. Tuesday. He expected to be back in Florida a little after 1 a.m.

What he saw during five-plus hours on the ground made the long day and the brisk turnaround all worthwhile.

Reading High senior Lonnie Walker IV turned in a dazzler, finishing with 35 points, five rebounds and five steals in a 57-51 win over Archbishop Ryan in a PIAA Class 6A semifinal at Liacouras Center.

Today, Walker is leading the Red Knights toward history: their first trip to a PIAA championship game since 1973 and, perhaps, the program's first state title. Next season, Walker will be a Miami Hurricane.

"Lonnie was phenomenal," Larrañaga said after the game. "His explosion at the end of the second quarter was absolutely amazing. He just went on a roll.

"In the second half, his poise and leadership really led to a great victory and a chance to win a state championship."

Larrañaga wanted to be at Reading's quarterfinal vs. Plymouth-Whitemarsh, but couldn't get to Philadelphia in time. He told assistant coach Adam Fisher they'd attend the semifinal if Reading advanced.

Walker found out via text that his future coach would be in the house.

"It just gave me more motivation to show my game and show who I am," Walker

said. "I was just hungrier than that other team. I was hungrier than anyone else on that floor.

"I would have died for this game." His determination was more than enough.

The Red Knights trailed 27-16 with three minutes left in the first half. They roared back with a 19-0 rush that spanned the second and third quarters.

Walker kicked it off with a 3-pointer. His steal and dunk pulled Reading within 27-26. He hit another 3 (his third in two minutes) to give the Knights a 29-27 halftime edge.

By the time Wesley Butler closed the run with a basket early in the second half, Reading led 35-27. The Raiders never got closer than four after that.

Walker scored 15 of his team's 19 during that pivotal stretch. None of it was a surprise to Larrañaga.

"I use the expression that he reminds me of Usain Bolt," Larrañaga said. "When he gets into the open court, he just flies to the basket. He has speed, quickness, jumping ability.

"What separates him from a lot of players is his skills. He can handle the ball. He can shoot the 3. He makes his free throws. He's not just a special player, but a special individual."

The coach marveled at the way Reading fans packed the gym, giving the Knights a warm atmosphere in a state semifinal. It's an environment Walker has come to expect.

Larrañaga gave Walker a hug before taking off again. He knows his recruit still

has one major goal to check off in high school.

Reading will face Pine Richland in the final at 8 p.m. Saturday in Hershey.

"We're one step closer to getting that ring I've always dreamed of, just bringing back that state championship for my city and my community," Walker said. "We want it more than anyone else."

‘Oh my goodness’: Reading’s Lonnie Walker puts on show for Larrañaga

Penn Live
Aaron Kasinitz
March 22, 2017

Reading boy’s basketball guard Lonnie Walker has grown accustomed to the shouting children who gather around him after games, but Tuesday, the Red Knights’ all-time leading scorer didn’t meet eager kids outside the Liacouras Center locker room.

Instead, just as a 57-51 win over Archbishop Ryan in the PIAA Class 6A semifinal began to sink in, Walker embraced a giddy 67-year-old man.

“Oh, you were fantastic,” Miami Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga said as he hugged his future player underneath the stands in Temple’s arena.

Walker just smiled. Larrañaga continued gushing.

“That explosion at the end of the half, oh my god,” Larrañaga said, referencing Walker’s right-handed dunk that capped a game-defining run .

“Then how about the spin?” the 2016 ACC Coach of the Year continued. “Avoiding the charge and kissing it off the glass in the third quarter? Oh my goodness.”

Larrañaga wasn’t the only spectator who left Philadelphia impressed with Walker — though he was likely the only one to do so on a private jet headed to Miami. When the final buzzer blared, Walker had poured in 35 of his team’s 57 points and steered the Red Knights to their first state title in 44 years.

“It makes me even hungrier to know that we’re one step closer to getting that ring that I always dreamed about and just bringing back that state championship

for my city and my community,” Walker said. “We want it more than anyone else.”

Walker, a McDonald’s All-American and 247sports’ No. 19 recruit in the country, will arrive in Miami this summer with a shot to make an immediate impact on a Hurricanes team that has challenged the ACC’s best over the past few years. He spurned offers from nearly every college hoops power in the country when he signed with Miami in November.

The springy guard said his soon-to-be coach texted Tuesday to explain he would make it to the PIAA semifinal in Philadelphia. Walker said that made him excited, but not anxious. He played in front of Larrañaga before and he valued the coach’s positivity.

Larrañaga, wearing a black Hurricanes pullover jacket, chatted with fans and Walker’s parents before settling into his seat at the Liacouras Center for the game. Then he watched as his five-star recruit ignited a Reading run to erase a double-digit first-half deficit.

Walker scored 15 of his 19 points in the second quarter to alter the tone of the game.

“I’ve seen him play so well so many times,” Larrañaga said. “And I use the expression that he reminds me of Usain Bolt when he gets into the open court and he just flies to the basket. His speed, quickness, jumping ability. And what separates him from a lot of players is his skills. He can handle the ball. He can shoot the 3, and he makes his free throws.”

Walker displayed that array of skills Tuesday night as he landed two points shy of his career-best scoring outing. And the play that impressed Larrañaga the most — the first one he mentioned

when he saw Walker — was a steal-and-flush near the end of the first half that gave Reading the lead and evoked an eruption from the Red Knights-heavy crowd.

That dunk stuck out to Walker, too.

“I swiped the ball and he let it go, all my adrenaline and all my energy just went into that dunk and I kind of blacked out and I was like, ‘Yeah, it’s over. This is our game. We’re not losing this game,’” Walker said. “And that pretty much changed the whole game. It changed the whole game and it changed how we played.”

And it gave Larrañaga plenty to rave about afterward.

In fact, Miami’s sideline general was so ecstatic that couldn’t leave Philadelphia without a second embrace. After the two first chatted, Larrañaga watched Walker greet reporters for an interview and smiled as the poofy-haired teenager discussed his 35-point performance.

Then Larrañaga busted through the small pack of media members to wrap his arms around Walker one last time before returning to Miami.

“Sorry,” Larrañaga said with a smile. “I just want to hug him.”

2017-18 Miami Has Sky-High Potential

ACCSports.com

Miami Insider

March 17, 2017

The history of the Miami Hurricanes' basketball program isn't a well-known or particularly storied one, so you're forgiven if the best teams in school history don't immediately spring to mind.

If next year's team lives up to its potential, you may be able to skip over the past.

The Hurricanes will return a host of players from this season's team, which went 21-11 and lost in the first round of the NCAA Tournament to Michigan State. They will also add arguably their best-ever recruiting class.

With Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell leading the way, and wing Lonnie Walker joining the mix, Miami will have three high-caliber future NBA underclassmen in the lineup. Those guards will join senior point man Ja'Quan Newton, junior forward Anthony Lawrence and center Ebuka Izundu. The role players, like sharpshooter D.J. Vasiljevic, backup point Chris Lykes and big men Rodney Miller and Deng Gak, were once highly regarded recruits.

Oh, and Miami still has two open scholarships to add star freshmen, ideally, or ready-to-play grad transfers.

It's a wildly interesting roster that could be the best team in school history.

Not that that's saying a whole heck of a lot. UM hasn't had legendary squads in its spotty run as a Division I program.

The best Hurricanes team never to do anything of note was certainly the 2001-02 group. That was when Perry Clark took a Leonard Hamilton-recruited

roster that included future NBA players John Salmons and James Jones, former McDonald's All-American Darius Rice and a quality college center in Elton Tyler and lost a first-round 5 vs. 12 matchup in March.

Hamilton had a younger Tyler, Salmons and Jones, plus guard Johnny Helmsley and center Mario Bland, on his Sweet 16 team of 1999-2000. That was the first UM squad to make it to that round.

The next of UM's three Sweet 16 squads did it with a future first-round pick (sophomore Shane Larkin). Good pro-level seniors — like Durand Scott, Trey McKinney Jones, Reggie Johnson, Kenny Kadji and Julian Gamble — joined him. That was UM's breakout season, when it earned a No. 1 AP ranking for the first time, a No. 2 seed and set a school mark in wins (29-7).

The other Sweet 16 run came in 2015-16, with NBA free agent Sheldon McClellan (who recently legally changed his surname to Mac) as its leading scorer, Angel Rodriguez at the point and Tonye Jekiri in the middle. Davon Reed and a sophomore-year Newton were complementary players. A good squad, but no first-round picks on that team.

Brown and Walker, right now, are in the top 15 of DraftExpress.com's mock draft for 2018. Huell could join them or take another year to develop into a first-rounder (likely). It would certainly be UM's first team with three first-rounders; Miami has had four in its history (Larkin in 2014, Salmons in 2003, Tim James in 2000, Rick Barry in 1966).

The history is there to be written.

Whether Melbourne or Miami - Vasiljevic shoots into March Madness

Sydney Herald
Roy Ward
March 17, 2017

Whether you come from the other side of the world or a local high school, a new player in US college basketball has to both bide his time but also fight for his place.

Melbourne guard Dejan “DJ” Vasiljevic has done this as well as could be expected in his freshman (first) season with University of Miami Hurricanes and his reward will be getting to play in the NCAA Tournament, also known as March Madness.

The Hurricanes begin their tournament against perennial contender Michigan State Spartans on Saturday at 12.25pm AEDT.

Vasiljevic had his troubles adjusting to Miami in his first couple of months.

The 19-year-old had lived away from home at the Basketball Australia Centre of Excellence in Canberra, formerly known the AIS basketball program, but moving overseas proved harder than expected.

He Facetimes with his family back in Melbourne regularly and has leaned on his teammates as he adjusted to life in Miami.

“The first two months were the hardest for me but I had all my teammates show me the ropes and now it feels like it’s my own city – I’m enjoying it, that’s the main thing,” Vasiljevic said.

Miami’s cultural mix is much different to Melbourne or Canberra while on court the feisty, fearless shooter had to earn his shots in a team filled with talented guards like Devon Reed, Bruce Brown and Ja’Quan Newton who all play big minutes with Vasiljevic coming off the

bench in support.

Under coach Jim Larrañaga the team plays a fast style where the best performers get most of the ball and anyone who can’t hold their own defensively doesn’t get on court.

Miami play in the ACC conference against powers like Duke, North Carolina, Syracuse and Louisville.

“I used the non-conference play to get used to guarding smaller, quicker, more athletic guys and getting used to how they all played,” Vasiljevic said.

“Then we got to ACC play and you have to have the mindset that anyone you are guarding could be in the NBA Draft, they are all that good.

“You have to come in ready to defend, coach told me if I wanted minutes I had to defend and I had to play well and I’ve done that in my minutes.”

As a proven performer for Australia’s under-17 and under-19 sides, Vasiljevic has walked on the world stage and made big shots with his Australian under-17 side making the gold medal game against USA where he averaged 13 points per game.

He knew he had to earn his minutes but he didn’t let himself forget he had played on the elite stage before coming to college.

“I tell people just because I’m from a different country doesn’t mean I haven’t got any experience,” Vasiljevic said.

“I’ve played on the world stage, I’ve represented my country at the highest level so that experience helps me at this level.”

Vasiljevic’s offensive game has started to show late in the season despite few

opportunities, an undermanned Miami side beat Virginia Tech in February after Vasiljevic’s late three-pointer while he scored 13 points in the Hurricanes’ win over Syracuse in the ACC Tournament at Barclays Centre in Brooklyn, New York earlier this month.

NCAA Tournament games can become a showcase for shooters of Vasiljevic’s quality and the Melbourne raised guard is ready to stand up should his moment arrive.

“I can shoot the ball and I know my teammates will find me but with the way most teams defend we need to spread the floor,” Vasiljevic said.

“So we need guys like Reed, Brown or Newton to get into the paint so I help create that space – some games I might only get one or two shots, others I might get eight or nine. It depends how they are playing us but I’m ready no matter what.”

While the basketball goes up a level in March, the school work continues too and Vasiljevic said he was still learning how to make the most of his study time.

“Nothing against the AIS but the schoolwork there was nothing compared to what it’s like in college with going on the road and still having to go to class,” Vasiljevic said.

“One weekend we played Clemson on a Saturday, left for Virginia on Sunday, played on Monday then didn’t get back until 3am or 4am that morning then I had two tests starting at 9am Tuesday morning.

“Being able to sleep and study on the plane is something I’ve had to work on.”

Spartans storm back from early deficit and eliminate Hurricanes

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
March 17, 2017

The scene in the post-game locker room was not what the University of Miami Hurricanes had envisioned – heads hung low, voices at a whisper, and seniors Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy peeling off their UM jerseys for the last time.

There will be no Sweet 16 for the Canes this year. No Jim Larrañaga dances. The eighth-seeded Hurricanes played eight fantastic minutes, forced Michigan State's heralded freshmen into turnovers, took an early 12-point lead, but then went cold and are heading home after a 78-58 first-round loss.

"The first eight minutes their youth showed, their freshmen turned the ball over, first play of the game a freshman mistake and foul and we took advantage of their turnovers," said Murphy, who was held to one point and two rebounds. "Then they got comfortable, made a couple shots and we played catch-up from there. They outplayed us. It was a bad game for me, sad it was my last game of college career."

ADVERTISING

The Spartans' guards outplayed the Hurricanes' (18 assists to eight), their big men dominated the backboards, and Miami wound up with a season-low 23 rebounds and one blocked shot.

"They carved us up pretty good," UM coach Jim Larrañaga said of Michigan State's freshmen. "You have to be at your best at this tournament, and we weren't. We were good for 10, 12 minutes but we weren't very good the rest of the game."

Ja'Quan Newton led UM with 16 points, Davon Reed had 12, and Bruce Brown added 11.

Michigan State got big games from freshmen Nick Ward (19 points), Miles Bridges (18) and Joshua Langford (13) after they were rattled early on. They also combined for 18 rebounds. The Spartans outscored Miami 40-28 in the paint.

"We were really shaky early," said Spartans coach Tom Izzo. "We turned the ball over a lot early. We responded like a bunch of freshmen, to be honest. We weren't as sharp as we needed to be. Give Miami credit. They took it to us. But after that first seven, eight minutes, I thought we played some of the best basketball we've played

not only this year, but in a couple of years.

"We moved the ball. We guarded. We took a couple of things away that are their strengths."

The Hurricanes came out with boundless energy and dominated the first eight minutes, using zone defense to rattle the Spartans' freshmen. Ward was called for a foul two seconds into the game – "He set not only a North American record, but a Michigan State record for fastest foul," Izzo said.

UM jumped to a 10-0 lead which widened to 17-5. Michigan State was the team known for its breakneck speed in transition, but for a while, it was the Hurricanes stealing and disrupting and racing up and down the floor like track stars.

First Reed, then Brown, then Newton. Miami got five early steals and scored eight quick points off turnovers. Spartans freshman Bridges is the lottery pick-in-waiting, but Brown put on a show in the opening minutes with a couple of steals, a three-pointer and a one-handed dunk that launched the UM fans in attendance out of their seats.

Brown also had a slick pass underneath the basket to Ebuka Izundu, who threw down a dunk to give Miami a 19-8 lead. At that point, the Spartans had scored eight points and committed seven turnovers.

But the tides were about to change in a hurry. The Spartans found their form and started taking great care of the ball, while the Hurricanes went cold and came unglued.

Langford hit a three-point shot to close the gap to 19-13, Bridges made a jumper to get MSU within two, and followed it up with a layup to tie the game 21-21. The Spartans took their first lead of the game, 25-23, on an Alvin Ellis layup with four minutes to go before the half.

They never trailed again. Michigan State outscored Miami 30-8 to end the half, made nine of their last 11 shots of the half, and those early-game Hurricane heroics mattered no more.

"I feel terrible right now," said Brown. "We probably took our foot off the gas way too early, and they made tough shots. I feel bad for the seniors, Murph and Reed. They worked so hard to get here and I'm just sad that I couldn't help them get past what they got last year."

Added Reed: "Once they got the momentum going, they never looked back. They outworked us. I'm sad to go out this way, but my goal was to get back to the tournament and see where we can go from there, and we did that, so I'm very proud of these guys."

Larrañaga said, in retrospect, he wished he had stayed in the zone longer rather than switching to man-to-man. "In the man-to-man we ended up playing like it was five games of one-on-one instead of team defense...If I had to do it all over again, I would have stayed with the zone in the first half."

He said he switched because he felt the MSU players were starting to figure out the zone.

The typically-dependable Hurricane seniors Reed and Murphy shot a combined 1-for-7 for three points in the first half. Between them, they had zero rebounds before intermission, which was surprising considering they pride themselves on their defense. Reed came alive in the second half, but Murphy continued to struggle.

Despite the loss, Larrañaga told his players he was proud of them, and that they exceeded expectations.

"First few weeks of practice, to think we'd win 20 games and get to NCAA Tournament having beaten Duke, North Carolina and Virginia on the road, that would be surprisingly good for such a young team so short on the bench," he said.

The Spartans (20-14) advanced to the Sunday second-round game against Kansas (29-4), which played like a top seed in the earlier game, clobbering UC-Davis 100-62 in front of a packed BOK Center crowd that included actor Rob Lowe, who is filming a documentary nearby. Lowe flew in on the same flight as the UC-Davis chancellor, who invited him to the game.

After quick start, Hurricanes fall apart, are bounced from NCAAs

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 17, 2017

The most succinct description of what happened in Tulsa on Friday night came from Michigan State coach Tom Izzo.

“They took it to us,” he said. “And after that first seven or eight minutes, we played some of the best basketball we’ve played not only this year but in a couple of years.”

That was more than enough to put Miami on the mat.

The Hurricanes had a rollicking start, looking at good as they have all season. At that point Izzo referenced, they began a stunning, dizzying descent.

The final result — a 78-58 loss to the Spartans in the first round of the NCAA Tournament — seemed like a given by halftime.

Miami, the No. 8 seed in the East region, ended its season with one-quarter of an outstanding game, and three-quarters of one of its worst games of the year. It was a wild swing in momentum, from all Canes to all Spartans.

From the opening tip — when Miami players excitedly clapped after drawing a foul in the first two seconds of the game — to the 12:16 mark, the Hurricanes did nearly everything right.

UM (21-12) scored the game’s first 10 points and went up 17-5 in the first 6:48, capped by a thunderous slam on the break by freshman Bruce Brown. Off a steal, he cocked his right arm behind his head and threw it down. With 12:16 left in the half, Michigan State had nearly as many turnovers (seven) as points (eight).

The Hurricanes scored 10 of their first 17 points off Spartans miscues. The Canes had quick feet in their zone defense, leading to Sparty’s 5-for-17 shooting start.

“We were turning them over, getting out in transition and scoring easy buckets,” Brown said.

Jim Larrañaga’s theory on the reversal was twofold.

After the first seven or eight minutes, Larrañaga saw the Spartans attacking the zone, so he switched to man-to-man — and “they really carved us.” Freshman stars Nick Ward (19 points) and Miles Bridges (18) barreled into the paint. The Spartans, who had 18 assists, kept finding the open man.

Larrañaga switched back to zone in the second half, but it was too late. He admitted if he could have done it over, he would have stuck with the zone.

The other problem: Miami couldn’t score.

Miami’s ball-screen offense worked so well in the first 10 minutes, but Brown and Ja’Quan Newton and found it increasingly tough to enter the lane. That meant shooters Davon Reed (12 points), D.J. Vasiljevic (2) and Anthony Lawrence Jr. (3) couldn’t get open looks. UM was 4-of-16 from beyond the arc.

Miami lost the rebounding battle 36-23. No Hurricanes player finished with more than three. Kamari Murphy, UM’s leading rebounder who was playing the best ball over the last month, finished with two rebounds and missed all six shots he took.

“I just wasn’t there tonight,” Murphy said. “We’re all human. We’re all going to have

those games. Kind of sad it happened the last game of my career.”

The Spartans (20-14), who will play top-seeded Kansas on Sunday, went on a 30-8 run to end the first half and led by as many as 23 in the second half. Their dominance can be explained in many ways, including this: The Hurricanes went up 19-8, and by the time Miami scored its next 19 points, the Spartans had scored 50.

“They killed us on the offensive backboards [17-6 second chance] and points in the paint [40-28],” Reed said.

“They were doing whatever they wanted and we were playing catch-up,” Murphy said.

“We got in one of those stretches we’ve had all year, where we struggle to score,” associate head coach Chris Caputo said.

“I thought we prepared very well,” Larrañaga said. “It’s one thing to know what they’re going to do. It’s another thing to stop it.”

They tried. About five minutes into the second half with Miami down 19, Brown brought the ball up the floor, advancing toward referee Rick Crawford. As he dribbled, he repeated “timeout” four times. Crawford continued to stare. Frustrated, Brown then yelled it, which caused Crawford to whip his head around and realize someone was talking.

It was the quietest of endings, after the loudest of starts.

Larrañaga didn't expect NCAA Tournament for UM ... until December

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
March 17, 2017

Like many observers of the University of Miami men's basketball program, coach Jim Larrañaga was skeptical of his team's chances of making the NCAA Tournament at the start of the season.

NIT, yes. But the Big Dance? That didn't seem likely.

The Hurricanes had lost three key players from the 2016 Sweet 16 team — Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri — and with the transfer of Manu Lecomte to Baylor the previous year, it left UM's nine-man roster with no true point guard. Ja'Quan Newton, a shooting guard, would become the de-facto point guard.

The four freshmen coming in were question marks. Would Bruce Brown be as good as advertised? How would D.J. Vasiljevic handle the transition from Australia to the Atlantic Coast Conference? Were Dewan Huell and Rodney Miller ready to battle the league's big men in the post?

"In September, watching our first workouts, I would have said we have very little chance of being able to compete with the best teams in the country and beating them," Larrañaga admitted on the eve of the eighth-seeded Hurricanes' NCAA Tournament opener against No. 9 seed Michigan State late Friday night.

"But by the time December rolled around, my opinion had completely changed ... our players were getting better and better, and if we can keep it up for three or four weeks we'd be in position in the second round of ACC teams to compete with everybody."

He singled out the two North Carolina State games as his best barometer that the Canes had the potential to finish the season strong.

They won the first meeting at home 81-63 on Dec. 31.

"When we beat them and how we beat them and how we rebounded, I was like, 'Wow,' " Larrañaga said.

Then on Feb. 4, on the road in a raucous arena, UM rallied from a 45-36 halftime deficit and won 84-79. Davon Reed scored 26 points in that game, and Anthony Lawrence and Ebuka Izundu combined for 35 points off the bench.

"To go there and win in front of a hostile crowd, knowing they'd have revenge on the mind, we left there and I said, 'We can compete with everybody now,' " Larrañaga said.

Coach L told his players if they could go 5-4 or 6-3 over the next nine games, they would make the NCAA Tournament. They went 6-3.

Larrañaga gave much of the credit for the team's success to seniors Reed, who was named the ACC's top scholar athlete, and Kamari Murphy, a fifth-year senior playing in his fourth NCAA Tournament — two with Oklahoma State and two with UM.

"I think those two guys are the reason we're here," Larrañaga said. "Davon and Kamari are two of the best leaders I've ever had and they've done it by example, by how hard they practice every day, the consistency in their effort and execution."

He has been particularly impressed with their defense, so much so that in a team-bonding activity on Wednesday

night, when each person in the room was asked to tell another what he appreciates about him, Larrañaga turned to Murphy and told him he admires his defense and wishes he had been that relentless on defense during his playing days.

Murphy averaged 9.9 points and 6.6 rebounds, making 61.8 percent of his shots, in the 10 games leading into the NCAA Tournament. He also had 22 blocks this season.

Reed was the Hurricanes' leading scorer at 15 points per game, and also averaged 4.8 rebounds and had 41 steals and 16 blocks. He made the ACC All-Defensive Team.

"I believe Kamari Murphy should have been the defensive player of the year, that's how good I think he is defensively," Larrañaga said. "By my estimation, our young players would not have developed the way they have if not for those two guys and the message they sent from Day One about the importance of defending and rebounding."

Improving, not NBA Draft, on the mind of Brown

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
March 17, 2017

So many games in the NCAA Tournament are won by talented, aggressive guards who take over. Bruce Brown has that ability.

He showed it in December (triple-double against South Carolina State). He showed it in January (30 points against No. 9 North Carolina). He showed it in February (winning 3-pointer at No. 18 Virginia, 25 points against No. 10 Duke).

He doesn't expect his first March experience will be his last.

As one of the top freshmen in the ACC, college basketball's premier conference, Brown's pro potential is widely discussed. Since the NBA instituted its "one-and-done" rule in 2006, 97 freshmen have been drafted. But when asked for his thoughts on leaving early, Brown, 20, said he's "not thinking about it right now."

After the Hurricanes' run is over, would he consider it more deeply?

"I don't think I'm ready, to be honest," he told The Post. "I feel like I can get a lot better. I feel there's a lot I can do to prepare myself better to get to that level."

Such as?

"Shooting, dribbling, everything," he said.

Brown, a 6-foot-5, 200-pound combo guard, is averaging 11.9 points, 5.8 rebounds, 3.2 assists and 1.4 steals while playing more than 30 minutes a night. He's a physical scorer and athletic defender who can make shots from the outside. But he sees the holes in his game.

His loose handle can get him into trouble; he averages 2.1 turnovers, but has coughed it up four or more times in seven of 32 games. "That's one big thing I need to work on," he said. Ball-handling will be a major focus of his offseason training.

Last year, he worked mostly on his shooting, "because I thought my handle was OK," he said. "My jump shot was not where it needed to be at the start of the season. Now I have confidence in it."

That feeling was hard-won. In November, the newcomer missed nine of the first 10 shots he took from beyond the arc. Over his first 10 games, he was 5-of-24 on 3-pointers. But continued work with UM's coaches helped him improve. In ACC games, he made them at a 40 percent clip. His percentage ranked just outside the top 10 among conference players.

What else?

"Everything," he said, agreeing with a reporter who noted he could become a more dominant scorer. "I've got to get stronger. I didn't rebound well the last couple games. That's something I need to work on, too."

His coaches are more than happy to help.

"It takes a level of humility to understand where you're at, what you're good at, what you need to improve upon, what's your identity as a player," UM assistant coach Chris Caputo said. "What's unique about Bruce is there's not a lot of guys who would put up 30 against Carolina and 25 against Duke and spend most of their time thinking about what they could be better at. There would be a lot of people trying to live off that, rather than self-examine."

That will only help Miami (21-11), whose first-round matchup with Michigan State tips off around 9:20 p.m. Friday, achieve greater things.

In its 2018 mock draft, which was updated Tuesday, DraftExpress.com rates Brown as the No. 15 player. That's two spots behind guard Lonnie Walker, Miami's top incoming recruit, who is currently in high school but could leave after one season at UM. If DraftExpress' faraway projections came true, Brown and Walker would become the highest-drafted Hurricanes since Hall of Famer Rick Barry (second overall in 1966). UM's most recent first-rounder, Shane Larkin, went 18th in 2014.

Though Miami will lose heart-and-soul seniors Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy, the 2017-18 Hurricanes should be even better with the development of Brown, freshman forward Dewan Huell (a former McDonald's All-American) and several other young players, plus a Walker-led recruiting class considered UM's best ever. Brown could be the go-to player on a team expected to make major noise.

If Brown wants to, he can test the water. Last

year, the NBA instituted a rule that allows underclassmen to declare for the draft and retain their NCAA eligibility by withdrawing before the draft. They can do so in multiple seasons, and can participate in the league's scouting combine and work out for NBA teams.

Brown, a top-30 recruit, was one of the highest-rated players ever to sign with UM. (ESPN)
Brown, a top-30 recruit, was one of the highest-rated players ever to sign with UM. (ESPN)

That doesn't interest him now, though, not with a trip to Tulsa, Oklahoma and a tough Midwest Region ahead.

"Right now we're just focusing on defense in practice," Brown said. "When we have fun on the court, that's when we play our best basketball. That's another thing we need focus on in this run.

"We all think we need to share the ball more. Our defense is great ... It's defense to offense. We get out in transition, we get turnovers and easy points in transition. ... When we defend, we win."

He's weathered a few dramatic games so far in his brief college career, but he hadn't been through a Selection Sunday as a Hurricane. As he waited for his team's matchup to flash across the big-screen TV at the on-campus party, he admitted, he was jittery.

"I don't know why," he said. "I knew we were in the tournament, but I was nervous for some reason."

Those nerves won't be around for long. Brown will stay a while.

Future Miami Heat star brought Larrañaga and Izzo together

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 17, 2017

Jim Larrañaga was a first-time head coach at Bowling Green and was about to land his first star recruit.

There was one major obstacle standing in the way of that happening. Steve Smith had a particular dream, and Larrañaga couldn't help him achieve it.

Tom Izzo could, and did.

That's how Larrañaga described it Thursday, some 31 years later. He visited Smith's home, near Detroit, in September of his senior year. Smith, Larrañaga said, told him he was glad to get a scholarship offer from the Falcons and planned to visit campus, unless ...

"I said, 'What do you mean, Steve? Unless what?'" Larrañaga said.

"He said, 'Unless Michigan State offers me a scholarship because they're my favorite. Magic Johnson is my hero and if they offer me that's where I'm going.'"

The postscript, according to Larrañaga, involved Smith scoring 47 points the next weekend in front of Izzo, then an assistant for Michigan State's Jud Heathcote. Izzo "went to Steve's home by himself, without coach Heathcote, and offered him the scholarship," Larrañaga said. "And I believe, if I heard the story correctly, Steve Smith committed to him on the spot. But that was our first encounter."

Smith was Michigan State's all-time leading scorer. The Heat made him the No. 5 overall pick in 1991, and he led Miami to its first playoff win — over the Hawks in 1994 — before joining Atlanta

in the one-sided Kevin Willis deal. He was known as one of the best shooters in the NBA during his career, which ended with a short stint with Miami in 2003.

Izzo became MSU's coach in 1995. His resume, heading into Friday's game against Miami (9:20 p.m., TNT), includes seven Final Fours and one national title (2000). He hired Larrañaga's former assistant, Stan Heath, in 1996. Larrañaga moved onto George Mason in 1997, and crossed paths with Izzo in the first round of the 2006 NCAA Tournament.

The 11th-seeded Patriots' upset of sixth-seeded Michigan State kick-started their stunning run to the Final Four.

"Tom and I have never discussed it, but the media tends to bring it up a lot," Larrañaga said, laughing. "That's in the past. Has nothing to do with tomorrow night's game. It's Michigan State against the University of Miami, and both of us, I think, recognize we have young clubs. We have a lot of young guys making major contributions, and I'm sure we're both hopeful that those young guys will play up to their capability."

Hurricanes look to continue ‘special’ year as they open NCAA Tournament

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

March 16, 2017

As he watched his team go through some of its early practices, Jim Larrañaga didn't exactly have high hopes.

The Hurricanes men's basketball team, adjusting after the losses of veterans Sheldon McClellan, Angel Rodriguez and Tonye Jekiri, were too young and inexperienced, Larrañaga thought, to make any kind of postseason run.

But in the months since, the Hurricane's men's basketball team grew up. And the wins started coming.

Seniors Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy did what they were asked, and more. They mentored a talented core of freshmen that included Bruce Brown, Dewan Huell and sharp-shooter DJ Vasiljevic.

Young players from last season's Sweet 16 team such as Anthony Lawrence and Ebuka Izundu developed.

And through injuries and suspensions, the Hurricanes – who have just nine scholarship players on their roster – powered through, notching wins against Duke, North Carolina and Virginia in the process.

Now Miami finds itself in the NCAA Tournament for the second straight year and the third time in the past five seasons under Larrañaga, who took over at Miami in 2011. The Hurricanes will open play in Tulsa, Okla., late Friday as a No. 8 seed against traditional powerhouse Michigan State, a No. 9 seed which some college basketball analysts have already pegged as the favorite to advance despite its bubble-team status.

No matter what others may think, though, the Hurricanes believe they've already put together a special run – and they aren't quite ready to have their season end just yet.

“I think this was really a special year for me and the staff and the players, going into the season with basically six very inexperienced players and only three veterans,” Larrañaga said before his team left for Tulsa. “You can have six inexperienced veterans if you have four or five veterans. We only had nine scholarship guys this year. There were games we only played seven. We had one player suspended three games and we won those three games. We've overcome a lot of adversity and I think we're hitting our stride right now and hopefully we'll play very well Friday night.”

While Michigan State (19-14, 10-8 Big Ten) enters the tournament with tradition and pedigree on its side, the Spartans have lost three of their last four and could have easily seen their streak of 20 straight tournament appearances come to an end after an up-and-down season.

But some of their weaknesses – and strengths – mirror Miami's.

Both teams have notched big wins and head-scratching losses. Both have talented freshmen leading the charge, with Miami's Brown averaging 11.9 points per game, while Huell and Vasiljevic are logging significant minutes. The Spartans, meanwhile, have Miles Bridges, Joshua Langford, Nick Ward and Cassius Winston each notching at least five starts, averaging a combined 43.7 points and earning recognition as the most productive freshman class of coach Tom Izzo's 22-year tenure at Michigan State.

And then there's Larrañaga and Izzo, two veterans that know each other – and the tournament – well.

Miami went on to win the ACC championship that season and make a run to the Sweet 16.

The Hurricanes (21-11, 10-8 ACC) would like nothing more than having another victory over Michigan State spark another memorable run, this time one that starts a little later in the year.

They also wouldn't mind if that win garners them a little bit more national respect, something they're still fighting to earn while playing against yet another one of college basketball's powerhouse programs.

“We have to stick to our game plan,” Murphy said. “In the tournament, we have less days to prepare for teams, so we have to stick to what we do. But we've played in the best conference in America, so I think we're prepared for any team we'll have to play and their style and matchups. And we have great coaching as well. ... Michigan State has great basketball history, but I think it's time for people to put some recognition on Miami now.”

Larrañaga doesn't know what to expect with young team in tourney

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
March 16, 2017

Ask Jim Larrañaga if he thought he would be here, preparing for a first-round game in the NCAA Tournament, and he'll respond in a typically Larrañagan way: with a story that illustrates his feelings.

"In 2012, I went into a board of trustees meeting and told the board of trustees to get behind the team if they wanted to see the best basketball team in school history," he said, recalling his Hurricanes team that finished first in the ACC and won the league title, then went to the Sweet 16.

"I had the utmost confidence in that team because I had a lot of knowledge about them from the previous season," he said. "This year I had very little."

College basketball teams are allowed 13 players on scholarship, and at the start of the year he had nine. He had four freshmen and two sophomores "that were really unknown quantities," he said. He didn't know if junior Ja'Quan Newton, a combo guard forced into full-time point guard duty, could handle the responsibility on both ends of the floor. Larrañaga believed his two seniors, guard Davon Reed and forward Kamari Murphy, would be leaders — but neither had that kind of pressure on last year's team, a veteran group that made the Sweet 16.

Though it looked like the Hurricanes (21-11) were NIT-bound at certain points in the year, they pulled it together and earned a spot as the slight favorite in Friday's 8-vs.-9 matchup against Michigan State (19-14) in the Midwest Region (9:20 p.m., TNT). After a season when his team "kept getting better and better and better," Larrañaga said he doesn't quite know how good they can be.

"These games are separate entities themselves," he said. "You don't know if your team is going to shoot great free throws or have a bad night at the free-throw line, or a bad night shooting 3s or just be on fire. Or the opponent, how they'll play."

Michigan State coach Tom Izzo, with seven Final Fours and a national title (2000) in 20 years of NCAA tournament appearances, feels the same about his group. His top players are freshmen, and he doesn't quite know how they'll fare.

It's a group that includes leading scorer and rebounder Miles Bridges, who averages 16.7 and 8.3, forward Nick Ward and flashy point guard Cassius Winston, who shares time with speedy Lourawls "Tum Tum" Nairn, a junior from the Bahamas.

"I had an interesting thing happen to me earlier in the week. I made a comment that these young guys were just taking off the diapers," Izzo said, "and somebody sent me a dozen diapers. And it is time to take them off. They're guys now that have been through a lot of wars."

Larrañaga sees in them some big boys, to be certain.

"They've got a tremendous 1-2 punch in Bridges and Ward," Larrañaga said. "Bridges can score inside, he can score in transition, he shoots the 3 extremely well. ... (Ward) is a beast inside, he's got a tremendous jump hook, he's a great offensive rebounder, he's No. 1 in the country in drawing fouls."

Izzo has had to mix and match all season. October knee injuries to centers Gavin Schilling and Ben Carter left MSU without a rotation player bigger than Ward, who is 6-foot-8 and 250 pounds. He and sophomore Kenny Goins, a 6-6, 230-pound center who is limited offensively, are the Spartans' frontcourt.

The Hurricanes aren't a bulky team — 6-10, 230-pound sophomore Ebuka Izundu is the largest member of the rotation — but they have the height advantage. They can roll out Izundu, who can be foul-prone, and freshman Dewan Huell (6-11, 220). Larrañaga will start forwards Murphy (6-8, 220) and Anthony Lawrence Jr. (6-7, 210) and hope to find a way to slow down Ward (13.7 points, 6.5 rebounds) from getting comfortable on

the block.

"He's a big kid," said Murphy, a quick defender. "But I've never been bullied. I don't plan on being bullied."

Stopping Michigan State's best player, Bridges (6-7, 230), is another matter. Bridges can score inside, outside or on downhill drives to the basket. It will be up to all Hurricanes to check him, especially Reed (6-6, 220), who is a key reason Miami ranks 20th nationally in KenPom.com's widely cited defensive efficiency stat. Michigan State isn't far behind (34th).

The teams are also close in turnovers. The Spartans give the ball away at one of the nation's highest rates (14.2 per game), and the Hurricanes (12.7) aren't far behind. UM will try to protect the ball, and hope freshman star-in-the-making Bruce Brown, who put up a combined 55 points in wins over No. 9 North Carolina and No. 10 Duke, can dazzle again.

"In September, watching our workouts, I would have said we have very little chance of being able to compete with the best teams in the country and beating them. But when December rolled around, my opinion completely changed."

Larrañaga saw his players improve daily. He started to believe they'd be in the ACC race.

RELATED

Photos: Game-by-game look at the 2017 NCAA Tournament

Now they're in the tournament, for an unknown length of time, and they've given each other something more to believe in.

"We knew we had a lot of young talent, but you never know how quickly they'll pan out," Reed said. "I've been thoroughly impressed with this group. They've been playing hard all season.

"We don't back down to anybody. That's our biggest strength."

Larrañaga and Izzo meet and dream again

Sun Sentinel
Dave Hyde
March 16, 2017

They met for the first time, full of young dreams, in 1986. Jim Larrañaga was the new Bowling Green coach. Tom Izzo had been promoted to a full-time assistant at Michigan State.

Izzo was a part-time assistant before that, meaning he made \$7,200 a year and lived in student housing. So that summer of 1986 he had left the state of Michigan for the first and only time in his life to become Tulsa's recruiting director.

Seven weeks later, Michigan State called with a full-time job. So Izzo won't remember much of Tulsa when he returns there for the first-round of the NCAA Tournament on Friday. But he'll know all about the coach on the other sideline

"Oh, we're friends. We've known each other a long time," Miami's Larrañaga says.

They've vacationed together with their wives as part of a shoe deal and can connect the years with games against each other. They even had a famous first-round tournament meeting in 2006.

Larrañaga was 11th-seeded George Mason's coach then; Izzo, a year removed from the Final Four, had molded sixth-seeded Michigan State into one of the nation's top programs.

"We're just going to have fun, guys," Larrañaga told his team before that game. "You know what? We're just going to have fun."

They had more fun than anyone expected, upsetting Michigan State and starting perhaps the unlikeliest run to the

Final Four. Mason Madness, that March was called. A decade later, Larrañaga's message hasn't changed.

"Everyone's working hard and having fun," Larrañaga was saying outside the Hurricanes' team bus Tuesday, the one heading to the airport and the flight to Tulsa.

In some ways, nothing has changed for the two basketball lifers. But Larrañaga, now 67, and Izzo, 62, have changed as they've grown to know themselves.

Larrañaga can laugh at the times he'd get so worked up at Bowling Green that his wife told him he needed to calm down. Izzo, with two titles and seven Final Four appearances, isn't driven by the youthful ambition to succeed.

Now they bring an old-school wisdom and common-sense perspective to the game. Izzo is delighted to be here, considering a week ago he wasn't sure if Michigan State would qualify for its 20th consecutive tournament.

Jim Larrañaga praises Michigan State coach Tom Izzo ahead of Friday's NCAA tournament game against Michigan State.

Larrañaga, too, appreciates the journey of this Miami team with only nine scholarship players. That's, in part, because of NCAA sanctions from the Nevin Shapiro fiasco. It's also because Larrañaga dismissed two talented players this season, 6-foot-6 Rashad Muhammad and 6-9 Michael Gilmore.

"Failure to meet team expectations," was the stated reason. Larrañaga, you see, runs a program with three general rules that, as he has said, might sound "corny":
1) Always be positive.
2) Have unconditional commitment

to your work on the court and in the classroom.

3) Act in a first-class manner.

NCAA Tournament butterflies? Learn from Michigan, UM's Jim Larrañaga says. To some, that's Mayberry R.F.D. in a YouTube world. But maybe following such simple rules is how you teach players to be better people. Maybe Miami making the tournament with this unlikely team is testament to that.

"This was really a special year for me and the staff and the players," Larrañaga said. "Going into the season with basically six very inexperienced players and three veterans. You can have six inexperienced players if you have six veterans. But there were games we only played seven."

Izzo, too, brings a brand of rawhide-tough discipline that is well known in college-basketball circles. As Larrañaga says, "His best friends are all football coaches."

UM standout freshman Bruce Brown unfazed by NCAA Tournament stage. The story of college basketball, many say, is the story of big-name coaches running big-time programs. Maybe so. But the real story of those coaches consists of the all-consuming passion they had long before arriving in the big-time.

It's one of dreaming in small programs, or smaller positions, while consumed with a passion that will carry across a long career. Larrañaga and Izzo tell that narrative. They met three decades ago with youthful dreams of basketball.

They meet Friday night, older now, but with the same dreams.

Newton has extra motivation entering NCAA Tournament

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
March 16, 2017

University of Miami guard Ja'Quan Newton will have extra motivation to play well against Michigan State in the first round of the NCAA Tournament on Friday night.

His father, Joe Newton, plans to be in the stands at the BOK Center, and he is somewhat of a legend in parts of Oklahoma. Joe Newton was a star guard at Central Oklahoma University and was named the 1998 Division II National Player of the Year. He averaged 26.1 points, 5.6 assists, 5.3 rebounds and 3.4 steals per game.

Newton said he is looking forward to facing the Spartans — especially with his father in the audience.

“I love this building, love the court,” Newton said after the Canes’ first practice on Thursday. “Court has an extra bounce to it, the rims are soft, basketballs are perfect, I like it. We’re all really excited to play. Everybody’s loose. Watching all these other games on T.V. ... I can’t wait to get out there.”

Familiar Face

When Baylor walked onto the BOK Center floor for practice at the end of UM’s practice session, one player stood out to Hurricane players — former UM guard Manu Lecomte, who transferred after his sophomore season. The Belgian guard wanted more playing time, didn’t want to sit behind Angel Rodriguez, so he left to play for the Bears. He sat out last season, and has been a key player this season, as the Bears went 25-7, tying a school record for wins in a season. Lecomte averaged 12.4 points per game

and ranked fifth in the Big 12 in three-point shooting percentage (42.2) and eighth in assists (3.9).

Lecomte missed out on UM’s Sweet 16 run last season, so he is eager to play on Friday against New Mexico.

“This is my first NCAA Tournament game,” he said. “I know there’s a lot of motivation even though this is the team’s fourth straight time. It’s all new to me, so we’re all really hungry.”

Winning Starts: Miami has won its opening NCAA Tournament game in each of its last three appearances, and advanced to the Sweet 16 in 2013 and 2016.

Perfect attendance

Michigan State is making its 20th consecutive NCAA Tournament appearance under coach Tim Izzo, the nation’s third-longest active streak. The only two teams that have made more Dances in a row are Kansas (28) and Duke (22).

Scouting report

UM coach Jim Larrañaga said some of the Michigan State players remind him of players in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

“When we showed our players videotape of Lourawls Nairn, Jr., and told them his nickname is TumTum, we showed a tape of him and then compared him to John Gillon of Syracuse because the first time we played Syracuse, Gillon torched us with his speed and quickness and ability to score in the open court.

“Then we talked about Miles Bridges and the great player he is and compared him to a Jason Tatum of Duke, of how well

he can score from three-point range but what a great athlete he is and how he can score in a variety of ways.

“And then we compared Nick Ward to a Kennedy Meeks, a premier low-post player, a tremendous offensive rebounder, tremendous jump hook shooter. Kennedy is right-handed. Nick Ward is left-handed. But there’s a lot of similarities.”

Izzo on UM

Michigan State coach Tom Izzo compared Miami to Wisconsin.

“I compare them a little bit to Wisconsin of old days, but Miami will run and is more athletic. But they have the ability to control tempo, and we’d like the tempo to be high. Tum brings that. We’re going to try to push it.”

No such thing as an underdog when Larrañaga and Izzo's teams face off

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
March 16, 2017

Michigan State coach Tom Izzo knows better than to consider his ninth-seeded Spartans an underdog against No. 8 seed University of Miami on Friday night in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Although some TV commentators — and former President Barack Obama — picked the Spartans to beat the Hurricanes, Izzo is well aware that UM's dancing, fun-loving coach Jim Larrañaga can work miracles in March with players often lacking the pedigree of those who wear Spartan green.

Eleven years ago, Larrañaga took a band of mid-major kids from commuter school George Mason and rocked the college basketball establishment in one of the most memorable Final Four runs in NCAA Tournament history.

The 11th-seeded Patriots busted brackets all over the nation with a 75-65 first-round upset of Izzo's sixth-seeded Michigan State team, which had been to the Final Four the previous year.

George Mason, which had never won an NCAA Tournament game, was determined to prove it belonged after TV analyst Billy Packer said the Patriots didn't deserve to get an at-large bid.

The Patriots shot 59 percent against Michigan State and two nights later shocked defending national champion North Carolina in the second round.

They then beat Wichita State and eliminated tournament favorite UConn in the Elite Eight with an 86-84 overtime thriller before losing to eventual champion Florida.

Though it all, Larrañaga preached fun.

He organized a whiffle ball game in a hotel ballroom. He urged players to mingle with fans during practices.

That lively atmosphere continues with this Miami team as it prepares for Friday night's game. On Wednesday night, the coach held two team-bonding activities at the hotel.

One was a gameshow between the big men and the guards consisting of questions about the Michigan State scouting report. In the other, each player had to turn to a teammate and tell him something he appreciates about him.

The Kansas Jayhawks are the top overall seed in the Midwest region - where the Miami Hurricanes also reside. Get to know the 17 teams in the region. Only four of them will make it to next week's regional in Kansas City.

Neil Nakahodo The Kansas City Star

"Coach is still saying the same thing he told that George Mason team — 'Seize the moment, have a lot of fun,' " said UM assistant coach James Johnson, who was on Larrañaga's Patriots staff, as was UM associate head coach Chris Caputo. "Preparing for Michigan State has been similar to back then, too, because it's still Tom Izzo, still a great rebounding team, they still push the ball in transition."

Larrañaga and his players were loose at their public practice on Thursday before heading to the University of Tulsa gym (home of Larrañaga's UM predecessor, Frank Haith) for a private workout.

"What I really enjoyed was walking out on the practice court [Thursday] with our UM band playing a Gloria Estefan song, 'The Rhythm is Gonna Get You,' because the second I heard that ... knowing our team is representing our university and city, competing against Tom Izzo and the great tradition he's built at Michigan State, it's very exciting and I want our guys to enjoy it," Larrañaga said.

Like his Patriots in 2006, these Hurricanes feel they have something to prove despite a résumé that includes signature wins over North Carolina, Duke and Virginia. When the bracket was announced, TV analyst Seth Davis said he was looking forward to the second-round matchup between Michigan State and Kansas.

"I guess he hasn't seen us play," Larrañaga shouted into the microphone at the selection watch party.

The coaching matchup is one of the key

storylines of Friday night's game. Larrañaga, 67, and Izzo, 62, go back more than three decades. Asked about their relationship Thursday, Larrañaga regaled reporters with a 1986 recruiting tale.

"I took the head coach job at Bowling Green State University in 1986 and Tom was an assistant at Michigan State at the time," Larrañaga said.

"My first encounter with them was when we identified a player named Steve Smith, who was out of Detroit. ... My staff and I started recruiting him very, very hard."

"We went to Steve's home in September of his senior year, offered Steve a scholarship, and he told me he was seriously considering Bowling Green unless — I said, 'Unless what?' He said, 'Unless Michigan State offers me a scholarship because they're my favorite. Magic Johnson is my hero and if they offer me, that's where I'm going.'"

Larrañaga lost that battle but has beaten Izzo the past two times they played — with George Mason in the 2006 tournament and with UM in the 2012 ACC-Big Ten Challenge in Coral Gables, the only meeting between the schools.

Izzo joked that maybe being a lower seed this time "is good luck, because we were the higher seed then. Jim's a good coach, he's a guy I've known for a long time, a good guy. He's done a good job there. But it's OK not to like him for a weekend."

Former OSU forward Murphy ‘valued more’ and thriving at Miami

OSU Sports Extra
Cody Stavenhagen
March 16, 2017

Miami forward Kamari Murphy did a double-take on Selection Sunday when he saw his first-round game appear on the TV screen.

Murphy wasn't so shocked at the opponent, Michigan State. He was more surprised at the location.

"I didn't think I would ever come back here," Murphy said of coming to Oklahoma.

Murphy, a fifth-year senior, spent the first two years of his college career at Oklahoma State, where he played alongside Marcus Smart on two NCAA Tournament teams.

Murphy started 15 games as a freshman in 2012-13 and took on an even bigger role as a sophomore after Michael Cobbins tore his Achilles midseason. Murphy started 21 games that year and averaged 6.1 points, as well as a team-best 6.3 rebounds and 1.2 blocks.

But after the Cowboys took a late-season nosedive and got bounced from the tournament in the first round for a second consecutive year, Murphy was part of a serious overhaul.

While Smart and Markel Brown headed for the NBA, assistant coach Steve Middleton was fired. Middleton was vital in Murphy's recruitment, and after his departure, Murphy announced he was transferring from Travis Ford's OSU program.

Although Murphy still might have played a big role on more recent OSU teams, he has no regrets about leaving.

"Right now I got a lot more confidence than when I played back then," Murphy said Thursday in the Miami locker room. "Back then, I think I had a lot of restrictions on my game. We had a good team, but individually I wasn't happy with how I was playing and stuff like that."

It was never any secret that Murphy didn't love his "junkyard dog" role at OSU. Often asked to play the center spot and focus on defense and rebounding, Murphy is now more active offensively and can play on the perimeter.

His numbers haven't changed all that much — he averaged 5.6 points and six rebounds last season and 7.3 points and 7.5 points this year — but Murphy says he's now more comfortable in his game than ever.

"I'm definitely valued more, I would say here," Murphy said. "Coaches believe in me more here. And that's all I needed, was coaches who believed in me and gave me that confidence."

Murphy has also blossomed into a top-notch defender, so much so that Miami coach Jim Larrañaga thinks Murphy was snubbed from postseason awards.

"(Davon Reed) and Kamari Murphy, two of the best leaders I've ever had, and they've done it by example, by how hard they practice every day, the consistency of their effort and execution," Larrañaga said. "... I believe Kamari Murphy should have been the (ACC) Defensive Player of the Year. That's how good I think he is defensively. He didn't even make the All-Defense team."

Murphy said he still keeps in touch with the likes of Smart, Brown and Le'Bryan Nash, and he's also enjoyed keeping tabs

on former young OSU teammates Jeffrey Carroll and Leyton Hammonds.

"I watch them, I'm like, 'Wow, I would have never thought,'" Murphy said. "When we were playing it was like, they were quiet, they were new to college basketball. Now Jeff is a big-time scorer. Leyton, one of the good senior leaders on that team."

Murphy said he received a few texts and has some old friends he hopes to see this week in Tulsa, but he admits it's strange being back. And after getting used to Miami, the Brooklyn native does not miss the hot-and-cold Oklahoma weather.

"I didn't think I would be back any time soon, but the only thing I can think about is the good times I had at Oklahoma State," Murphy said. "... It feels good to be back. Thought a lot about my old friends and stuff at Oklahoma State, but I'm more focused on the games we have now."

Although it seems fifth-year OSU guard Phil Forte has been around forever, Murphy has been around just as long. And like Forte, Murphy is now preparing to play in his fourth NCAA Tournament.

Last season, Murphy and the Hurricanes made the Sweet Sixteen. He'll look to start another run at 8:20 p.m. Friday against Michigan State.

"We haven't been as good as the team at Oklahoma State — we was like top-three in the country at one point," Murphy said. "But we were very close to it. We went further in the tournament with Miami. I'm very happy with these guys. I'm happy here."

Coach L Looking To Put The Finishing Touches On His Best Job Yet

State of the U
David Perez
March 16, 2017

On Friday night, the Miami Hurricanes will have their toughest first round NCAA tournament matchup of the Larrañaga era.

After a sweet 16 run in 2016, Miami will look to get through Michigan State and make it to the round of 32 this weekend.

Entering as an 8 seed, the 'Canes aren't favored by many to make a tournament run. If Miami is able to move past Michigan State they will in all likelihood face off against #1 seed Kansas for a slot in the Sweet 16.

But despite the fact that Miami has a much more difficult road than in the past, Larrañaga's coaching job this season has been more impressive than any other year at Miami.

With four empty scholarships, three departing starters, and an 8 man rotation, the odds were stacked up against the 'Canes in 2016-17. At the start of the year even Larrañaga questioned whether the team would make the tournament.

"Not after the first couple practices when I saw how far we had to go to really become the kind of team that could compete with the best teams in the country," Larrañaga told the Miami Herald. "Which is what you have to if you're going to compete in the ACC."

After an early season stumble in the Advocare Invitational that included losses to Iowa State and Florida, Miami found themselves far away from the top 25. The 'Canes bounced back with a win against Rutgers, but with no signature wins entering conference play, optimism

was diminishing.

And after a heartbreaking last-second loss at home to Notre Dame, the theme of inconsistency continued to plague Miami.

Once the 'Canes took down #9 North Carolina at home, however, things began to take a turn. Miami went 6-2 in their next 8 games, and won their first matchup of the ACC tournament for the 8th straight season.

"After the non-conference, things really started to change," Larrañaga told the Miami Herald. "Our focus defensively became much better. Our offense, although sporadic and we still turn the ball over a little too much, we started to do some things offensively that I liked. Meaning our young guys started to contribute more at the offensive end, meaning guys like DJ Vasseljevic, Bruce Brown, Ebuka Izundu, Anthony Lawrence. When I saw that coming on, I thought we really had a chance."

The 'Canes took down Georgia Tech, Clemson, Virginia, and Duke during a 10 day period, and were settled in with their rotation.

Although Ja'Quan Newton's turnovers continued to be an issue, his scoring was where it needed to be, and freshman Bruce Brown began to hit his stride. Seniors Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy continued to be more reliable than ever, and Miami found themselves securely in the tournament.

"We really had only nine scholarship guys this year," Larrañaga told the Miami Herald. "There were games we only had seven. We had one player suspended for three games and we won those three games. We've overcome a lot of

adversity and are hitting our stride right now and hopefully we'll play very well on Friday night."

To Win in March, CanesHoops Must Rely on its Upperclassmen

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
March 16, 2017

Seniors Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy, as well as junior Ja'Quan Newton, have extensive NCAA tournament experience, with each playing significant roles on last year's Sweet 16 team. Murphy will become the first Miami player to play in four NCAA tournaments, after playing extensive minutes for Oklahoma State in his two seasons in Stillwater. Hurricanes sophomores Anthony Lawrence and Ebuka Izundu also return to the NAAs, though Izundu never saw the floor and Lawrence averaged about 12 minutes per game during the run. This experience will be vital to Miami making it out of the first round and potentially upsetting a number one seed in the second round. Reed has been highly consistent throughout his Miami career, and this season has been no exception, with the all-conference performer leading the team in scoring and 3-point shooting both in and out of conference (15 points per game overall). Newton was second in scoring at 13.4 ppg, and led the team in assists (3.4), while Murphy led the team in rebounding (7.5) and consistently improved his jump shot as the season wore on.

Cleaning the glass and playing tough defense has been the key to many of Miami's wins this year, the team's defense is lead by All-Defensive team performer Reed and Murphy, who garnered votes for Defensive Player of the Year but did not make the team itself. Coach Jim Larrañaga said on Selection Sunday that Michigan State reminds him of a familiar ACC opponent. "There's two programs that pride themselves on scoring, even after you score, within the first five seconds. The two best teams in the country that do this are North Carolina and Michigan State." Miami's defensive

specialists will most certainly match-up against the Spartans' two best players, combo forward Miles Bridges (6'7", 230 lbs) and power forward Nick Ward (6'8", 250 lbs), both of whom are freshmen. Bridges is MSU's leading scorer and rebounder, averaging 16.7 points and 8.3 boards per game, and will certainly be a handful for the 6'6", 220 -pound Reed. Ward is susceptible to foul trouble, and so goes Sparty's fortunes when he is on the bench. If an assertive Murphy and aggressive guards can get Ward off the court, it should give the Hurricanes more room to maneuver.

After big games against North Carolina and Duke propelled him into the spotlight, many expect Miami to match with their own freshman sensation, Bruce Brown. However, the key will be Ja'Quan Newton and whether he is able to control the game without the ball sticking in his hands. Newton has been highly inconsistent this year, exacerbated by a late season suspension and poor play following his return. If Newton can pick his spots and get his teammates involved in the offense, Miami should be in great shape to emerge victorious. If he can become the model of consistency that his fellow tri-captains Reed and Murphy are, Miami has a chance to be very dangerous from the eighth seed beyond Friday night.

*A tip of the hat to SOTU's CanesHoops Consigliere, Josh Frank aka @JoshDaCane for his insights and skillz in helping to craft this piece.

Hurricanes veteran Murphy back in Oklahoma and tough as ever

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 16, 2017

No Hurricane has appeared in more NCAA Tournaments than fifth-year senior forward Kamari Murphy, who made the dance twice at Oklahoma State before transferring to Miami. He will start his fourth appearance 70 miles east of where he spent the first two years of his college career.

“I’m a city kid,” he said. “I didn’t really miss Oklahoma like that.”

Murphy, a Brooklyn native, originally wanted to sign with Miami out of Bradenton-IMG Academy in 2012, but the NCAA cloud hovering over the program convinced him to go west.

He started 15 games as a Cowboys freshman in 2012-12, and shouldered more of a load as a sophomore because of injuries to others. He started 21 games and led the team in rebounds (6.3) and blocks (1.2), chipping in 6.1 points.

He has fit the same defense-and-dunks profile at Miami, though his defensive game greatly improved — coach Jim Larrañaga was disappointed Murphy wasn’t an ACC All-Defensive team selection — and is as confident as ever in his jump-shooting. He scored in double figures in six of his previous 10 games, a reason why he’s on pace for career bests in points (7.3), as well as rebounds (7.5). He is also shooting free throws at the best clip of his career (61.2).

He’s one of two seniors, along with Davon Reed, leading Miami into its first-round matchup with Michigan State on Friday (9:20 p.m.).

“I’m just showing them how it’s going to be on and off the court,” he said. “Teams are going to go on runs in the tournament games. Everybody’s going to bring their best game. You’ve got to be poised in those situations.”

Along with forward Anthony Lawrence Jr., he’ll be a big part of Miami’s defense against Michigan State’s Nick Ward, who is a load in the post at 6-foot-8 and 250 pounds. The smaller, quicker Murphy (6-8, 220) said he planned to “give him different things to think about” with how he defended him. If he can keep Ward (13.7 points, 6.5 rebounds) from getting comfortable on the block, he’ll be in good shape.

“He’s a big kid,” Murphy said. “But I’ve never been bullied. I don’t plan on being bullied.”

Larrañaga recalls the time Tom Izzo took Steve Smith from him

MLive
Nick Bsumgardner
March 16, 2017

Most people see the names Tom Izzo and Jim Larrañaga and think of Michigan State and George Mason.

But Larrañaga thinks of a different name.

Steve Smith.

Larrañaga -- who will lead No. 8-seeded Miami against No. 9 Michigan State on Friday during an opening-round NCAA Tournament game in Tulsa -- spent some time Thursday recalling the time he first encountered Izzo some three decades ago.

Like most coaching relationships, it happened on the recruiting trail.

"I took the head coach job at Bowling Green State University in 1986 and Tom was an assistant at Michigan State at the time. And my first encounter with them was when we identified a player named Steve Smith, who was out of Detroit, and my staff and I watched him play. We started recruiting him very, very hard," Larrañaga said. "And we went to Steve's home in September of that senior year of his (at Pershing). And at that point in time, we offered Steve a scholarship and he told me he was going to visit, that he was very seriously considering Bowling Green, unless -- I said, 'what do you mean, Steve? Unless what?'"

"He said, 'unless Michigan State offers me a scholarship because they're my favorite. Magic Johnson is my hero and if they offer me that's where I'm going.' "

Smith, of course, made good on his word as he became one of the best college basketball players in Michigan State

history during a career that ran from 1987-91.

Eventually, he became a two-time All-American, an NBA All-Star and the man whose \$2.5 million donation built Michigan State's Clara Bell Smith Student Athlete Academic Center in 1997.

Too bad for Larrañaga, of course.

There is another Izzo-Larrañaga connection this week, though. Stan Heath.

Izzo hired Heath away from Larrañaga's Bowling Green State program as an assistant coach in 1996 -- his second season as MSU's head coach.

Heath, of course, would play a key role in the Spartans' rise under Izzo -- as he was a member of the 2000 national championship staff.

Smith, though, is probably the more entertaining story.

"I think he saw Steve play that next weekend (after I offered him) and Steve had like 47 points, and he went to Steve's home by himself, without coach (Jud) Heathcote and offered him the scholarship. And I believe, if I heard the story correctly, Steve Smith committed to him on the spot," Larrañaga recalled. "My Bowling Green team played against Michigan State several times, and then when Tom was named the head coach, I just was so impressed with the job he did immediately. He just took them to a whole other level.

"I've known Tom an awfully long time and have the utmost respect for him."

Larrañaga's connections to MSU go way back

Detroit News
Matt Charboneau
March 16, 2017

Back in the late 1980s, Jim Larrañaga was the coach at Bowling Green and had his eye on a wiry guard from Detroit named Steve Smith.

Smith was a raw talent at the time playing at Pershing High and Larrañaga was putting in plenty of work. As Larrañaga recalled it on Thursday afternoon, he offered Smith a scholarship and got a positive response. Well, sort of.

"We offered Steve a scholarship and he told me he was going to visit, that he was very seriously considering Bowling Green," Larrañaga said, "unless ... I said, 'What do you mean, Steve? Unless what?'"

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"He said, 'Unless Michigan State offers me a scholarship because they're my favorite. Magic Johnson is my hero and if they offer me that's where I'm going.'"

There began the relationship between Larrañaga and Tom Izzo, an assistant for Jud Heathcote at Michigan State. As Larrañaga recalls it, Izzo visited Smith a week later and offered a scholarship that was accepted on the spot by Smith, who went on to score 2,263 points for the Spartans, the second-most in program history.

Fast forward 30-some years and the two are ready to square off, this time on the court as No. 8 Miami takes on No. 9 Michigan State at approximately 9:20 Friday night at the BOK Center in the Midwest Region of the NCAA Tournament.

Season of new experiences has MSU ready for big stage

"Jim is a good coach, he's a guy that I've known for a long time, a friend of mine, a good guy," Izzo said. "He's done a good job there, but it's OK not to like him for a

weekend."

The connections don't end with the Smith recruitment. From 1994-96, Stan Heath was an assistant to Larrañaga at Bowling Green before heading to Michigan State as an assistant for Izzo. From there, Heath went on to become the head coach at Kent State, Arkansas and South Florida.

"And then five years later they won the national championship together," Larrañaga said. "And that got Stan's head coaching career started and jumped from Michigan State to Kent State. So known Tom an awfully long time and have the utmost respect for him."

While those stories aren't as well-known, everyone knows about the on-court matchups between Izzo and Larrañaga. Miami beat Michigan State in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge in 2012, but it was back in 2006 when the coaches squared off in the NCAA Tournament that generates most of the buzz.

Michigan State vs. Miami (Fla.): Who has the edge?

That was the year Larrañaga took 11th-seeded George Mason to the Final Four, a run that started by beating No. 6 Michigan State in the first round.

"Tom and I have never discussed it, but the media tends to bring it up a lot," Larrañaga said with a laugh. "But that's in the past. Has nothing to do with tomorrow night's game. It's Michigan State against the University of Miami, and both of us, I think, recognize we have young clubs. We have a lot of young guys making major contributions, and I'm sure we're both hopeful that those young guys will play up to their capability."

Brief stay in Tulsa

This isn't Izzo's first trip to Tulsa. In fact, he's worked here before, even if for only seven weeks.

It was back in 1986 when Izzo left his part-time coaching spot for Heathcote at Michigan State to be a full-time assistant for J.D. Barnett at the University of Tulsa. However, after just seven weeks, a full-time spot opened at Michigan State after Mike Deane left to be the head coach at Siena College.

Heathcote brought Izzo back, a move that clearly turned out to be the right one.

"I'm sure I'll remember maybe one restaurant, if it's still there," Izzo said this week.

When the Spartans arrived in town on Wednesday night, Izzo told a local TV station he still keeps in touch with Barnett.

"Anytime I go back I have to talk to the coach I worked for," Izzo told News on 6 sports. "Today I called J.D. Barnett, who's down in Texas. We reminisced a little bit. There will be a couple people around that I probably remember. But this is about business for us now. I'm not worried about my social life."

Miami's main men

Both Michigan State and Miami rely on young players, but the Hurricanes have some experience to lean on, far more than the Spartans.

Senior Davon Reed is the leading scorer at 15 points a game while second-leading scorer Ja'Quan Newton is a junior. And fifth-year senior Kamari Murphy is the team's top defender while grabbing 7.5 rebounds a game.

"I think it's the reason we're here," Larrañaga said. "We wouldn't be where we are and our young players would not have developed the way they have if it weren't for those two guys and the message they sent from day one about the importance of defending and rebounding."

Larrañaga Is No Stranger To Making Tournament Magic

CBS
J.T. Wilcox
March 16, 2017

When the University of Miami hired Jim Larrañaga to be its head basketball coach back in 2011, it seemed like a match made in heaven.

Up to that point in his career, Larrañaga was thought of as a coach who “did more with less” – spending the first 25 years of his career at “mid-major” programs and out of the traditional college basketball spotlight – but was held in pretty high regard around the country.

Miami, a football-centric school that dabbled in the basketball arts from time to time, wanted to wipe the slate clean of the Frank Haith era and bring in a coach that could truly tap into the hoops potential that the program had.

Fast forward six years and Larrañaga has positioned Miami to earn a consistent seat at the ACC’s “big boy table” and will lead the Hurricanes to their third trip into the NCAA Tournament this Friday when they square off against No. 9 seed Michigan State in Tulsa, Oklahoma’s BOK Center.

In his tenure as the Canes head coach, Larrañaga has posted a 139-68 record – good for the best winning percentage (.671) mark of any hoops coach (with at least 100 games coached) in the program’s history.

But, where Larrañaga leaves his best mark is postseason play.

Prior to his coming to Coral Gables, Larrañaga coached at George Mason for 14 seasons. While there, his teams won less than 16 games only once – his first season in 1997-98 – won three conference championships and turned

the basketball world on its ear in 2005-06 when he led the Patriots to the Final Four.

Larrañaga’s George Mason team entered the 2006 tournament as a No. 11 seed and had one of the toughest roads to victory out of any team on the bracket.

Their run began with an upset of Michigan State (goosebumps) – Larrañaga’s first NCAA tournament win – and continued through the second round, where George Mason knocked off defending champion North Carolina.

George Mason then defeated Wichita State in the Elite Eight and upset regional top seed UConn to advance to the Final Four.

The Patriots’ dream season ended in the Final Four when Larrañaga’s squad was overwhelmed by eventual champion Florida.

Still, it was the greatest season in George Mason’s history and showed both the coaching and motivating chops that Coach L possesses.

It’s been reported that during the run to the Final Four, Larrañaga told his George Mason players during the game against North Carolina that “their fans think they’re superheroes. Our fans know we’re kryptonite.”

As well as motivating his players during the game against Connecticut by telling them that the UConn players didn’t know what conference George Mason was in and that “on this day ‘CAA’ stood for ‘Connecticut Assassins Association.’”

George Mason played in the Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) during Larrañaga’s time there. The school has since moved into the Atlantic 10.

That kind of magic still lies within Larrañaga. He’s done similar things to motivate the Hurricanes – including dancing with the team in the locker room after big wins. Even in 2014-15 when the Canes failed to make the Big Dance, Larrañaga led UM to the championship round of the NIT – before they fell to Stanford in an overtime game in Madison Square Garden.

Coach L will have to work his magic again this season if the Canes are to advance to the Sweet 16 for the third time under his leadership.

The road begins Friday against a Michigan State team that is a bit better than its 19-11 record would say and if Miami comes out victorious there – it would very likely see regional No. 1 seed Kansas in the second round.

This Miami team did post another 20-win season but it’s safe to say that Larrañaga has done “the most with the least” given the team only boasts nine scholarship players and typically had a rotation of about seven players.

“This was a special year for me and the staff and the players,” Larrañaga told reporters before the team left for Oklahoma.

“Going into the season with six very inexperienced players and only three veterans...we really had only nine scholarship guys this year. There were games we only had seven. We had one player suspended for three games [Ja’Quan Newton] and we won those three games. We’ve overcome a lot of adversity and are hitting our stride right now and hopefully we’ll play very well on Friday night.”

Freshmen Sensations: how youngsters could determine Miami-MSU

State of the U Cam Underwood March 15, 2017

In today's age of college basketball, freshmen are more important than ever. With the NBA's rule that players must be 1 year removed from HS before entering the NBA draft, top talents now come to college for a year (or more) before making the lap to the pros.

For both Miami and Michigan State, freshmen not only play a big role on the court, but they are the players who figure to be difference makers in this opening NCAA tournament game.

The Superstars

Both Miami and Michigan State have superstar freshmen who came to campus with a world of ability. Both 5-star recruits were among the best players in the 2017 recruiting class, and have been leaders on the court for their respective teams.

Miami: Bruce Brown

A 20-year-old freshman, Brown may be the older of these 2 standout players, but he has a lot of game at his disposal. Brown, who has started 28 of Miami's 32 games on the year, enters the NCAA tournament with season averages of 11.9 points, 5.8 rebounds, and 3.2 assists.

A powerfully built slashing player, Brown's shooting numbers (.458 FG%, .348 3FG%, .748 FT%) are solid, but not great. Brown is a streaky shooter who is MUCH better in catch-and-shoot situations than pullups off the dribble, and is better classified as a "scorer" than "knockdown shooter".

At 6'5" 190lbs, Brown is well built, and uses his chiseled frame well. He had a triple double against South Carolina State — 11 points, 11 rebounds, and 10 assists in 30 minutes — the first for a Canes player since 2004, earlier in the year, and has multiple 20 point games. Brown has scored in double figures in 20 of Miami's 32 games so far this season, and his 3 highest scoring games came against Duke (25 points) and North Carolina (21 points and 30 points). Through the latter part of the regular season, the Miami offense ran better with Brown as the initiator, a testament to his importance.

On top of those offensive stats, Brown is a tenacious defender, with a team-high 46 steals on the season. Brown's size and length is an asset against smaller guards, and he can disrupt offensive sets with both his on-ball pressure and off-ball anticipation in the passing lane.

Brown has the talent to be taken in the teens-to-20s in the NBA draft (Brown's Draft Express player profile is a testament to that), and has single handedly won games for Miami this season. His talent is exceptional, and Miami will need his A-game on Friday night.

Michigan State: Miles Bridges

A National top 5 player in the 2016 recruiting class, Miles Bridges has all the talent in the world. He was one of the most highly sought after recruits in the Country, and wit good reason: he can hoop.

Bridges is a wing who plays anywhere between shooting guard, small forward, and power forward for the Spartans At 6'6" 230lbs, Bridges is a powerfully built lefty with skills to impact the game on both ends.

To this point of his freshman season, Bridges has per-game averages of 16.7 points, 8.3 rebounds, 1.6 assists, and 1.6 blocks, with a shooting line of .481 FG%, .388 3FG%, and .687 FT%. Bridges is Michigan State's leader in points and rebounds, which is a testament to his talent and versatility.

Bridges is unquestionably the most talented and most important player for the Spartans. Despite missing 6 games with a leg injury, Bridges has been MSU's leading scorer 15 times, leading rebounder 16 times, and was tied for the lead in points and rebounds twice each.

Widely considered a top 10 NBA draft prospect (here's his Draft Express player profile), Bridges is the kind of talent who can take over a game by sheer force of will. Miami will need to focus on limiting his effectiveness, a task that is much more easily said than done.

More than meets the eye

While Brown and Bridges are the top freshmen for their respective teams, there are others who figure to play a big role in deciding Miami-Michigan State on Friday night.

For Miami, the pair of G Dejan Vasiljevic and F Dewan Huell will need to make their presence felt.

An Australia native, Vasiljevich is the best shooter on Miami's roster and a dead-eye shooter from 3pt range. He has had several games with multiple 3FGs this year, including 6 3's at Syracuse in January. If you give him a sliver of daylight, Vasiljevich is going to shoot the ball, usually with good success. Vasiljevich can be a streaky shooter, however, so if he makes his first one, watch out....and if he misses his first one, watch out as well.

Vasiljevich has improved off the dribble this year, but spotting up from deep is his best game. On defense, Vasiljevich is a bit of a liability, with teams targeting him in pick and roll situations due to his limited lateral agility.

A 5-star recruit from local Norland HS, Huell has yet to live up to that billing. He has good size and length at 6'10", but has yet to really have a breakout game. Right now, Huell is mostly hustle (he runs like a wing player much smaller than 6'10" 215lbs) and length.

Huell flashes effectiveness as a roll man in PnR, but could improve as a rebounder and post defender. A 2016 McDonald's All-American, Huell stepping his

game up in the NCAA tournament would be a big win for Miami.

For Michigan State, the pair of F Nick Ward and G Cassius Winston have been standout players throughout the 2016-17 season.

A stout post player, Ward is MSU's most consistent offensive player. With per-game averages of 13.7 points, 6.5 rebounds, and 1.6 blocks, Ward is an impact player, and statistically the 2nd best player for Michigan State behind Bridges. A crafty lefty in the mold of former MSU star Zach Randolph, Ward isn't an explosive athlete, but that doesn't stop him from being a tough matchup night in and night out. Ward has a knack for drawing fouls and getting to the FT line. Ward averages 6 FT a game, far and away the most by any MSU player. That is a testament to Ward's ability to create contact and draw fouls, which is something that can create problems for opposing teams.

Ward has been a steady player for MSU this year. He has led the team in points 7 times, and rebounds 12 times. He tied with Bridges for the lead in points and rebounds 2 times each. Between the pair, either Bridges or Ward led Michigan State in points in 25 of 33 games, and led in rebounds in 29 of 33 games.

Like Randolph before him, Ward lacks length and athleticism, which can be exploited on both the offensive and defensive ends of the floor.

An alum of my cousins' alma mater — University of Detroit Jesuit HS — PG Cassius Winston is a player who has come along in his freshman year. He's the backup point, but he has an impact on the game. Winston 6.7 points and a team-leading 5.1 assists in only 20 minutes a night. Winston's assist rate is a nation-leading 46.9% — 4% higher than the next closest player. So, suffice it to say that when it comes to facilitating an offense, there is literally no player in America better than Winston. Those assists are great, but the turnovers — 2.2 per game — are not. And, Winston is nowhere near the same player on the road as he is at home:

[View image on Twitter](#)

Winston can be impacted by pressure defense at times, and he himself is not a great defender due to limited athleticism. Look for Miami's dribble drive and PnR offense to go right at the freshman when he's in the game.

Between Miami and Michigan State, there a 6 key freshmen who will have a major part in determining the outcome of the game.

And, for this Hurricanes fan, here's hoping the trio of Brown, Huell, and Vasiljevich outdoes the trio of Bridges, Ward, and Winston on Friday night.

Who else will impact this game? Find out as our NCAA tournament coverage continues on State of the U.

NCAA Tournament: Rankings the bracket's best 68 players

NBC Sports

Rob Dauster

March 15, 2017

The NCAA tournament kicks off in earnest on Thursday afternoon, and in honor of the 68 teams in the event, here are the 68 best players that you will see step on the floor this week:

No. 43 Davon Reed, Miami: The names people know on Miami are JaQuan Newton and Bruce Brown. Davon Reed is probably Miami's best player.

Off to Tulsa the Hurricanes go, loaded with dreams and snacks

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
March 14, 2017

Other than the small clot of reporters gathered by the bus, there was no indication the University of Miami men's basketball team was heading off to its biggest business trip of the season Tuesday morning.

The Hurricanes looked relaxed, like a team going to the NCAA Tournament for a second year in a row.

They loaded up the bus with luggage and snacks (Little Debbie Oatmeal Cream Pies and Nutty Buddies, Cheez-its, Oreos) and left to the airport to board a flight bound for Tulsa, Oklahoma, where they will play Michigan State at 9:15 p.m. Friday in the first round at the BOK Center.

Miami (21-11) is the No. 8 seed and Michigan State (19-14) is the No. 9 seed. The winner plays the winner of the game between top-seeded Kansas and either North Carolina Central or UC-Davis.

"When the NCAA Tournament begins, the message I send my team is there are 68 really good teams, some you don't think have a great chance of advancing to the Final Four, but if you come out of the ACC and you've competed against North Carolina and Duke and Florida State, you're ready to compete for a national championship," said UM coach Jim Larrañaga.

If anyone is qualified to offer tournament advice, it's Larrañaga.

He has led the Hurricanes to the Sweet 16 two of the past four years, and in 2006 led mid-major George Mason on its historic Final Four run (along with UM assistants Chris Caputo and James

Johnson, who were on his staff). In the first round, George Mason, an 11 seed, knocked off sixth-seeded Michigan State, which had played in the previous Final Four.

The Patriots went on to beat North Carolina in the second round, Wichita State in the Sweet 16, and top-seeded UConn in overtime in the Elite Eight before losing to the University of Florida in the semifinals.

Then, like now, Larrañaga insists that his players have fun. He certainly does, judging by his locker room dance moves and the size of his smile as he boarded the bus on Tuesday.

Asked if his team has a chip on its shoulder after T.V. analyst Seth Davis suggested the Hurricanes would lose in the first round, Larrañaga said: "I don't know if we have a chip on our shoulder as much as we're enjoying the journey. Practice these last few days has been terrific, the focus, enjoyment. They're having fun but working hard."

The Spartans had an up and down year, and were on the tournament bubble as of a few weeks ago, but the Hurricanes are well aware that Michigan State coach Tom Izzo is a legend, and that his players will be prepared.

"The Michigan State team runs so fast," Larrañaga said, singling out Bahamian-American point guard Lourawls "TumTum" Nairn. "Their point guard's nickname is TumTum, and he's about as fast a player as there is in the country. Nick Ward and Miles Bridges are about as good a 4-5 combination as there is in the country. Miles Bridges is a likely lottery pick when he turns pro. Nick Ward is No. 1 in the country in offensive rebound percentage and getting fouled.

So, they're a handful."

Australian UM freshman D.J. Vasiljevic is soaking in every minute of his first March Madness.

"It was exciting to be there at the Selection Show party," he said. "I watched last year from the couch back home, so just being there and knowing where we were going to go was fun..."

Everyone wrote us off at the beginning of the season, saying we're a bit too young and inexperienced but we've proven people wrong and we're just going to continue to prove them wrong from here."

NCAA Tournament butterflies? Learn from Michigan, Larrañaga says

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

March 14, 2017

For the second straight year, the Hurricanes are off to the NCAA Tournament.

But while that eventual Sweet 16 team was filled with experienced veterans, this time around, Miami's men's basketball team will put a core of young players on the floor. Two of those players were wrapping up their senior years of high school this time last year and the third watched Selection Sunday from home... in Australia.

Still, Miami's three freshmen — Bruce Brown, Dewan Huell and DJ Vasiljevic — all figure to log significant minutes Friday night when the Hurricanes open up tournament play against Michigan State in Tulsa, Okla.

But before heading to the airport to start their NCAA Tournament journey, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga said he wasn't worried the moment would be too big for his young players.

As he noted, playing against the likes of powerhouses Duke, North Carolina, and Virginia late in the season wasn't too much for the trio to handle.

And if by any chance, any of his players — including the veterans — are experiencing tournament butterflies, the coach says the Hurricanes can learn from one of Michigan State's biggest rivals — Michigan.

Last week, the Wolverines were on their way to the Big Ten Tournament when the plane they were on skidded off the runway and crashed into a fence.

None of the passengers on the plane, including the Wolverines players and staff, were seriously hurt. But there's no doubt the incident gave the team a scare.

Still, the Wolverines voted to fly to Washington, DC for the conference tournament instead of forfeiting their berth. And with their luggage stuck on the damaged plane, the team played its opening-round game — a 75-55 win over Illinois — in its practice uniforms.

The Wolverines went on to win the Big Ten title, their story capturing national attention and inspiring Larrañaga in the process.

“One of the things you can observe around the country is how different coaches and different teams respond to adversity,” Larrañaga said. “I’m so impressed with what [Michigan coach] John Beilein and the University of Michigan basketball team did after a near fatal accident. They came off of an airplane that could have ended all their lives. ... They had to play their first-round game in their practice gear. And not only did they play, but they played great and won by 20 points. Then they go on and win the tournament.

“You know, young kids are very resilient and I think when their mental approach and emotional approach is connected, you can accomplish great things and I think that’s what Michigan did in the Big Ten Tournament. I hope we can be that well-connected for the NCAA Tournament, I just hope we don’t have to go through a near-fatal accident to get there.”

That’s a sentiment likely being echoed around the country as the nation’s top men’s and women’s basketball teams begin their respective journeys to the

tournament games.

Off best UM coaching job, Larrañaga initially thought this wasn't NCAA Tournament team

Miami Herald
Barry Jackson
March 14, 2017

Early-morning chatter from UM as Canes players left campus en route to Tulsa for their NCAA Tournament game against Michigan State in Tulsa on Friday:

- Jim Larrañaga has done brilliant work at UM but this might be his best season, considering UM has no prototypical point guard, only nine scholarship players and only seven or eight who play and lost their three best players from last year's Sweet 16 team (Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan, Tonye Jekiri).

To make the NCAA Tournament with this group is remarkable.

Could Larrañaga have seen this coming?

"Not after the first couple practices when I saw how far we had to go to really become the kind of team that could compete with the best teams in the country, which is what you have to if you're going to compete in the ACC," he said.

"But after the non-conference, things really started to change. Our focus defensively became much better. Our offense, although sporadic and we still turn the ball over a little too much, we started to do some things offensively that I liked. Meaning our young guys started to contribute more at the offensive end, meaning guys like DJ Vaseljevic, Bruce Brown, Ebuka Izundu, Anthony Lawrence. When I saw that coming on, I thought we really had a chance. When we beat Georgia Tech, Clemson, Virginia and Duke in a 10-day period, I thought that was a really good sign we could be a postseason team."

- One goal for Larrañaga was to become a perennial NCAA Tournament team, or at least a program that made it most years. He's now done it three times in six years. I asked Larrañaga about the importance of making it in a year nobody expected.

"This was a special year for me and the staff and the players," he said. "Going into the season with six very inexperienced players and only three veterans. You can have six inexperienced players if you have four or five veterans. We really had only nine scholarship guys this year. There were games we only had seven. We had one player suspended for three games [Ja'Quan Newton] and we won those three games. We've overcome a lot of adversity and are hitting our stride right now and hopefully we'll play very well on Friday night."

- UM would need not only to beat Michigan State but likely pull off a stunning upset of Kansas to make its third Sweet 16 appearance under Larrañaga.

"The message I send my players on the team is there are 68 really good teams," he said. "Some teams you think don't have a great chance of advancing to the Final Four. But if you come out of the ACC and you've competed against North Carolina and Duke and Florida State, you're ready to compete for a national championship...."

"I don't know if we have a chip on our shoulder as much as we're enjoying the journey. Practice these last few days has been absolutely terrific. They're having fun but working really, really hard."

- Friday's Larrañaga/Tom Izzo coaching matchup is an interesting one.

"I've known Tom Izzo for more than 30 years. We compete at Bowling Green and then at George Mason, we played them twice. In our second year here, we played Michigan State. Tom Izzo, very much like the North Carolina system, they run so fast.

"Their point guard, Tum Tum [Nairn Jr.], is about as fast a player as there is in the country. Their 4 and 5 man, Nick Ward and Miles Bridges, are about as good a 4/5 combination as there is in the country. Bridges is a likely lottery pick when he turns pro. Nick Ward is No.1 in the country in

offensive rebound percentage and getting fouled. They're a handful."

- With Newton having nearly as many turnovers as assists (97-99), does the lack of a prototypical point guard affect how he runs his offense?

"Yes," Larrañaga said. "The answer to that is really as a coach, I evaluate what our strengths and weaknesses are, and then we try to enhance the strengths and minimize the weaknesses. We've elevated the responsibility of someone like Bruce Brown to help Ja'Quan with the role so that Ja'Quan doesn't have to do it for 40 minutes every game. I had no idea who could be the backup point guard when we started practice. We knew Ja'Quan would be given the ball and given the responsibility.

"When Davon Reed was a freshman, we even used him because we were shorthanded at the point but I never want to put Davon at the point this year because he's such a good 2/3 man, such a good wing player and I didn't want to take away from his strength because I thought he would need to be our leading scorer."

- Larrañaga said he's undecided if he will stick with a starting lineup of Newton, Reed, Brown, Anthony Lawrence and Kamari Murphy. That starting unit is 4-4. Izundu started ahead of Lawrence at times this season.

"That's a debate the coaches are having right now," Larrañaga said. "We're looking at the matchups, looking at what defense we might start in, looking at who would guard Nick Ward best, looking who would stay out of foul trouble guarding a player like Nick Ward, who draws so many fouls. We looked at different lineups yesterday."

Miami confident heading into tourney

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

March 14, 2017

A year ago, the Miami Hurricanes were one of the favorites to put together a deep NCAA Tournament run and the selection committee rewarded them with a No. 3 seed and an opening-round game in which they were the heavy favorite.

That's not quite the case this time around, but no matter. The Hurricanes are still playing and they'll be in college basketball's premier event.

During a Selection Sunday party on campus, Miami's men's basketball team learned it would open its NCAA Tournament run as a No. 8 seed in the Midwest Region and will head to Tulsa, Okla., where it will face No. 9 seed Michigan State in its opening round game on Friday.

Miami has faced Michigan State just once in program history, with the Hurricanes earning a 67-59 win on Nov. 28, 2012.

The Hurricanes will enter the tournament with a 21-11 overall record and posted a 14-2 record in ACC Conference play. This will be their third NCAA Tournament appearance under Larrañaga with the Hurricanes advancing to the Sweet 16 in both 2013 and 2016.

All time, Miami has posted an 8-8 mark in tournament play and a 4-2 record under Larrañaga.

Is it as ideal a draw as the Hurricanes would have liked? Probably not, especially with opening-round games being played just a few hours north of Miami's campus in Orlando. But the Hurricanes — who have played some of their best basketball late in the season

— are confident in their ability to extend their season, no matter where they play.

“Despite the fact the way we played today, this has been an outstanding defensive team. We've been very hard to score on. We have some guys that are just tremendous defensive players,” Miami coach Jim Larrañaga said after the Hurricanes' 78-53 loss to North Carolina in the ACC tournament last week. The guy sitting next to me, Kamari Murphy, is as good a defensive player as I've ever coached. He can do so many things at the defensive end of the floor. And Davon Reed is an All-Conference defensive player. Bruce plays very hard defensively.

I thought Ja'Quan Newton's defense yesterday on John Gillon was a big key. And if our young big guys come along and guard the basket for us a little bit better and rebound, I think that gives us a real chance against anybody. ... We're very capable of playing a whole lot better than we did. At the offensive end, we're not quite as consistent as we are defensively, and if we share the ball well and get some assists and don't turn it over very much, we'll be a tough team to beat.”

Reed Has Plenty To Gain In NCAA Tourney

CBS
J.T. Wilcox
March 14, 2017

You'd be going out on a pretty short limb if you called Davon Reed the Hurricanes' go-to guy.

Reed is one of the most experienced players on the roster; he has played in every game this season; he leads the team in points per game, and he could be called the team's best shooter – since he's tops in both free throw and three-pointer percentage.

While his resume is unquestioned in Coral Gables, the 6-foot-6 combo guard still has work to do in terms of impressing pro scouts.

With the eighth-seeded Canes getting ready to take on No. 9 Michigan State Friday night in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the opening round of the NCAA Tournament, Reed will have the chance to showcase his skills on a national stage.

Since arriving in Miami from his native Ewing, New Jersey and Princeton Day School, Reed has seen his game and role grow and mature each season.

After primarily coming off the bench during his freshman year, Reed began to show the skills that had him rated as the third-best player in New Jersey and 18th best at the 2-guard position coming out of high school and started carving out a niche in coach Jim Larrañaga's rotation.

Fast forward to the 2016-17 season and Reed has turned himself into a 15-point-per-game scorer while also snatching down five rebounds and dishing out two and a half assists a night – all career highs – and has definitely intrigued scouts.

Reed told UM's student newspaper – The Miami Hurricane – in January that he spent the offseason prior to his senior year fine-tuning his game. Also saying that he focused on improving “the little things” in his game and that he wanted to “step up as a leader as a returning upperclassman”.

It has worked.

“The senior swingman has the look of a three-and-D prospect with his improved offensive repertoire,” wrote one scout. “And his great athleticism and quickness give him upside defensively. I expect him to get plenty of looks.”

Better yet, Reed also manages to nab at least one steal per game – showing his commitment to the defensive end and fitting snugly into that “three-and-D” label.

Reed, however, is not a household name. Everyone will be paying attention to the likes of UCLA's Lonzo Ball, Kentucky's Malik Monk, Washington's Markelle Futz and Kansas' Josh Jackson over the course of The Big Dance.

However, Reed can steal some of the spotlight if he continues on his current arc.

Plenty of eyes will watch as the Canes battle with the perennially strong Spartans and their blueblood coach Tom Izzo.

People will be interested in seeing Michigan State's freshman sensation Miles Bridges, a 6-foot-7 wing with elite hops that averages a team-best 16.7 points, 8.3 rebounds and 1.6 blocks per game.

Reed will probably have more than his

fair share of opportunities to lock horns with Bridges one-on-one Friday night, thus making his performance against him paramount – not only for Miami but also for himself. The matchup will serve as a window into the future as the Spartans star represents a small sample of what awaits Reed in the NBA on a nightly basis.

As a junior, in three games of action during the 2016 NCAA tourney, Reed notched a double-double (10 points and 12 rebounds) against Buffalo and scored another 10 against Wichita State before being relatively ineffective during Miami's loss to eventual champion Villanova.

Though Reed started every game UM played in 2015-16 – something he's on track to do again in 2016-17 – he wasn't the go-to guy.

As a senior and as one of the team's captains, Reed's performance can almost be directly tied to the Canes' success.

Sure, a win Friday would more than likely mean a second-round matchup with Midwest No. 1 seed Kansas. But it would also mean another big stage and chance for Reed to prove himself.

Hurricanes have toughness that Michigan State lacks

Detroit Free Press

Chris Solari

March 14, 2017

Coach Tom Izzo learned plenty about Miami (Fla.) in the 36 hours after it was announced as Michigan State's opening opponent in the NCAA tournament.

The Hurricanes like to control the tempo, a negative for the Spartans' transition game. But they don't have a true post presence, a plus for undersized MSU.

Izzo also saw a glimpse of his own past in Jim Larrañaga's program.

"You know, we've always prided ourselves on being one of the tougher teams," Izzo said today. "We're not quite that this year, and this team is that."

The ninth-seeded Spartans (19-14) face No. 8 seed Miami in the first round of the NCAA tournament around 9:15 p.m. Friday in Tulsa, Okla. (TNT).

The Hurricanes (22-11) feature strong play from the trio of big guards, Davon Reed (15 p.p.g.), Ja'Quan Newton (13.4) and Bruce Brown (11.9). Newton, a junior point guard, is 6-feet-2. Reed — a third-team All-ACC selection as a senior — is 6-6. Brown, a freshman, is 6-5 and played against MSU's Miles Bridges and Cassius Winston in last year's Jordan Brand Classic.

Larrañaga told reporters Sunday that his relationship with Izzo "goes way back."

"He's a Hall of Fame coach, he's an absolutely great individual, a great leader in college basketball — not just for his program but, I think, in the nation," said Larrañaga, in his sixth season at Miami and 33rd as a head coach. "He's done a tremendous job of building a national

championship-caliber team every single year. And they have a very specific way they play."

During his 10 seasons at Bowling Green (1986-97), Larrañaga went 2-2 against Jud Heathcote's MSU teams that featured Izzo as an assistant. Izzo defeated Larrañaga's George Mason team during the 2004-05 season before getting shocked by the Patriots in the first round of the 2006 NCAA tournament, the start of a stunning Final Four run for Larrañaga.

Larrañaga took over the Hurricanes in 2011. MSU traveled to Miami and lost in the 2012-13 ACC/Big Ten Challenge, the only meeting between the schools.

Stopping MSU's transition game is one of Miami's primary objectives. Larrañaga compared the Spartans to North Carolina in how quickly they like to push tempo.

"When I talked to my team about preparing for North Carolina, I said the very first thing you have to do is prevent the five-second layup," Larrañaga said. "Because there's two programs that pride themselves, even right after you score, within the first five seconds — and the two best in the country, in my estimation, are North Carolina and Michigan State."

Izzo, in turn, said the Hurricanes' defensive toughness makes them difficult to run against. Miami defeated North Carolina, Duke and Virginia during the ACC regular season, and 10 of its losses came against teams in the NCAA field.

"The way they control the tempo, it's gonna be interesting to see if we can still run and get some, because they have done a pretty good job," Izzo said. "You know, they held Duke to 50 points. It's not like their field goal percentage

defense is that good. Somebody said they play like a very athletic and longer Wisconsin team, which means they can control what they want to control.

"Jim's a very good coach; he's done it at different levels. So they're playing that style with even better players. So that'll be a challenge."

A grab bag of things to know about Miami-Michigan State

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 13, 2017

The casual fan watching Miami-Michigan State may be interested in the sidelines. Jim Larrañaga and Tom Izzo have a combined 53 years of head coaching experience, and both have made their marks in March.

The on-floor matchups are similarly enticing.

Both teams are strong defensively and turnover-prone offensively. Neither team has great size or experience, but there's enough talent on the rosters to grab the attention of any NBA scout who tunes in.

A few appetizers in advance of what should be an 8-9 slugfest in Tulsa on Friday (approximately 9:20 p.m., TNT):

The best player in the game will probably be Michigan State freshman forward Miles Bridges, a projected first-round pick from Flint, Michigan. A 6-foot-7, 230-pound combo forward, Bridges is both the Spartans' leading scorer (16.7 points) and rebounder (8.3). He loves to rock the rim, but can finish off-balance, hit 3s (shooting 38 percent; averages two makes per game) and block shots (1.6). Stopping his downhill drives will be a challenge.

The best player in the game could also be Miami freshman guard Bruce Brown, who has proven he can take over against the best teams in the country. The 6-5 Boston native scored 30 points against North Carolina and 25 against Duke — both big home wins for the Hurricanes — and hit the winning 3 in UM's best road win, at Virginia. He's an electric athlete who fills up the box score when he's on his game. Like Bridges, he's never been

on this stage before.

Both teams are young. In addition to Bridges, the Spartans rely on freshman Nick Ward, a 6-8, 250-pound paint presence, and 6-foot freshman point guard Cassius Winston. The Hurricanes' most consistent players are two seniors, guard Davon Reed and forward Kamari Murphy, but wouldn't be here without Brown, 6-10 freshman Dewan Huell and sophomore forward Anthony Lawrence Jr., a versatile sub. Freshman sharpshooter D.J. Vasiljevic and sophomore center Ebuka Izundu have big roles off the bench.

The Hurricanes are the favorite as of Monday afternoon. Miami, which has a better record (21-11) than the ninth-seeded Spartans (19-14), had a 2-point edge according to VegasInsider. And there's this: according to ESPN, Michigan State was seeded too high. That outlet believes the Spartans' resume qualified it for a 12-seed, not a 9-seed. The Spartans have lost three of four and four of seven, and haven't won three games in a row since the early part of the Big Ten schedule. However, like Miami, its last three losses came away from home.

Both defenses are excellent. Miami ranks 20th in Ken Pomeroy's defensive efficiency metrics; Michigan State is 34th. They look similar, too: athletic on the wings, a lack of size in the middle. Of the 351 Division I teams, the Hurricanes rank 24th in points per game allowed and 48th in rebounding margin. The Spartans rank 32nd in blocks per game and 44th in defensive rebounds per game. Expect them to scrap for loose balls.

The offenses have their issues. On the other side of the statistical ledger, Miami has trouble sharing the ball (276th in assists) and is 252nd in assist-to-

turnover ratio. Michigan State commits a lot of turnovers (305th) and doesn't force many (320th). The Spartans are also prone to foul trouble (302nd in fouls per game). Miami could win the battle at the line; it ranks 11th in fewest fouls committed. When Michigan State does get to the line, it hits just 66 percent of its shots (287th). Miami is at 72 percent (118th).

Michigan State's motivation comes from two words: Middle Tennessee. Sparty's stunning first-round loss in last year's tournament, to 15th-seeded Blue Raiders, was arguably the biggest first-round upset in tournament history. Michigan State, the No. 2 seed, was expected to make a Final Four run. But the underdogs hit 58 percent of their threes. National player of the year candidate Denzel Valentine stumbled (13 points, six turnovers). In preseason interviews, Izzo said he regretted not calling timeout until Middle Tennessee led 15-2, as Sparty never recovered. However, only three players of a nine-man rotation saw action in that game. Maybe it's just Izzo who burns from that game.

Miami's motivation comes from two words: Michigan State. The Hurricanes made the Sweet 16 in two of the previous four seasons, but have a spotty tournament history and are forever forgotten in an ACC with bluebloods like Duke, North Carolina, Virginia and Syracuse. This is a reloading year, and they'd love to grab a statement win over a program making its 20th consecutive NCAA Tournament appearance.

Miami's Road To The NCAA Tournament

CBS Sports
Ryan Mayer
March 13, 2017

A roller-coaster season is the best way to describe the year for Jim Larrañaga's squad. The Hurricanes looked like world-beaters at times (wins over UNC, Duke and Virginia) and struggled mightily at others (losing four of six to begin ACC play). The team was built on a top-20 defense, with an offense that could be explosive when hitting shots, but that shooting was inconsistent throughout the year.

Preseason expectation: Six ACC teams were ranked ahead of Miami in both of the major polls heading into the season. (Miami was 31st in the AP poll and 29th in the Coaches poll.) The expectations for the 'Canes were even lower from media members within their own conference, who pegged them in preseason voting as the ninth-best team in the ACC. However, there were reasons to believe that Miami would outperform the expectations, even in a loaded conference. Miami lost seniors Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri from last year's team that lost to eventual national champion Villanova in the Sweet 16, but returned seniors Kamari Murphy and Davon Reed. Add in junior guard Ja'Quan Newton and a pair of four-star freshman recruits in guard Bruce Brown and forward Dewan Huell, and there looked to be plenty of weapons available.

November 24-27: Miami travels to Orlando, Florida for the AdvoCare Invitational where they square off with Stanford, Iowa State and in-state rival Florida. After beating Stanford 67-53, the 'Canes drop the next two match-ups against fellow tournament teams, scoring just 56 points in each outing. Miami shoots just 6-30 combined from three in the two games, showing signs of the inconsistent shooting that would plague them all season.

Key Dates: After the AdvoCare Invitational, Miami's non-conference schedule lightens considerably. The toughest match-up prior to ACC play comes when 2016 NIT champion George Washington calls on December 22nd.

The 'Canes dispatch the Colonials 72-64 behind the trio of Reed, Newton and Brown and proceed to beat Columbia to wrap up the out-of-conference slate on a six-game winning streak.

January 4: The Hurricanes travel to the Carrier Dome for an ACC match-up with Jim Boeheim's Syracuse team. Facing the Orange's vaunted 2-3 zone, the 'Canes shoot a respectable 11/26 (42.3%) from three but manage to shoot just 10/28 (35.7%) from inside the arc. The bright spot in the loss is freshman guard Dejan Vasiljevic, who hits six of his 12 three-point attempts and makes his case for more regular playing time. The loss starts a stretch of four losses in five games, leaving Miami in a 2-4 hole in conference.

January 28: Following a win against Boston College, Miami stares down its biggest test of the season thus far when the sixth-ranked North Carolina Tar Heels descend upon the Watsco Center, bringing with them one of the best offenses in the country. The Hurricanes shut down the vaunted Heels attack, holding Roy Williams' team to just 62 points on 35% shooting. Meanwhile, Bruce Brown explodes for 30 points on 8-of-11 shooting from the field, including 4-of-6 from three-point range, showcasing the potential that had Miami fans so excited about the freshman heading into the year.

February 11: The Hurricanes follow up the North Carolina win with a loss to in-state rival Florida State in their next game before recording a pair of victories against North Carolina State and Virginia Tech. That sets up a showdown with fourth-ranked Louisville on the road. The 'Canes are in the game, tied at 61 with 1:56 left, before recording a turnover, missed layup, and a missed free throw on their next three possessions. That allows Louisville to take a 66-62 lead from which Miami couldn't recover.

February 20 and 25: Miami rebounds nicely from the loss to Louisville with a pair of wins against Georgia Tech and Clemson. Awaiting the 'Canes are dates with Virginia on the road (Feb. 20) and Duke at home (Feb. 25).

To solidify their tournament resume, these two games are likely crucial. Miami enters the two-game stretch at 8-6 in conference, but getting to 10 wins would likely put them over the top. They do just that. In a pair of defensive slugfests, the Hurricanes hold their opponents to an average of 49 points, allowing each team to shoot just 31% from the field and 24% from three. In fact, over the last six games of the regular season, Miami holds their opponents to no more than 66 points.

March 8-9: Miami travels to Brooklyn for the ACC Tournament after dropping their final two conference games to Virginia Tech and Florida State. They draw Syracuse in the second round their bye by finishing eighth in the conference. The Hurricanes avenge the January 4 loss to 'Cuse with a 62-57 win, shooting much better and continuing their run of strong defensive play. This sets up a quarterfinal date with North Carolina. Continuing the season's theme, Miami's shooting deserts them, and the Tar Heels run away for an easy 78-53 win. The Hurricanes end the season with a 21-11 record (10-8 in ACC play).

The road ahead: The Hurricanes drew an eight-seed in the Midwest region, and their first-round opponent is the Big Ten's Michigan State Spartans, another team that's been up and down this season. The showdown is set for a 9:20 p.m. ET tip on Friday, March 17. If the Hurricanes advance, they would likely face number one-seed Kansas in the Round of 32 on Sunday.

UM men to open NCAA Tournament play against Michigan State

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

March 12, 2017

minutes after his team secured its second consecutive NCAA Tournament berth, Miami Hurricanes men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga stood, turned to face both his players and the fans gathered at a Selection Sunday watch party on Miami's campus and smiled.

"I don't know if you heard [CBS college basketball analyst] Seth Davis say he's looking forward to Kansas versus Michigan State in the next round," the Miami coach said, his back turned to the tournament bracket popping up on a large television screen behind him. "I guess he's never seen us play."

Unlike last year when the then third-seeded Hurricanes were one of the favorites to make a deep run in the tournament, this Miami team knows it is a bit of an underdog as it prepares for its opening-weekend game against Michigan State in Tulsa on Friday at 9:20 p.m.

The No. 8 seed in the Midwest Region, the young Hurricanes (21-11, 10-8 ACC) have taken their share of lumps this season. And as a program, the Hurricanes don't have the pedigree or tradition of the ninth-seeded Spartans (19-14, 10-8 Big Ten).

The Hurricanes, who grew up as they earned regular-season wins over ACC powerhouses North Carolina, Duke, and Virginia, are playing in college basketball's championship tournament. And they believe they can compete with anyone, Tom Izzo's Michigan State team included.

"I wouldn't even care if we were a ten

seed or whatever. As long as we're in the tournament, I'm happy," Hurricanes senior forward Kamari Murphy said. "I like the matchup. Michigan State has great basketball history, but I think it's time for people to put some recognition on Miami now."

Added fellow senior Davon Reed, "It's unfortunate that we're not really looked at as a basketball school or a powerhouse. But coach L is changing the mode of this program. He's doing a great job and I know he's going to continue to do a great job. But at the end of the day, we can't get too upset about it. We just have to continue to play great basketball. And we have a great coach, so we'll continue to do that."

The Hurricanes, who have made nine appearances in the tournament in program history, are set to make their third under Larrañaga, who is in his sixth season at Miami.

The Spartans, meanwhile, have played on this stage in each of the past 20 years. They've appeared in nine Final Fours, the most recent coming in 2015 when they fell in a national semifinal to eventual champion Duke.

The two teams have limited history, with Miami besting then 13th-ranked Michigan State 67-59 in their only matchup, an ACC/Big 10 Challenge game in 2012 during Larrañaga's second season at Miami.

Printable 2017 NCAA Tournament bracket
Printable 2017 NCAA Tournament bracket
The Hurricanes were unranked at the time of the win, but it served as notice they were a program to be taken seriously. They'd go on to win the ACC championship that season and make a run to the Sweet 16.

There's nothing Miami would like more than to duplicate that success again, knowing that a win over the Spartans – who this year, some considered a bubble team – would help continue to prove that they are a consistent program on the rise, a program worthy of respect outside of South Florida.

"We need to earn the respect of the national media and the committee if we're ever going to be mentioned as a team that [they] believe can move on," Larrañaga said. "Everyone's going to predict Kansas is going to move on, or Louisville is going on or Michigan State is going to move on because they've moved on so many times in the past. We're getting closer because our last two trips to the NCAA Tournament we've reached the Sweet 16."

Miami Hurricanes open with Michigan State in Tulsa

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
March 12, 2017

CORAL GABLES — Young roster. Lowered expectations.

Who cares. It's March, and Miami's dancing.

For the second year in a row and third time in five seasons, UM is heading to the NCAA Tournament.

The Hurricanes (21-11), reloading after graduating three key players from a Sweet 16 squad, were selected as an 8-seed in the Midwest Region. They will open with 9-seed Michigan State (19-14) on Friday in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Kansas (28-4) is No. 1 in the Hurricanes' bracket. On CBS's selection show, analyst Seth Davis offhandedly mentioned the possibility of a Michigan State-Kansas matchup in the second round. That comment drew catcalls from a watch party of about 200 at UM's on-campus Rathskeller bar.

During the commercial break, UM coach Jim Larrañaga rose from his seat in front of the big-screen TV, turned and addressed the crowd.

"I guess he's never seen us play," Larrañaga said, to loud applause.

He drew more cheers when said he hoped watch party attendees would either join them in Tulsa or cheer loudly at home — "so it'll be us vs. Kansas in the second round."

Meeting with reporters afterward, Larrañaga said Davis' comments would "give me ammunition to talk to my team about," he said. "There are certain programs in this country that demand a lot of respect. ... In the Big Ten, Michigan State is the premier program. They've been at the top of the national rankings, they've been to a lot of Final Fours, they've won a national championship under coach [Tom] Izzo. I think the media knows him and knows his program very, very well, and they give him a lot of respect."

That's exactly why junior point guard Ja'Quan Newton wants to beat them.

"They're always on TV, the commentators and stuff love them," he said. "I always wanted to play against a team like Michigan State, or Kansas. ... It's an opportunity. They said we were going to lose."

"Michigan State has some great basketball history," senior forward Kamari Murphy said, "but I think it's time to put some recognition on Miami now."

Of the Hurricanes, freshman guard Bruce Brown was best-suited to give a scouting report. Three of the Spartans' top four scorers are freshmen, and Brown played against all of them in elite prep showcases. He faced 6-foot-7, 230-pound forward Miles Bridges (team-best 16.7 points and 8.3 rebounds) in several tournaments, roomed with 6-8, 244-pound forward Nick Ward (13.7 points, 6.5 rebounds) at a Nike basketball camp in Los Angeles, and went head-to-head with 6-foot point guard Cassius Winston (6.7 points, 5.1 assists). He hasn't faced 6-3 senior Eron Harris (10.4 points), but may wind up guarding him.

"I feel like we're a really good team and people just don't watch us," Brown said. "But it's fine. We're playing on a big stage now and we have something to prove."

The Hurricanes have faced the Spartans once, and upset them. On Nov. 28, 2012, Larrañaga's unranked squad beat 13th-ranked Michigan State 67-59 in Coral Gables, as part of the Big Ten/ACC Challenge. The Hurricanes won their first ACC title later that year and reached the Sweet 16.

Like Miami, this year's Spartans went 10-8 in their conference (Big Ten). Their common opponents with Miami were Duke, which beat the Spartans 78-69 at home in the Big Ten/ACC challenge, and lowly Rutgers. Michigan State, like Miami, went 1-1 at its conference tournament; it beat Penn State and lost to Minnesota.

Izzo, who is 46-18 in 19 previous NCAA Tournament appearances, is in his 22nd year in Lansing. He won the national title in 2000 and reached the Final Four seven times, most recently in 2015.

"He's done a tremendous job of building a national championship caliber program every year," said Larrañaga, who also faced Izzo at Bowling Green and George Mason.

The Miami-Michigan State winner advances to a Sunday matchup, likely against top-seeded Kansas. In the 1-vs-16 matchup, Jayhawks face either North Carolina Central or UC-Davis on Friday.

In earning an 8-seed, Miami was rewarded for its signature wins over ninth-ranked North Carolina, 10th-ranked Duke and 18th-ranked Virginia. The Hurricanes' resume also lacked bad losses; they were 9-0 against teams below 150 in RPI, according to ESPN. The case against them included a non-conference schedule ranked 268th by ESPN and 4-10 record against the RPI top 50.

It's also hard to gauge how hot they are at the moment.

Miami has lost three of its last four, dropping its final two games of the regular season (at Virginia Tech, at 15th-ranked Florida State) and falling in the quarterfinals of the ACC Tournament to sixth-ranked North Carolina. It also grabbed a tough win over Syracuse in Brooklyn, and before its late-season funk beat Duke and Virginia (the latter of those two on the road) as part of a four-game winning streak.

"We're playing pretty good," Murphy said. "That last game against North Carolina, they were just clicking. They had everything going. We were slow on the defensive end. All I can say is we have a chemistry now. We just know we're playing for each other, we're playing for coach L, we're happy to make the tournament and we like our matchup."

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Canes players, and coaches, and an anthropomorphic bird, and cheerleaders, and fans. All waiting for the Sunday selections
5:11 PM - 12 Mar 2017
22 Retweets 18 18 likes
Leading scorer Davon Reed, a senior, averages 15 points per game and keys one of the better defenses in the tournament.

"We all think we need to share the ball better and get more assists each game, but our defense is great," Brown said. "When we're playing good defense, we get turnovers and get easy points in transition."

The Hurricanes also rely on Murphy (7.3 points, 7.5 rebounds) for defense and rebounding, and Brown

(11.9 points, 5.8 rebounds, 3.2 assists) for his all-around game. Brown shares ball-handling duties with Newton, who can be turnover-prone (3.3 per game) but is a talented scorer (13.4 points, 3.4 assists). Off the bench, sophomore forward Anthony Lawrence Jr. and freshman guard D.J. Vasiljevic can get hot from the outside. Freshman Dewan Huell and sophomore Ebuka Izundu provide minutes up front.

Miami was a 3-seed last year, when it lost 92-69 to eventual national champion Villanova in the Sweet 16 in Louisville. The Hurricanes, who went 27-8, lost leading scorer Sheldon McClellan, point guard Angel Rodriguez and center Tonye Jekiri.

This year's squad, which consists of nine scholarship players (four freshmen, two sophomores, a junior and two seniors), was expected to come together slowly. No player on the roster had precisely the same role as last year. But thanks in large part to steady play from Reed and Murphy and big-game heroics from Brown, UM went 10-8 in what is widely considered the best conference in the country.

"I think our young players have been coming on late, and our upperclassmen have been playing well the whole season," Larrañaga said.

UM ranks 20th in defensive efficiency, according to KenPom.com, and 68th in offensive efficiency. Michigan State is 66th in offense and 34th in defense. Both teams prefer to slow the tempo; according to KenPom, Miami ranks 338th of 351 Division I teams in tempo. Sparty is 241st.

In traveling some 1,500 miles to the BOK Center in Tulsa, the Hurricanes will take the longest trip of four Florida-based tournament teams.

Both Florida State (25-8) and Florida (24-8) were expecting high seeds and hoping to land in Orlando, one of eight sites for the opening weekend. They got their wishes. The Seminoles were a 3-seed, and play 14th-seeded Florida Gulf Coast at Amway Center on Thursday. The Eagles (26-7), a.k.a. "Dunk City," earned an automatic bid by winning the Atlantic Sun Conference.

The Gators made it as a 4-seed, and will play 12th-seeded East Tennessee State in Orlando on Thursday. Davis, on CBS, picked UF to lose that matchup.

Villanova (31-3) is at the top again, grabbing the No. 1 overall seed in the tournament. The Wildcats, who set a record for most wins by a reigning national champ entering the tournament, will start in the East region.

UM will practice at home Monday, Larrañaga said, and will leave for Tulsa on Tuesday or Wednesday.

Hurricanes will face Michigan State in NCAA first round

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
March 12, 2017

The University of Miami Hurricanes had just found out they are seeded No. 8 and headed to Tulsa, Oklahoma to play ninth-seeded Michigan State on Friday in the first round of the NCAA Tournament—and already some experts were dismissing them.

Upon the announcement of the Midwest bracket Sunday on CBS, analyst Seth Davis said he is looking forward to watching a second-round matchup between Michigan State and top-seeded Kansas, a statement that did not sit well with the Hurricane faithful gathered at the campus Rathskeller bar for the Selection Sunday watch party.

“Seth Davis said he’s looking forward to seeing Kansas against Michigan State in the next round,” UM coach Jim Larrañaga screamed into a microphone as the crowd boomed. “I guess he’s never seen us play.”

The coach urged fans who watch the game on TV to, “Yell very loud, I’m sure we’ll hear you, and then it will be us against Kansas in the next round.”

The game will be the second Friday night on TNT.

Davis’ comment “gives me some ammunition to talk to my team about,” Larrañaga said.

He added that he understands why the Spartans, who have been to 20 consecutive NCAA Tournaments, would get more respect than the Hurricanes.

“There are certain programs in this country that demand a lot of respect. Carolina, Duke, Louisville, Syracuse,

Kansas... In the Big Ten, Michigan State is the premier program. They’ve been at the top of the national rankings, they’ve been to a lot of Final Fours, they’ve won a national championship under coach [Tom] Izzo. I think the media knows him and knows his program very, very well, and they give them a lot of respect.”

Senior Davon Reed said the Canes embrace being the underdog.

“We’ve been counted out a lot of times in my career here, this season, last season, the season before that,” Reed said. “We’ve got to just tune all that out and get ready to go play some great basketball.”

Fellow senior captain Kamari Murphy agreed: “People think of Miami think of the good weather, the beach, maybe LeBron when he was here... I think we had a little better season than Michigan State, but they have the name Michigan State. Miami’s always the underdog whether we’re winning a lot or losing. It keeps the chips on our shoulders, keeps you motivated.”

It is Miami’s ninth appearance in the NCAA Tournament, and third in six years under Larrañaga. UM’s best finishes were Sweet 16 appearances in 2000, 2013, and last year, when the Hurricanes entered the tournament as a No. 3 seed and were eliminated by eventual national champion Villanova.

In what has become a tradition since Larrañaga took over the program, Hurricane players, coaches, cheerleaders, and fans gathered at the Rathskeller to await their fate. They erupted in celebration upon seeing their logo pop up on the jumbo TV screen.

“I’m used to watching it on TV and now

I’m playing in it, so it’s really exciting,” said freshman Bruce Brown. “I know a couple of their players from AAU basketball, so it will be a really good game.”

Just like last year, there was no question the Hurricanes (21-11, 10-8 Atlantic Coast Conference) were going to get an invitation to the NCAA Tournament. The only questions were what they’d be seeded, where they would be going, and who they would face.

Although they started the season with many questions after losing Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri from the Sweet 16 team, the Canes slowly but surely worked their way into the national conversation with signature home wins over then-No. 9 North Carolina (77-62) and then-No. 10 Duke (55-50), and an overtime road win at Virginia.

They broke into the Top 25 at No. 25 after the Duke win, but dropped out the following week after ending the regular season with back-to-back losses at Virginia Tech and Florida State — both of whom made the NCAA Tournament.

Miami is ranked 42 in the Ratings Percentage Index, was 3-3 in neutral sites, 4-6 on road courts, and 7-5 over the final 12 games. MSU has a 51 RPI, was 10-8 in the Big Ten, had a No. 10 strength of schedule and were 7-5 the final 12 games.

Three of the Spartans’ top four scorers are freshmen, led by Big Ten Freshman of the Year Miles Bridges (16.7 ppg, 8.3 rpg) and Nick Ward (13.7 ppg, 6.5 rpg).

Big-game Bruce Brown looks like the future for Miami

CBS Sports
Howard Megdal
March 10, 2017

NEW YORK -- Little went right for the Miami Hurricanes on Thursday afternoon. The same Hurricanes who beat North Carolina handily on Jan. 28 lost 78-53 in the ACC tournament quarterfinals.

Almost nothing Miami tried would work, especially in the second half. That is, with the exception of Bruce Brown, who continued his propensity for big games against the royalty of the conference, putting up a game-high 21 points, while grabbing seven rebounds, tied with UNC's Kennedy Meeks for most on the floor.

Brown, of course, is a guard, unlike the high-flying Meeks.

"He's all-world against us," North Carolina coach Roy Williams said of Brown following the game. "He's got 51 in two games. I stopped him in the hallway out there and told him he had a great game and he's going to have a great career, don't forget to work. I think he's been really something against us in both games."

His season-high 30 points came in the last meeting with UNC. His second-best point total, 25, came in the Hurricanes' Feb. 25 win over Duke. For the season, Brown is averaging 22.8 points per game against Duke and North Carolina. His season average overall is 11.6.

The question becomes whether Brown is the type of player who can carry the Hurricanes night in and night out if necessary. The team's leading scorer, Davon Reed, is a senior. So is the team's defensive stopper, Kamari Murphy. Ja'Quan Newton is a junior. So Jim

Larrañaga needs Brown to become the star he looks like he can be when the lights are brightest.

"I think Bruce is a great competitor, and I think he loves a challenge," Larrañaga said. "I think he should have been on the All-Rookie team. I can't believe a player of his caliber who had the kind of year he had did not make the All-Rookie team. Just not right."

Brown tried to take matters into his own hands Thursday. With Miami trailing 34-25 late in the first half, Brown skied above the UNC bigs to grab a defensive board and took it the length of the court for a layup. Then, with just seconds to go, Anthony Lawrence stole the ball, flipped it to Brown, who raced the clock and both teams to the hoop and dunked it at the break. Suddenly, Miami had closed the deficit to five.

"I was just trying to give us a boost of energy," Brown said. "I felt like we were down and we weren't playing the way we knew we were capable of. So I was just trying to give us energy, get us hyped. I guess it didn't work."

It didn't, but it may have caught the eye of NBA scouts who could try and entice Brown away from Miami's long-term plans. The good news for Miami is that Brown is not only excelling on the court, he's up over a 3.0 GPA off it, a source of pride for Brown.

"The school is just they help me a lot in the classroom. I get tremendous help from my academic advisers. I go extra hours to get help on tests and quizzes. So it's a perfect fit for me, honestly." For the Hurricanes, too.

Murphy feels at home as Canes beat Syracuse to continue a season beyond expectations

Miami Herald
Greg Cote
March 8, 2017

The well-worn idiom “there’s no place like home” might be best-known as Dorothy’s mantra from “The Wizard Of Oz,” but the latest iteration now belongs to Kamari Murphy. He earned that feeling on Wednesday.

The Miami Hurricanes’ senior forward returned to his hometown of Brooklyn and led UM to a 62-57 victory over Syracuse as the Canes opened play in the Atlantic Coast Conference tournament at Barclays Center. His 16 points and 10 rebounds led the team, and he had seven consecutive Miami points down the stretch as the victory was secured.

“Oh man, with family and friends coming out, I was hyped to come out here,” Murphy said afterward. “I couldn’t come here and and lose.”

Coach Jim Larrañaga’s guys earned the right to face top-seeded North Carolina at noon Thursday in the same building. UM will be an even bigger underdog than it was Wednesday to the Orange, but discount these Canes at your own risk because they’ve been pleasantly surprising us all season long.

“I think we’ve overachieved with so many young guys,” Larrañaga admitted. “I think we’ve come a long way.”

It was Miami’s 77-62 upset of the Tar Heels on Jan. 28 that seemed to spark the surge. Since then The U has come within five points of winning at No. 4-ranked Louisville, has won on the road against No. 18 Virginia and has beaten No. 10 Duke. Count Wednesday as a nifty win, too, considering the ’Cuse was higher seeded than Miami (albeit only 8 to 9),

was a betting favorite and had beaten the Canes 70-55 in early January.

There would be none of that Wednesday as patient UM solved the challenge of Syracuse’s zone defense to not only advance in ACC play but undoubtedly improve its stock with Selection Sunday on the horizon and NCAA Tournament seedings in play. A couple of late free throws by Davon Reed sealed it — Reed, who earlier in the day was presented with an award as the ACC’s Scholar Athlete of the Year.

Murphy and Reed happen to be UM’s only two seniors, and they arose big in what might have been the biggest game of the season to this point in that it launched the postseason.

The game was played in Syracuse’s home state Wednesday and most fans wore orange, but it was home not only for Murphy but for the Bronx-born Larrañaga. (UM freshman Rodney Miller and assistant coach Chris Caputo also are from in or around Brooklyn.)

“It’s really tough to get out of Brooklyn,” Murphy had said this week. “They say you have to be an artist or an athlete to get out, and I think nine times out of 10 that’s true. Basketball kept me out of trouble. But now I take Brooklyn with me everywhere I go.”

Larrañaga, ever the educator, used his return to an arena he knows well to show his players the sites. The team visited the 102-story One World Trade Center and sampled what the coach called “dirty water hot dogs” from street-corner carts since arriving for the tournament on Sunday. Larrañaga literally served as a tour guide at one point, taking over the microphone on a team bus and narrating the sites (“and on your left is the famous

Wall Street bull”).

Hard to imagine now that this began as a rebuilding season for Miami after losing so many key players. Instead, what is now a 21-win season has become Larrañaga’s best coaching job since he guided George Mason to the Final Four in 2006.

On Wednesday, the Canes fell behind 41-40 with 12 minutes to play — their first deficit since 4-3 after a 13-4 Orange run to start the second half. But UM got the lead right back.

“We need teammates cheering!” you heard Larrañaga, mic’d up by ESPN, telling his bench. “Everybody into it, let’s go!”

Soon afterward, he didn’t have to ask as the Canes were celebrating the win — and the latest reason to count this unexpected season as special.

Tell these NBA first-round picks not to mess with Brooklyn

New York Post

Fred Kerber

March 8, 2017

Near the top of his laundry list of things to accomplish against Syracuse in the ACC Tournament, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga placed rebounding and defending with purpose. The Hurricanes accomplished both in their second-round game.

And forward Kamari Murphy was a big reason why.

Back in his hometown of Brooklyn, Murphy — part of the long list of Lincoln High products — forged a double-double of 16 points and 10 rebounds, both team highs, and Miami outlasted Syracuse, 62-57, Wednesday at Barclays Center.

Murphy did a terrific job limiting Orange forward Tyler Lydon, a potential first-round NBA draft pick, to five points while hitting the glass for five rebounds at each end. Miami, swamped in rebounding in the previous meeting between the two, held a 31-26 edge in rebounds. Miami blanked Syracuse in second-chance points, 6-0.

“That was part of the game plan,” said Murphy, a 6-foot-8 redshirt senior who spent two years at Oklahoma State. “[Syracuse] guys like to attack the offensive boards. That was part of our game plan to stop them and get them off the boards. We did that. But as well, our game plan was to get on the offensive boards.”

Though Orange coach Jim Boeheim said Lydon has been “hesitating” offensively of late, Murphy said he simply followed the game plan again against the 6-foot-9 Lydon. Larrañaga felt it was more Murphy aggression than Lydon hesitation.

“Lydon I think is an NBA guy, a great player, All-League player, and Kamari Murphy held him to five points, and Kamari didn’t even make the All-Defensive team which blows me away,” Larrañaga said.

“We know that he’s a 3-point shooter. He’s one of those stretch fours that rarely run to the rim, and he runs to the 3-point line, so we had to be aware of that,” Murphy said. “We [wanted to] force him to get on the floor, which he’s not so comfortable doing compared to shooting. We added a ball screen game plan, transitioning game plan, and I think I executed — the team helped me execute as well, and you see the results.”

Miami led much of the game, fell behind 41-40 lead then surged back ahead. The Orange threatened again late. Murphy responded with three baskets in a big 3:04 span. With Syracuse within 51-48, Murphy hit a left baseline jumper at 5:37. When Miami’s lead dipped to 53-52, Murphy slammed home an alley-oop from Anthony Lawrence at 3:45. After Miami got a stop, Murphy dunked again at 2:33 for a 57-52 lead.

Murphy has happy homecoming as Miami beats Syracuse

Newsday

Mark Herrmann

March 8, 2017

Conventional wisdom, common sense and Miami coach Jim Larrañaga all agreed that, going in, this would be like a home game for Syracuse. The Orange always did pour fans and electricity into Madison Square Garden during the Big East Tournament, so it was natural to assume Syracuse would hold court in the first Atlantic Coast Conference championship in Brooklyn.

Yet Syracuse wasn't around to watch the ground being cleared for Barclays Center, the way Miami center Kamari Murphy was. No one among the Orange had the same local ties as Murphy, who went to Brooklyn's Lincoln High School. Nobody on Syracuse had the kind of day Murphy did, either. He went above and beyond his usual performances as Miami claimed Brooklyn as its turf and advanced to the quarterfinals with a 62-57 win.

"It's nice. I love this place. It's a great arena," Murphy, a redshirt senior transfer from Oklahoma State, said after he scored a season-high and team-high 16 points, grabbed 10 rebounds and thrilled a lot of people who came out specifically to watch him. "Everybody: My high school coaches, mom, dad, brothers. Everybody."

They saw Miami (21-10) withstand the roar and "Let's Go Orange!" chant after Syracuse took its only lead of the second half, 41-40, with 12:18 to go. They saw DJ Vasiljevic, a freshman from Australia make two long three-pointers (he also had some local inspiration, playing beneath the retired Nets jersey of his idol Drazen Petrovic). They never saw Syracuse catch up. Instead they saw a sequence in which Syracuse's Tyus Battle

missed a dunk, then Murphy finished a fast break by making a dunk five seconds later for a 57-52 lead.

Location, location, location was all in Murphy's favor. "Maybe it gave me a little bit more of a boost, but not much. I just didn't want to lose," he said. "I come to play the same every game, but I'm just happy they got to see it live."

The Hurricanes have the tenacity Larrañaga developed while growing up in the Bronx. They will need it when they face top-seeded North Carolina Thursday in a tournament that might have lost some buzz without Syracuse (18-14).

"It's a little different. The Garden is different," coach Jim Boeheim said. "Madison Square Garden made the Big East Conference . . . and I'm saying that because I don't give a [expletive]."

Still, the man nearing the end of a legendary career fully endorsed the Brooklyn site, adding, "I just think New York City is a great venue for our tournament. I'm not going to be around much longer to care about it, but I think that's where the value is. Obviously, we get some fans here. It doesn't matter in terms of who wins."

Brown making the grade on the court, in school — and with Mom

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
March 7, 2017

Roberta Sweet-Brown, a Delta ramp agent at Atlanta International Airport, was off from work last Wednesday and having the oil changed on her truck when she got one of the most memorable phone calls of her life.

It was University of Miami basketball coach Jim Larrañaga, informing her that her son Bruce, a freshman guard with the Hurricanes, had been named to the Atlantic Coast Conference All-Academic Team — an honor that requires a minimum 3.0 grade-point average.

Sweet-Brown burst into tears, and nearly broke down again when she discussed it a few days later.

She said that news was more exciting than watching her son score 30 points against North Carolina, more thrilling than seeing him scorch Duke for 25 points or record the second triple-double in UM history.

That phone call was so wonderful because it was so unexpected. Sweet-Brown had wept over Bruce's grades many times over the years, but they were never tears of joy. They were tears of deep concern.

Brown's grades were poor his first two years at Boston's Wakefield High School, which turned away some college recruiters and broke his mother's heart because she had stressed education from the moment her six children could speak.

"I was a teen mom myself and you want something different for your children," said Sweet-Brown, 47, who ran a day care for 22 years in Boston before moving to Atlanta. "I always told my kids, and all the kids in my day-care program, that education is everything. Some people push drugs. I pushed grades.

"That is why I am so very proud of Bruce right now. He's really loving college, and I just cannot believe it, like 'Wow,' he's playing great, keeping up his grades. South Beach, coming from freezing cold to people halfway dressed. But he is so focused. I cannot express how happy this makes me. Oh, my

goodness."

The Canes play their ACC tournament opener at noon Wednesday against Syracuse at Barclays Center in Brooklyn. Sweet-Brown will be there, as will Brown's father, Bruce Sr., a retired City of Boston mechanic; older brother Daryl, a former Division II football player with whom he's very close; and Gregory Grant, a family friend and mentor. Brown's parents divorced when he was young, and he remains close with both. But it was his mother, he said, who is the disciplinarian.

When Bruce was 6 years old, she enrolled him in a program called "No Books, No Ball" at the Roxbury YMCA in Boston. The program was started 25 years ago by Anthony Richards, a bridge inspector.

Inner-city parents waited in long lines on registration day for a chance to put their kids under Richards' tutelage. Shabazz Napier of the Portland Trail Blazers and Jalen Adams of the University of Connecticut were among the players who came up through the program.

"In order to play, they had to provide their report cards every quarter, and if their grades were good, they'd get a green light and be eligible," Richards said. "If not, they'd have to sit and watch. It was that simple. No books, no ball."

Brown kept decent grades through middle school, but when he got to high school, he said he got "distracted." He was a four-sport star (basketball, football, baseball, soccer) and let his grades slide.

"My GPA was below a 2.0, to be honest," Brown said. "I'd see my Mom hurt looking at my report cards, not being able to talk to her friends and aunts about my grades. I saw her cry over my grades. I felt really bad."

Sweet-Brown was known to call AAU coach Leo Papile regularly to request he be held out of games because he didn't do well on a chemistry test or didn't clean his room to her liking.

"Bruce's mom was tough, not an enabler," Papile said.

Never mind that he was playing for the prestigious Boston Amateur Basketball Club (BABC), an AAU program whose alumni list includes Patrick Ewing and Nerlens Noel. If Mom said Brown couldn't play, he didn't.

Same rules for football, where Brown was a standout wide receiver from his days in Pop Warner with coach Daryl Simmons, one of several mentors Brown leans on to this day.

"Bruce's mom is tough; she doesn't play," said UM assistant coach Jamal Brunt, who was closely involved in Brown's recruitment. "That toughness, sternness is the reason he is the person he is. He is not afraid of the moment. He isn't intimidated by anyone, and he wants the ball in the big games. He stays on task, on the court and in the classroom. Bruce wasn't the guy who was super-heralded as a young player. When he saw he could be pretty good at basketball, he became a good student."

After struggling through his sophomore year in high school, he transferred to Vermont Academy, a prep school known to get athletes to hit the books. "I needed the change," Brown said. "From the minute I got to Vermont, my grades improved. I started focusing, and the teachers helped me prepare for college."

When he arrived on campus, he noticed that captain Davon Reed had something he coveted: a UM "Book Buster" T-shirt, given to athletes with 3.0 GPAs.

"I wanted that shirt, wanted it bad," Brown said. "I really wanted the black one, but that's for 4.0. Maybe some day."

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/sports/college/acc/university-of-miami/article137063663.html#storylink=cpy>

The ACC tournament is way north of its base, but New York basketball is in its roots

Washington Post
Ava Wallace
March 7, 2017

With his traditional black suit, patterned tie and pocket square — different patterns, but both accented with blue, for the ACC — John Swofford looked like a proper Southern gentleman as he stepped to the lectern placed halfway between the glossy front doors of Brooklyn's Barclays Center and the gaping entrance of the arena's adjoining subway station.

"It's natural for us to come here in terms of the great basketball history and tradition that is here in Brooklyn and throughout New York City," the ACC commissioner said in the media appearance Monday in his gentle Southern accent, "and the number of coaches and players that have come into our league long before this was part of our actual geographical footprint."

Swofford's remarks, however controversial they may be to those who refute that there is anything natural about holding the ACC tournament so far north of the Mason-Dixon Line, officially opened the league's two-year experiment in holding its crown jewel tournament at Barclays Center. The opening round began Tuesday.

From the league's standpoint, this is a good time to be flaunting itself in the country's largest media market. With the reigning college football national champion under its umbrella and the possibility of a record-breaking 10 member programs headed to the NCAA tournament, the ACC is all but thumbing its nose at those who said expansion would be bad for the conference.

"It's good timing, there's no question," Swofford said. "Coming off last year and then having the regular season that we've had this year fits really well with us coming to New York for the first time."

To mark the occasion — and to assuage the doubts of those who see no reason other than money for the North Carolina-based ACC to hold its tournament in New York — the league excavated its deep history with New York City basketball and packaged it for public consumption.

"A Cut Above," a syndicated television special produced by the ACC and network partner Raycom, illustrates the league-city ties through vignettes that include North Carolina's 1957 national championship team that went 32-0 with a roster of New York kids and a coach, Frank McGuire, who started the pipeline between the city's high school players and North Carolina. Georgia Tech's Kenny Anderson and Bobby Cremins, both New York natives, make

appearances along with Charlie Scott, a Harlem street ball legend who was North Carolina's first black scholarship basketball player.

To those New York natives such as Cremins, who played for McGuire when South Carolina was an ACC member and achieved his greatest fame as coach at Georgia Tech, the ACC tournament being in New York makes perfect sense.

"If you really do your history, the greatest players are from New York," Cremins said in a phone interview, his accent thick despite 30 years in the South. "And if you do your history, and you do ACC basketball, you will be amazed at what you find."

Cremins credits McGuire for stirring ACC fervor in the basketball-crazy New York of the mid-20th century. Cremins grew up the son of Irish immigrants in the South Bronx, playing basketball in the schoolyard across from his family's apartment complex. By the time he was playing at All Hallows High in the 1960s, McGuire loomed large for two reasons — he had taken St. John's to the Final Four in 1952 and won the 1957 national title with North Carolina.

"Frank McGuire's the man," Cremins said, "He was the man. He owned New York City. He was a New York Irishman, his father was a police officer, he was the 13th child in his family. And he was like the godfather of New York.

"A lot of us in the beginning, we just knew he was a big shot ... but all the high school coaches in New York loved Frank McGuire and they helped him a lot. A lot. Jack Curran [the legendary coach at Archbishop Molloy High School in Queens] played for Coach McGuire at St. John's, so his loyalty was to Frank McGuire. And Coach McGuire could just go to New York, and if you were all-New York City, he was going after you. And he'd get you."

As more New York prodigies such as Anderson and Kenny Smith, a former Tar Heel, headed south, interest in the ACC stayed steady throughout the five boroughs — even with the powerful Big East, with the likes of St. John's, Seton Hall and Syracuse, close by.

But mainly, New Yorkers around the league say the ACC tournament is a good match for the city simply because New York is, at its core, a basketball city. Played on schoolyard playgrounds, in parks and dimly lit high school gyms, basketball was a way of life — and an opportunity to go to high school and college on scholarship.

"I grew up in the '60s, so basketball — I was there at what you would call the renaissance of the basketball era collegiately and professionally," Scott said. "I was also at a time when basketball was getting more blacks involved from baseball, and basketball was everything for us, especially when you're talking about going to college. I don't know anyone where I grew up, and I grew up in Harlem, that would have gone to college if not for the athletic scholarship they got for basketball."

Ron Sanchez, Virginia's associate head coach, felt the same type of connection to the sport growing up in the Bronx decades later.

"I think things have changed now, but back in the '80s and '90s, you couldn't go outside and find an empty basketball court," Sanchez said.

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For that reason, Miami Coach Jim Larrañaga expects Barclays Center to draw good crowds this week. Larrañaga, a Bronx native who played for Curran at Archbishop Molloy, views the tournament as a homecoming of sorts for the Big East programs of yore — Syracuse, Louisville, Miami, Virginia Tech, Notre Dame, Boston College and Pittsburgh — even while the actual Big East tournament will be contested simultaneously across town at Madison Square Garden.

"As far as I'm concerned, kids from New York City decades ago invented the game of basketball," Larrañaga said. "That's seven of our 15 schools at one time in the Big East, including Miami ... two years ago we played in the NIT at Madison Square Garden, the number of Miami fans that showed up blew me away."

Sanchez agrees. North Carolina made the ACC what it is, but New Yorkers have a basketball tradition of their own.

"New York City is a basketball city. They may not care about, oh, Florida State," Sanchez said, "but they care about basketball. This place will be jumping."

Canes confident regular-season growth will pay dividends

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

March 7, 2017

Jim Larrañaga learned basketball on the courts of New York. Kamari Murphy, too. And Rodney Miller.

Davon Reed wasn't exactly too far away from the city, perfecting his game in nearby Ewing, New Jersey.

This week, all will be in Brooklyn with a singular goal – help the Hurricanes men's basketball team again stun some Atlantic Coast Conference powerhouses en route to a conference title.

The Hurricanes, who dropped out of the Associated Press Top 25 after a pair of losses in the final week of the regular season, understand it won't be easy. They know their underdog status. They enter the tournament as the No. 9 seed – where they were pegged to finish the year before the season started.

But after growing up during the regular season and notching wins against ranked conference foes such as North Carolina, Virginia and Duke, the Hurricanes (20-10, 10-8) believe in themselves – and in their ability to make some noise in March, both in Brooklyn at the ACC Tournament and beyond.

They'll have their first chance Wednesday when they open tournament play against Syracuse at noon.

Despite our loss the other night, we've been rolling," said Reed during the final week of the regular season. "We've caught our stride and we're playing at a very high level, I feel like. I think we're going to continue to grow and take some good steps forward."

Even after their losses at Virginia Tech and Florida State to end the regular season, the Hurricanes enter the conference tournament having won six of their last nine. They posted another 20-win season and notched 10 wins against ACC opponents during a season in which many college basketball experts expect the ultra-deep conference could send as many as 10 teams to the NCAA Tournament.

Miami accomplished all of that while adjusting to the losses of Sheldon McClellan, Angel Rodriguez and Tonye Jekiri, three starters from last year's team that made a run to the Sweet 16. The Hurricanes found themselves regularly putting three freshmen into their rotation. And late in the year, they were without point guard Ja'Quan Newton, who was suspended for three games during a critical stretch.

Still, there was improvement. There were wins. And there were lessons learned.

Now, the Hurricanes say, it's time to put all of that together, against one of the teams they faced early in conference play when they weren't quite at their best yet.

When Miami and Syracuse (18-13, 10-8) met in January in what was the Hurricanes' ACC road opener, the Orange snapped Miami's seven-game win streak. Syracuse's famed zone defense gave the Hurricanes problems, with Miami shooting just 21-of-54 from the field. And the Orange have, traditionally, been a tough out for Miami, with Syracuse holding a 17-7 lead in the all-time series.

Still, the Hurricanes have improved since that game. Freshmen Bruce Brown, Dewan Huell and DJ Vasiljevic have become invaluable contributors. Veterans Reed and Kamari Murphy are

playing well. And the Hurricanes' defense has helped them notch some key wins of their own.

So the Hurricanes expect they'll be able to improve their seeding in the upcoming NCAA Tournament with their play in Brooklyn. And several of them have a motivation all their own.

They want to put on a show for their hometown friends and family from around New York.

"As far as I'm concerned, kids from New York City, decades ago, invented the game of basketball," Larrañaga told reporters in New York this week. "Dr. [James] Naismith is the inventor, but the guys who perfected it are the kids who grew up in the streets of New York. And I include myself as one of those guys who learned the game by playing against other really great high school players."

Added Reed: "To be able to finish my ACC career in Brooklyn, close to home, will be a great feeling. I'm sure I'll have a lot of friends and family there, but I'll be looking forward to handling business. We've been kind of fighting an uphill battle a little bit and being the underdog all season. We know what we're capable of doing. We know what we set out to do in the beginning of the season and we're looking forward to executing."

Conference Call with Analyst Jay Bilas

March 6, 2017

ESPN college basketball analyst Jay Bilas participated in a media conference call on Monday, March 6, in advance of ESPN's Champ Week and the NCAA Selection Sunday.

Just wanted to get your take on Miami really quickly. A lot of tough teams in the ACC. I'm wondering if you kind of see anything with them that would let you think that they could maybe go a couple games deep in the NCAA Tournament and what would concern you and what would kind of keep you from thinking that?

JAY BILAS: Well, I think they can play in the second weekend. A lot depends on their draw. They're kind of young in spots, too. They've got some - obviously some returning players. Davon Reed is a senior and an outstanding player. But they're not as experienced as they've been, and that's - I think it's hard to kind of tell them apart, really, if you look at their resume and all that. It's hard to kind of tell them apart from Virginia, frankly. They're not as good defensively as Virginia but they're really good. I like their team. Bruce Brown has gotten a lot better and he's a big-time scorer.

They defend pretty well. They run a lot of ball screens. They've got good big guys, but they don't score from the post all that well. But they're very capable.

Do I favor them to be a Final Four team? I do not. Do I think they can play in the second weekend? I do. I think if they've got a good draw they can do that.

Quickly on Bruce Brown, he's had some really good games against high-profile opponents, and there's kind of been some talk about him maybe thinking about leaving early. I'm wondering if you have a take on him and what you've - not asking you to assess him as a draft prospect but just what do you think of him and what he's been able to do to the freshmen?

JAY BILAS: I think he's been great, and he keeps getting better. He's really dynamic, and he's not afraid. He can shoot it and he's improved his shooting. He's improved his shot selection. Yeah, I like him a lot. He's one of the best freshmen in the league, and he played his best basketball toward the end of the season. Gets to the free-throw line. He attacks.

As far as pro prospects, he's a potential pro player. But you know, if you look at the landscape, I don't know what the rush would be. But it depends on each kid and each player as to what they want, and what they want out of their careers and what they consider ready to be. Are you ready to be a pro? Are you ready to be an impact player? And some guys are just ready to be a pro right now, and that's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. I would never talk anybody out of it. You just want them to make an informed decision, as long as he knows what he's getting into.

But I think if you were to ask me what's best for his long-term career, then being as prepared as possible would be the best thing, and I don't think he's fully prepared yet.

Miami Counting on Northeast Toughness in likely NCAA run

New York Post

Zach Braziller

March 6, 2017

The campus is located in the Miami sun, but Jim Larrañaga's roster is full of Northeast grit. And The Bronx native and Archbishop Molloy graduate is fond of his team's makeup.

There is senior guard Davon Reed from southern New Jersey, junior guard Ja'Quan Newton from Philadelphia, senior forward Kamari Murphy from Brooklyn, and freshman wing Bruce Brown from Boston. Seven-foot freshman center Rodney Miller hails from Queens, as does associate head coach Chris Caputo. It's no surprise the Hurricanes' identity is toughness — they allow just 63.4 points per game, 22nd fewest in the country.

"It leads to us being a hard-working team. A bunch of guys that look forward to grinding," said Reed, an All-ACC third-team honoree. "Growing up in the Northeast, that's what I'm accustomed to.

"It stems down from Coach L, and we just follow suit."

After reaching the Sweet 16 last year, the Hurricanes (20-10) were supposed to take a step back, following the losses of leading scorers Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez. They started slowly in the conference, dropping four of their first six, losing big at Wake Forest and Syracuse. The season started to turn Jan. 28, with a 15-point win over ACC regular-season champion North Carolina.

"It just let you know we can compete with anybody," Reed said.

Miami finished 10-8 in the powerhouse conference, going 6-3 over the final nine games, doing enough to lock up what should be a third NCAA Tournament bid in six years under Larrañaga. The 67-year-old coach thinks it's important for Miami to land in-state players, and it is making the effort to do so — forwards Dewan Huell and Anthony Lawrence Jr. hail from Florida — but they have lost on some of them, such as North Carolina's Joel Berry II and Tony Bradley.

"We have to find a geographical location we feel very good about," Larrañaga said.

The current model is working well anyway.

"One of the things that happens when you grow up in a city environment, you play outdoors a lot, and outdoors basketball gets impacted by the elements. The sun, the wind, the court itself, the baskets," Larrañaga said. "So guys tend to drive more and play close to the basket, and as a youngster growing up, you have to learn how to play defense, because guys are going to attack you off the bounce.

"You have to have a certain amount of toughness."

Jay Bilas on Bruce Brown: Don't rush to the NBA Draft

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 6, 2017

The best of Bruce Brown — 30 points against UNC, 25 against Duke, 17 against FSU, an early-season triple-double — has given rise to casual talk about his potential longevity as a Hurricane.

Scouts, sportswriters, former Canes and fans have wondered if the freshman guard might test the NBA draft waters after the season, should he play well in the ACC and NCAA tournaments.

ESPN's Jay Bilas said on a conference call Monday that he wouldn't advise any player to stay in school too long, but said he doesn't think Brown is "fully prepared" for the NBA now.

"He's a potential pro player," Bilas said of Brown, who is averaging 11.8 points, 5.7 rebounds and 3.3 assists for the Hurricanes. "I think if you look at the landscape, I don't know what the rush would be. It depends on each kid and each player and what they want, what they want out of their careers. Are you ready to be a pro, or are you ready to be an impact player? Some guys are ready to be a pro right now, and that's fine, there's nothing wrong with that.

"I would never talk anybody out of it. You just want them to make an informed decision, as long as he knows what he's getting into. But if you asked me what I think is best for his long-term career, being as prepared as possible would be the best thing, and I don't think he's fully prepared yet."

Brown is No. 22 in the latest DraftExpress mock draft ... but for 2018. That mock draft also projects incoming UM freshman Lonnie Walker as a lottery pick (No. 10).

Brown is not listed in any notable 2017 mock drafts.

Right now, Bilas sees in him an attacking guard who gets to the free-throw line.

"I think he's been great and he keeps getting better," he said. "He's really dynamic and he's not afraid. He can shoot it, and he's improved his shooting and his shot selection. I like him a lot. He's one of the best freshmen in the league, and he played his best basketball toward the end of the season."

ACC Tournament starts Miami Hurricanes' NCAA Tournament

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 6, 2017

What does a prominent analyst think of the Hurricanes' NCAA Tournament potential as conference tournament week kicks off?

"I think they can play in the second weekend," ESPN analyst Jay Bilas said on a conference call Monday. "A lot depends on their draw.

"But they're very capable. Do I favor them to be a Final Four team? I do not. But do I think they play in the second weekend? I do. I think with a good draw, they certainly can."

As of Monday, ESPN's Joe Lunardi had Miami as an NCAA 8-seed, facing 9-seed Michigan in Buffalo. CBS Sports' Jerry Palm had the Hurricanes as a 7-seed, facing 10-seed Providence in Sacramento.

First comes the ACC Tournament, which Miami (20-10, 10-8 ACC) enters as the ninth seed. The Hurricanes will face eight-seeded Syracuse (18-13, 10-8) at noon Wednesday (ESPN) at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Should they advance, they will face a team they beat at home on Jan. 28. Top-seeded North Carolina, which was ranked No. 9 nationally when UM scored a 77-62 victory thanks to Bruce Brown's 30 points, awaits the winner of Miami-Syracuse at noon Thursday.

A win there would no doubt help UM's resume, which includes one week spent in the top 25 (last week, during which UM went 0-2), a 3-6 record against the RPI top 25, a poor non-conference strength of schedule (267th, according to ESPN) and no particularly bad losses. The

Hurricanes are 38th in NCAA RPI and 31st in KenPom.

"They're kind of young in spots," Bilas said. "They've got some, obviously, returning players — Davon Reed's a senior and an outstanding player, but they're not as experienced as they've been. It's hard to tell them apart, if you look at their resume, it's hard to tell them apart from Virginia. They're not as good defensively as Virginia, but they're good.

"I like their team. Bruce Brown's gotten a lot better and he's a big-time scorer. They defend pretty well. They run a lot of ball screens. They've got good big guys, but they don't score from the post all that well."

On Wednesday, UM meets the same Orange it lost to 70-55 on the road Jan. 4. In that game Syracuse, which opened the year 8-6, shot 57 percent and had 16 assists on 25 made baskets. Miami shot 39 percent against Cuse' 2-3 zone, with freshman D.J. Vasiljevic scoring 18 points by going 6-of-12 from 3-point range. UM's top scorers, Reed and Ja'Quan Newton, were 5-of-23 from the floor.

The tournament will be a homecoming for senior forward Kamari Murphy, who played at Lincoln High on the south end of Brooklyn. Coach Jim Larrañaga grew up in The Bronx and played high school ball in Queens, at Archbishop Molloy. Assistant coach Chris Caputo, an Elmhurst, Queens native, also played at Molloy. Freshman center Rodney Miller is also from Queens (Laurelton), but played at powerhouse Oak Hill (Va.) Academy.

Larrañaga says the Hurricanes are planning on a late-season comeback

AP
Steve Wine
March 3, 2017

Despite the Miami Hurricanes' many accomplishments during the Jim Larrañaga era, they haven't beaten a Top 25 opponent in March since he became coach.

That could change even before tournament time.

This week the No. 25 Hurricanes are ranked for the first time all season, and they close out the regular season Saturday at No. 15 Florida State.

In six years under Larrañaga, Miami is 0-6 in March against Top 25 teams. That contrasts with an overall March record of 23-11 (.676), including an Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament title, two trips to the NCAA Sweet 16 and a runner-up finish in the NIT.

Now the Hurricanes believe they're poised to make another late-season splash.

"We're planning on it," Larrañaga said Thursday. "This team has really made great strides and can be a very tough opponent for anyone in the field."

That includes ranked teams. The Hurricanes are 20-9 overall and 10-7 in the ACC, and last week they earned back-to-back wins against Top 25 opponents, Virginia and Duke.

The Hurricanes lost Monday at Virginia Tech, but Larrañaga's young team has made steady progress after beginning the season with only 10 scholarship players, five of them newcomers.

"We were pretty much the underdogs

all year, and just recently started getting a little national notice," senior guard Davon Reed said. "We've constantly been proving ourselves all season.

"I'm happy but not satisfied with where we're at. We know what we're capable of doing. We know what we set out to do at the beginning of the season, and we're looking forward to executing it."

Three freshmen have played significant roles down the stretch, including Bruce Brown, who scored 25 points in the win over Duke.

"We have a really young team," Brown said. "We didn't know what to expect coming into the season. To be playing so well at this time is great for us."

The Hurricanes are virtually assured of their third NCAA Tournament berth under Larrañaga, even if they lose at Tallahassee and in their opening game of the ACC Tournament. But they'll likely be seeded lower than they were in 2013 (second) or 2016 (third), meaning they'll likely face a ranked opponent the first weekend.

Larrañaga said his team is ready for the postseason challenges to come.

"It's really well equipped, because of the number of diverse teams we have in this league," he said. "It prepares you very well for the NCAA Tournament."

The ACC deserves at least 10 berths, Larrañaga said.

"The league is about as good as any conference has ever been in this country that I can remember," he said.

That includes Florida State (23-7, 11-6), which won at Miami 75-57 a month

ago — one of the Hurricanes' two home losses this season.

The Seminoles are tough at home too. They have a 20-game winning streak in Tallahassee.

"It's a rivalry game — all that stuff goes out the window," Reed said. "It'll definitely be a great last challenge for us before stepping into March Madness. I'm looking forward to going to Tallahassee and handling business."

Both teams are trying to position themselves for a high seed in next week's league tournament. Brown confirmed as much in a phone conversation with former AAU teammate Terance Mann, who plays for the Seminoles.

"He called me talking about how they need this win to get two byes," Brown said with a smile. "I'm like, 'What do I look like? We need this win too.'"

NCAA berths weren't always so automatic for Miami, even in Rick Barry's golden age

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 3, 2017

If you're a Miami basketball fan and disappointed to see the 20-9 Hurricanes rating only about a No. 7 or 8 seed in most of the Bracketology projections out there, just settle down and let it all play out.

There's a game at Florida State on Saturday night and then the ACC tournament to reset the picture. Remember that Syracuse made it all the way to the Final Four last year as one of the last of eight ACC teams to get into the NCAA field, and the Orange started out with a No. 10 seed.

Jim Larrañaga has built quite a reputation on a couple of Sweet 16 appearances at Miami and a shocking Final Four run with George Mason. He'll get the benefit of every doubt from the bracket-builders based on that history, and on wins over Duke, Virginia and North Carolina this year.

Long-time Miami followers will remember when it was lot tougher than this to get a little national boost.

The Hurricanes went 23-5 in the 1962-63 season and didn't even make the NCAA tournament. There were only 25 teams in the field back then and Miami, an independent, didn't rate one of those spots. Never mind that the Hurricanes upset Duke 71-69 at the Miami Beach Convention Center in December. It just wasn't happening.

What Miami got instead was an invitation to the NIT, and that's where the program got its first-ever postseason victory. Miami beat St. Francis 71-70 at Madison Square Garden in New York but lost the

next night to Providence, the eventual tournament champion.

It was even tougher to take what happened in 1965. Rick Barry led the nation in scoring with an average of 37.4 points per game and the Hurricanes went 22-4 but they weren't eligible for the NCAA tournament because of NCAA recruiting violations.

Barry scored 50 or more points six times in that senior season and also averaged 18.3 rebounds per game. That put him at the top of a sensational consensus All-America lineup that also included Bill Bradley, Gail Goodrich, Cazzie Russell and a high-scoring big man from Davidson named Fred Hetzel. Barry, Bradley and Goodrich went on to be inducted in the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame, and Hetzel was the No. 1 overall pick in the 1965 draft by the San Francisco Warriors.

As a strong competitor in the ACC, Miami won't get overlooked like that again.

Overall, it was a long road to achieving the level of recognition that our top state schools have now in basketball, and the Hurricanes got there first.

Miami's initial appearance in the NCAA tournament was in 1960, followed by FSU in 1968, Jacksonville in 1970, Florida in 1987, South Florida in 1990, Florida Gulf Coast in 2013 and North Florida in 2015.

WHAT DOES 2016-17 MIAMI TELL US ABOUT NEXT SEASON'S TEAM?

ACCSports.com
Miami Insider
March 1, 2017

Plant yourself a decade in the past and start looking forward. From this spot, 10 years ago, picture an ACC team that would play in two Sweet 16s in four seasons, would make 20-win campaigns a near-annual occurrence and would sign back-to-back top-10 classes featuring a combined three All-Americans.

You'd probably imagine you'd be thinking about Duke or Carolina, right? Or maybe NC State or Wake Forest has emerged as a consistent threat?

That's the résumé Miami has now, and as strange as it would have been to think about 10 years ago, the Hurricanes are just getting started.

Jim Larrañaga has authored a remarkable run in Coral Gables, for decades a basketball cold planet with brief blips of activity. Now the Hurricanes should be on everyone's radar. In this so-called rebuilding year, UM has found 20 wins again — 10 in the ACC — and is looking like it'll be a tough out in the tournament.

The real point here: Larrañaga is just getting started.

He has slowly shed his reliance on grad transfers and projects, and he's climbed into the rare air of a program landing nothing but top-100 players every year. Last cycle, he signed the first top-10 class in program history, featuring McDonald's All American forward Dewan Huell and Jordan Brand All-American Bruce Brown, with Australian sharpshooter D.J. Vasiljevic and 7-footer Rodney Miller. He followed that by landing a top-20 guard, 6-4 double All-American Lonnie Walker, electric 5-7 point guard Chris Lykes,

long power forward Deng Gak and New Zealand stretch 4 Sam Waardenburg.

That is a considerable amount of talent. For that reason, Hurricanes fans are thinking that whatever their team does this year in the NCAA tournament will be gravy.

Miami will lose reliable, versatile 1,000-point scorer Davon Reed and energetic power forward Kamari Murphy to graduation. There also exists a chance Brown, who has become Miami's best player and would be a front-runner for ACC Freshman of the Year if not for NC State's Dennis Smith Jr., will declare for the draft.

But if Larrañaga can convince Brown to stay — the argument being, he would boost his NBA stock to lottery status by proving he can run the point for a championship-caliber team — he'll have a heck of a squad in 2017-18.

Brown would run the point, with Lykes backing him up and senior Ja'Quan Newton able to play on or off the ball. Walker, the dynamic, speedy high-flyer, would play the 2-spot, with Vasiljevic coming off the bench. Anthony Lawrence Jr., a junior, becomes the 6-7 wing who can guard four positions, play inside or outside and rebound. Waardenburg (6-9) is a bit of an unknown, but he could give UM minutes; it helps he enrolled midyear and is redshirting, and thus able to work out. At the 4, Huell (6-10) has immense physical gifts and is developing his game, and there will be no need to rush Gak (6-10). The center spot, with a bulkier, junior version of Izundu (6-10) and a slimmed-down Miller, would feature one of the better tandems in the ACC.

This year's lineup is young and talented,

and next year's roster would be a little older and even more talented — perhaps enough to win it all.

Yes, at Miami. Who would have guessed?

Reed earns honor as top ACC basketball scholar-athlete

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

March 1, 2017

Davon Reed arrived at Miami after graduating from one of the nation's most prestigious prep schools. Since, his stellar efforts in the classroom have only continued, with the senior set to graduate in May with a degree in sports administration and double minors in communications and marketing.

On Wednesday, the guard — who happens to be Miami's leading scorer — earned the Atlantic Coast Conference's top scholar-athlete honor for men's basketball players when he was named this year's recipient of the Skip Prosser Award.

To be eligible for the award, an athlete must have earned a 3.0 GPA for the previous semester and maintained a 3.0 GPA cumulative average during his academic career.

Reed is the second Hurricane to earn the honor after former Miami guard Jack McClinton was named the Skip Prosser Award winner in 2009. Late last month, Reed was also one of four Hurricanes athletes to earn a postgraduate scholarship award.

"Davon Reed is the epitome of what a great student-athlete is all about," Hurricanes men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga said in a statement announcing Reed's award. "He's been our captain for the last three seasons because of his tremendous leadership qualities. He has been a Dean's List student since the day he arrived on our Miami campus. He's not only a great student, but he's also a tremendous basketball player. Davon is a complete player. He can score at the rim or from 3-point range and he's a

relentless defender and rebounder.

"But what separates Davon from other student-athletes is his leadership off the court, on campus, and in the community."

Reed is averaging 15 points per game and is among top ACC players in several statistical categories, including scoring (17th), free throw percentage (eighth), 3-point field goals made (ninth) and minutes played (fourth). He joined Miami's 1,000-point scoring club earlier this season.

Teammate Bruce Brown, a freshman, also earned recognition for his work in the classroom earning a spot on the ACC's All-Academic Team. Brown is majoring in sports administration and has maintained a 3.0 GPA during his academic career at Miami.

The 25th-ranked Hurricanes will close out the regular season Saturday at Florida State.

Surreal season for Larrañaga's yuuge-ly surprising Hurricanes

Miami Herald
Greg Cote
Feb. 25, 2017

This should not be happening. Not that flood of joy that swarmed the court with merry bedlam after Saturday's latest uplifting triumph. Not any of this improbable Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season.

There is no way to be nonchalant about this. It is close to incredible, what Jim Larrañaga has made of this season so far. We must not treat Saturday's 55-50 home upset of No. 10-ranked Duke as if it was expected. There is no sane way to regard UM reaching 20 victories on Saturday, and 10 in the rugged ACC, like it's normal.

This is Larrañaga's best coaching job since he somehow coaxed little George Mason to the NCAA Tournament's Final Four in 2006. Surely he needs to be in the Coach of the Year conversation this year, and I'd have said this even if UM hadn't won Saturday. Surely, too, his Canes had better now vault into all of the next Top 25 polls for the first time this season. Oh, and, by the way, how has Larrañaga not yet scored a "Dancing With the Stars" invite after all of this postgame hoofing with celebrating players that have become such gone-viral video delights?

No, none of this should be happening. Not this year.

UM lost four of five starters from last year's 27-win, Sweet 16 team including stalwarts Sheldon McClellan and Angel Rodriguez, opening this season as a depleted program voted to finish ninth of 15 teams in the preseason ACC media poll. Everyone expected a down year. Maybe it would be around a .500 team, right? Maybe there might be a chance to sneak an NIT invite.

Instead this bracing win over Mike Krzyzewski's vaunted Blue Devils comes on the heels of a huge win over another ranked team, at Virginia. Before that the Canes toppled Roy Williams and top-10 North Carolina. You don't think Larrañaga is

something special? Miami was 2-17 all-time vs. Duke before Larrañaga arrived in 2011. After Saturday, Miami is 5-3 vs. Duke under the man players call "Coach L."

Duke shot less than 30 percent in the second half Saturday.

"Jim's teams always play good defense," Krzyzewski said.

This season, America's Dancingest Coach is also doubling as a miracle worker.

"This year we were being the underdog and counted out as a team, with so many young guys," says Davon Reed, one of two Canes seniors (along with Kamari Murphy) who played their final home game Saturday and won't ever forget it. "We continue to prove people wrong. Against all odds, we've been resilient and continued to push."

The two seniors were honored Saturday but it was a baby who led the Canes — true freshman Bruce Brown scoring 25 points. He shot 11 for 18. All of his teammates were a combined 11 for 40. Brown, a 6-5 guard, has a chance to have a prolific career that gets the attention of the UM record book.

Brown is proof Larrañaga, even at 67, can recruit, can connect. The Bronx-born coach has a grandfatherly, Bernie Sanders quality to him, but players see the genuineness.

Larrañaga keeps it light. His cellphone chirped during a Friday news conference. "It's Donald Trump," he told reporters. "I'm not gonna answer that."

But the coach is dead-serious when it comes to his craft. He teaches. Players grow up under his guidance. They graduate. They learn. They love the guy.

The season's 20th victory was a big one — a "yuuge" one, in Larrañaga-ese — because, well, because Duke is Duke. No matter the Devils were not at full strength. For example, star Grayson Allen, still recovering from an ankle injury, did not play and was therefore

denied an opportunity to trip anybody.

Larrañaga not only has turned UM men's hoops into a consistent winner, he has sold the program, turned it into a hot ticket, breaking records for season-ticket sales so that every game is an official sellout now — though few are literally packed like Saturday's game was.

Larrañaga has taken this season of modest expectations and made it special. UM has a chance now, with two games left in the regular season, to be a top-four seed in the ACC Tournament and earn an early bye. And back-to-back wins at Virginia and over Duke have erased all doubts that Miami will be a March Madness team whose first-round opponent probably won't like the draw much.

Said Larrañaga: "We're very young. We've had some serious growing pains, but they're finding a way to overcome obstacles."

Saturday was another shot of confidence for a team coming into its own.

"We can play with anybody in any game," Reed said.

The claim isn't ludicrous. But the fact it can be said as we near March of this so-called down year — that is.

Brown earns ACC Freshman of the Week honors

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Feb. 27, 2017

Bruce Brown had an impressive two-game stretch for the Hurricanes last week. Now the freshman is earning recognition for his efforts.

Brown, who hit the eventual game-winner in Miami's upset of Virginia last Monday and then scored a game-high 25 points against Duke on Saturday, was named the ACC Freshman of the Week on Monday.

It is the second time Brown, a guard, has earned the honor. He was previously recognized in December after averaging 11.5 in Miami's wins over Rutgers and Wofford.

His performance last week was even more impressive.

Brown averaged 19.5 points and 3.5 rebounds against the Cavaliers and Blue Devils, both of whom are ranked.

He was the star of Saturday's 55-50 upset over Duke, shooting 11-of-18 from the field while his teammates combined to shoot just 11-of-40. He also finished with four assists and four rebounds and either scored or had the assist on nine of Miami's first 11 field goals.

"I just wanted to come out and perform and I played well and helped my team win," Brown said after Saturday's win. "I didn't really think much of it. I just came out, played hard and [did] what the team needed me to do and helped my team win."

News of Bruce's honor came just hours after the Hurricanes earned their first ranking of the season in the AP Top 25.

Miami, which will take on Virginia Tech in Blacksburg on Monday night, is now ranked No. 25 in the nation heading into the final week of the regular season.

The Hurricanes women are ranked 16th in the AP poll, making Miami one of eight schools nationally to have both its men's and women's teams ranked in the top 25.

Hurricanes hit another high with win over Duke

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Feb. 25, 2017

It's becoming common, sure. But does it ever get old?

No way.

Miami scored another upset win over Duke on Saturday, by a 55-50 score. Students stormed the court and jumped around afterward. Bruce Brown and Jim Larrañaga were interviewed on CBS. Mike Krzyzewski was talking about better times ahead.

Meanwhile, for Hurricanes basketball, these are the good old days.

This team, picked to finish ninth in the ACC, just locked up both an NCAA Tournament berth and a 20-win season with last week's double-play. Monday's win at No. 18 Virginia and Saturday's against No. 10 Duke means the Canes should have a poll position for the first time this season heading into this week's games at Virginia Tech and No. 19 Florida State.

Rebuilding year? Larrañaga doesn't do rebuilding years. He just figures it out.

"Back-to-back wins over ranked teams," senior guard Davon Reed said. "I feel like we're going up from here."

No kidding.

This win gives Miami (20-8, 10-6 ACC) another high-RPI knockout, but if we're talking résumés, let's appreciate Larrañaga's, which stands alone in UM hoops history.

He is 138-65 and owns the best winning percentage (.680) of any Canes coach

on the job more than two years. Next month marks his third NCAA Tournament appearance, tying Leonard Hamilton for most in team history. He has two of Miami's three Sweet 16 runs.

For ACC teams, there are no measuring sticks like Duke and North Carolina. Larrañaga is 10-6 combined against them and beat both this year. Between 1985-86, when the program rose from a 14-year hiatus, and Larrañaga's arrival in 2011-12, it had lost 15 of 18 games.

It helps when he attracts players like Brown, who scored 25 points on 11-of-18 shooting with one of his typically bloated stat lines: four boards, four assists, two steals and two blocks in 36 minutes. A killer finisher at 6-foot-5, he hit Duke with a spin move, a lightning-quick cut to the basket and a couple of vicious dunks. He scored the game's first seven points, capped by a stone-cold 3 early in the game, with a hand in his face.

He was the best player on the floor, no small feat against a team playing seven McDonald's All-Americans and boasting boatloads of NBA potential. Yet another clutch performance for the Boston native, who shot down UVa last week, put up 30 against UNC, 17 against Florida State and had a triple-double in early December.

Two bedrock seniors for Miami, the ever-dependable Reed and energetic forward Kamari Murphy, played their final home game. Don't be surprised if Brown did, too.

But even if he departs for the pros — becoming UM's first one-and-done player — Larrañaga welcomes a recruiting class led by 6-4 guard Lonnie Walker, a top-20 recruit from Pennsylvania.

Maybe he, like Brown, will be worth

the price of admission every night. Miami needs that, because despite its remarkable gains, games at the Watsco Center still rarely feel like big-time college basketball unless a Tobacco Road blueblood, or Florida State, comes to town.

Saturday was reminiscent of the Heat's Big Three days, when you could see LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh — along with visiting NBA stars like Kobe Bryant — in the mix at these games. On Saturday, Bosh was there, along with Ray Allen, baseball great Alex Rodriguez, former Presidential candidate Jeb Bush and 15 pro scouts.

Larrañaga loves when the heavyweights come out, and that Miami has sold out season tickets for the last two years running — another program first — but his main focus is getting the student section, which numbers about 1,000 on good nights, to provide a regular home-court advantage.

"We are not the perennial powerhouse like Duke or Carolina. We don't have the fan base yet. But the operative word is 'yet,'" he said. "The students have shown up for all the big games. Now we need them to show up for all the games. If we truly want to compete for a national championship, our students need to understand that this is their team, their program. They can lift us up on their shoulders and take us to the promised land."

That's really all Miami lacks. Larrañaga has made everything else possible.

Brown leads Miami past No. 10 Duke, 55-50

AP
Tim Reynolds
Feb. 25, 2017

For Miami, pregame was all about the seniors.

The freshman was the story from there. Freshman Bruce Brown scored 25 points, and Miami held No. 10 Duke a staggering 32 points below its season average on the way to beating the ailing Blue Devils 55-50 on Saturday in the Hurricanes' home regular-season finale.

"Growing up, me and my dad used to watch Duke all the time," Brown said. "I just wanted to come out and perform and help my team win."

That's precisely what he did.

Brown shot 11 for 18 and added four assists, while his seven teammates who got into the game shot just 11 for 40 with four assists combined. Yet that was enough for the Hurricanes (20-8, 10-6 Atlantic Coast Conference), who outscored Duke 40-20 in the paint. Davon Reed had nine points and 10 rebounds in his final Miami home game.

"To go out on Senior Day with a win was just an amazing feeling," Reed said.

Frank Jackson and Luke Kennard each scored 16 points for Duke (22-7, 10-6), which lost its second straight to an unranked opponent after falling at Syracuse on Wednesday.

Duke was without guard Grayson Allen, the team's No. 3 scorer at 15 points per game sidelined by a left ankle issue.

"We've got to get well," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "All these games

are important, but we've got to get him well."

The Blue Devils came into Saturday averaging 82 points on 48 percent shooting. They shot just 32 percent against Miami.

Further hampering matters for Duke was Amile Jefferson playing only 5 second-half minutes because of an injury. Decisions on the availability of both Allen and Jefferson for Tuesday's game with Florida State will likely not be made until game day, Krzyzewski said.

"The most important games are going to be played in a couple weeks," Krzyzewski said. "And we're going to be there. ... We're going to be one of them. Miami will be one of them."

Miami was up by as many as 10 points in the second half, before Duke went on a 12-2 run to knot the game at 39-all.

Reed's three-point play with 4:14 left put Miami ahead to stay, and the Hurricanes had to hang on in the final minutes. Kennard's 3-pointer with 5.9 seconds left got Duke within three, but Brown got a dunk on a runout on the next Miami possession to seal the win.

Not long after that, Miami fans stormed the court in celebration.

"We've had some serious growing pains," Miami coach Jim Larrañaga said. "We've had some adversity. But they're finding a way to overcome whatever the obstacles are, especially on the defensive end."

BIG PICTURE

Duke: Jefferson tied Andre Dawkins for 10th on Duke's all-time games list with his 142nd appearance. If he plays Tuesday, he will tie Danny Ferry, Nolan

Smith and Quinn Cook for seventh. ... Harry Giles made his sixth start of the season. ... Krzyzewski remains seven shy of his 1,000th win with the Blue Devils. Miami: It's the fifth 20-win season for Miami in Larrañaga's six as coach. ... Brown scored or had the assist on nine of Miami's first 11 field goals. ... Guard Ja'Quan Newton returned after a three-game suspension for a violation of team rules. ... Miami was 1-7 this season in games where it failed to score at least 70 points.

SENIORS HONORED

Miami paid tribute to seniors Kamari Murphy and Reed in a pregame ceremony before the final home regular-season game. Here's how young Miami's roster is: There were twice as many graduating team managers honored during that ceremony than there were players.

CELEB WATCH

The game brought a sellout crowd, including some celebrities: NBA career 3-point leader and former Miami Heat star Ray Allen greeted CBS analyst and Duke alum Grant Hill at halftime, retired Yankees slugger (and University of Miami trustee) Alex Rodriguez was courtside, and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and Heat forward Chris Bosh (a newly signed Turner Sports analyst) also had prime seats.

UP NEXT

Duke: Hosts No. 19 Florida State on Tuesday.

Miami: Visits Virginia Tech on Monday.

Brown dazzles as Miami Hurricanes upset No. 10 Duke

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Feb. 25, 2017

Their win against Virginia earlier this week had them dancing in the locker room.

The Miami Hurricanes win over Duke on Saturday likely assured they'll be dancing in the NCAA Tournament.

Miami's men's basketball team, which had already once this season blown a lead against the powerhouse Blue Devils, was determined to make sure that didn't happen again.

And thanks to a spectacular effort from freshman Bruce Brown, it didn't.

The guard dazzled on Saturday, scoring a game-high 25 points as the Hurricanes, playing in their final regular-season home game of the year, held off the 10th-ranked Blue Devils to pick up a 55-50 win in front of a capacity crowd that included the likes of Chris Bosh, Ray Allen and Alex Rodriguez.

The victory was Miami's second upset of a ranked team this week after the Hurricanes bested the then-18th-ranked Cavaliers 54-48 in overtime on Monday. It also marked their second upset of the season of a Tobacco Road blueblood, with Miami knocking off then No. 9 North Carolina late last month.

In all, the Hurricanes have won eight of their past 10 in conference play and have posted a 20-in season for the fifth time in six years under coach Jim Larrañaga.

Plenty for Miami's fans – many of whom rushed the court – to celebrate, and plenty, the Hurricanes feel they've

done, to secure a second-straight NCAA Tournament berth.

"We knew the talent we had and we knew we were destined to open it up a little bit for ourselves," said Davon Reed, who had nine points and 10 rebounds, and who with Kamari Murphy was one of two seniors honored ahead of tip-off. "We just had to find our rhythm. The talent was always there, we were just a young team trying to find ourselves. The biggest thing we can rely on is our defense and it's been tough for teams to score. With that, we can play with anybody in any game."

Reed's assessment was one echoed by Blue Devils coach Mike Krzyzewski, who praised the Hurricanes' defensive effort after Miami held Duke, which averages 80.1 points per game, to its lowest scoring total of the season.

That defense and Brown's play proved a lethal combination.

The freshman was 11 of 18 from the field and hit Miami's lone 3-pointer of the day, a shot that fell in the opening minutes and seemingly set the tone for how he'd play the rest of the way.

When the Hurricanes' (20-8, 10-6 ACC) offense struggled and found itself mired in scoring droughts reminiscent of the ones that appeared in Durham when the Blue Devils (22-7, 10-6) used a strong second half to beat Miami in January, it was often Brown that helped them emerge.

And fittingly, it was his dunk with five seconds left that clinched the win seconds after a Luke Kennard 3-pointer pulled the Blue Devils to within three in the game's final moments.

"Growing up, me and my dad used to watch Duke all the time. And I just wanted to come out and perform and I played well and helped my team win," said Brown, who had 55 points in 70 minutes of action at home against Duke and North Carolina. "I didn't really think much of it. I just came out, played hard and [did] what the team needed me to do and helped my team win."

For the Hurricanes, though, there is little time to celebrate Saturday's win.

Larrañaga noted the Blue Devils still outrebounded Miami 13-10 as the teams traded leads six times and now, the Hurricanes will look to continue improving their seeding for the upcoming ACC Tournament with road games at Virginia Tech and No. 19 Florida State.

The two teams have combined to go 31-1 at home, meaning Miami faces a challenge this week.

"Very satisfying to have another 20-win season, but we still have two huge games ahead of us. ... Florida State is undefeated [at home] and Virginia Tech, I think, only has one loss [at home]," Larrañaga said. "As satisfying as today's win was and the record is now, our work is still ahead of us."

Upset Over No. 10 Duke

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 25, 2017

The Miami Hurricanes hardly ever beat Duke in the past.

Now, the Hurricanes are growing accustomed to knocking off one of the best programs in college basketball.

Freshman Bruce Brown scored a game-high 25 points to help the Miami Hurricanes to a 55-50 upset win over No. 10 Duke on Saturday afternoon.

"I've been playing in big games my whole life in AAU and high school," said Brown, who scored a season-high 30 in a win over then-No. 9 North Carolina earlier in the season. "I don't think it affects the way I play at all. I think play the same way I play every game."

Miami (20-8, 10-6 ACC) has won five of the last eight against Duke (22-7, 10-6) after winning just two of the first 17 games in the series.

"We're growing and when you compete in the ACC every team is hard to beat," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "We've had great battles with Duke. We expect those battles will continue and hopefully we'll win our share."

Miami has won four straight and virtually locked up an NCAA Tournament bid with the win over Duke in addition to a win against North Carolina and a win at No. 18 Virginia on Monday.

"To get a chance to win and advance in the league is major especially with how the league is going," senior Davon Reed said. "People are losing, winning left and right. The standings are changing every day so a chance to climb in the ACC poll and a chance to build our confidence is always great to beat one of the best teams in the country, not only in our league, in Duke."

It is the second time in school history Miami

has beaten ACC powers Duke and North Carolina in the same season. They also did so during their ACC regular season and tournament championship season in 2012-13.

"We can play with anybody in any game," Reed said. "We've just steadily been getting better and to see where we are now and to get two huge wins--one on the road at Virginia and then tonight--back-to-back against ranked team is just an amazing feeling. I look forward to going nowhere but up from here."

There were a number of athletic stars in the crowd including Chris Bosh, Ray Allen, and Alex Rodriguez in addition to Grant Hill, who was calling the game for CBS, and Glen Rice, a scout for the Heat.

Brown made 11 of 18 shots from the field. He also had four assists and four rebounds.

"I just went out and played hard," Brown said. "I just read their defense to see what they were doing and the court opened up for me."

Brown was the only Hurricane who scored in double figures as seniors Kamari Murphy and Reed were honored before taking the floor for their final home game. Reed had nine points, 10 rebounds, and three steals. Murphy had seven points and six rebounds.

"To go out on senior day with a win is just an amazing feeling," Reed said.

Both players were keys on the defensive end holding Duke stars Luke Kennard and Jayson Tatum to a combined 10 for 36 from the floor for 24 points--12 shy of their average.

"They are two very talented players and scorers in this league and we just wanted to try to take away their strengths," Reed said. "We know they can get it going at any point so the plan wasn't to keep them from scoring, but to try to make their shots difficult and not let them get rhythm shots or easy shots that they look for. Our defense has been great all season and especially lately. Our challenges

made them shoot some difficult shots and they weren't able to convert as easily as they probably would have liked to. I think that led to slowing them down."

Miami went on an 11-2 run to begin the second half to take a 33-23 lead. Brown sparked the run with a layup and a dunk.

Duke battled back to tie the game at 39 with 8:42 left on a free throw by Frank Jackson, who helped provide scoring for the Blue Devils with Grayson Allen sidelined with an ankle injury, tying for the team-lead with 16 points along with Kennard.

Reed broke a 43-all tie with 4:14 left on a three-point play driving to the basket and withstanding a foul by Marques Bolden.

The Hurricanes never trailed the rest of the way.

Tatum missed a 3 with 1:55 left that would have tied the game and Matt Jones missed a long jumper with Duke still trailing by three.

Brown sank a pair of free throws with 46.5 seconds left stretching Miami's lead to 50-45.

Miami led 22-21 at the break in a half where both teams shots 10 for 29 from the floor (34.5 percent) and 1 for 7 from 3.

The Hurricanes return to the court on Monday (9 p.m., ESPN2) at Virginia Tech.

Duke can't handle Brown in 55-50 loss at Miami

Raleigh News and Observer

Jessika Morgan

Feb. 25, 2017

No. 10 Duke fell to Miami for the third time in the last six meetings on Saturday.

Miami's Bruce Brown nailed two free throws and scored off an inbounds pass in the final minute to seal a 55-50 win for the Hurricanes (20-8, 10-6 ACC), who've won four straight.

The loss eliminates Duke (22-7, 10-6) from the ACC regular-season title hunt, and the Blue Devils will return to Cameron Indoor Stadium to host Florida State on Tuesday.

Freshman forward Harry Giles, who missed two free throws with 37.7 seconds left, got his first start since Duke last played Miami on Jan 21, in place of injured junior Grayson Allen (ankle). It was Allen's third missed game of the year. He and veteran forward Amile Jefferson (foot) have been banged up for the last few games.

Senior guard Matt Jones and freshman guard Frank Jackson were the two who most initiated Duke's offense without Allen, the starting point guard who averages 15 points and a team-best 3.9 assists.

Off the bench, Jackson scored 16 points and had six assists in 29 minutes.

Luke Kennard also added 16, and Duke shot 31.8 percent from the floor. Kennard hit a triple with 5.9 seconds left to bring Duke to within 53-50, but a Brown breakaway basket sealed it.

Brown, who caused fits for the Blue Devils, was the lone double-figure scorer at halftime with 13. He finished with a

game-best 25, coming up with big shots in the second half.

A Ja'Quan Newton layup in the final seconds of the first half captured the lead and deflated the Blue Devils.

They came out and missed their first five shots of the second half before a long Matt Jones basket quenched the drought.

Luke Kennard's 3-pointer from the left wing cut Miami's lead to 37-32 at 11:35, and he battled for a rebound on other end and drew the foul to capture some momentum for the Blue Devils nearly 10 minutes into the second half.

Consecutive 3-pointers from Jackson helped stabilize Duke and bring it to within 39-38, forcing a Miami timeout with 8:55 showing. He nailed a free throw to tie the score on the next possession.

A Jones layup tied the score at 43-43 late, but Davon Reed executed a three-point play that had the Miami crowd on its feet with 4:13 left.

Down three with 1:45 left, a Tatum 3-point try bounced off the iron as the pressure heated up. Jones tried another long basket, but Netwon ripped down a decisive defensive rebound.

Brown fouled Kennard on a 3 with 29.8 seconds left, and he made two to reach the 1,000-point threshold.

After Duke upset, is UM's Brown a one-and-done player?

Sun Sentinel
Dave Hyde
Feb. 25, 2017

When Jim Larrañaga recruited Bruce Brown, it went nowhere. Larrañaga called. Brown didn't answer. Larrañaga texted. Brown didn't answer. This continued for months until Brown was scratched off Miami's wish list.

Then Larrañaga's phone rang.

"Are you coming to see me?" Brown asked.

"Why?" Larrañaga said. "Bruce, you never returned a call or text."

"That's not important," Brown said.

Here's what was important Saturday: Brown scored 25 points in Miami's 55-50 win against No. 10 Duke. Brown was the one player Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski couldn't contain.

What was important is Brown was the best player on the court in a nationally televised game against possibly four one-and-done Duke freshmen, if you believe the early NBA mock drafts.

So the question Saturday wasn't if Miami is in the NCAA Tournament. That's decided. They're not only in, they're rising. The question that could make Miami fans groan is whether Brown has emerged as Miami's first one-and-done possibility.

He's 6-5. He's a point guard. He runs the offense, attacks the defense, rebounds, passes and, when Miami needed a basket to hold off Duke, typically came up with the play. Is he ready for the NBA? Is any freshman?

This is all you need to know about his game: Miami led 39-32 in the second half when Brown went to the bench for a rest. The rest lasted 84 seconds. Duke had cut Miami's lead to 39-38.

Back came Brown to assist on a Ja'Quan Newton lay-up. Then he cut back-door for a dunk to stretch Miami's lead to 43-39. Then he waded through traffic to get a defensive rebound. It was Senior Night at Miami, but the freshman put his signature on the day.

"He scored half their points," said Krzyzewski, who was only rounding up. "They had a great game, and he scored the most for them. And the defense wasn't bad. He made tough plays."

Krzyzewski pointed out Duke was hurting with Grayson Allen held out with an ankle injury and forward Amile Jefferson struggling through a foot problem. That's valid. As was Krzyzewski's next comment.

"The most important games will be played in a couple of weeks," he said. "We're going to be there. Wherever there is, we're there. We'll be one of those teams that start 0-0."

"There are three times in the year you start 0-0. The start of the season. The start of conference play. And the start of the [NCAA Tournament]. We'll be one of those teams in it. Miami will be one of them, too."

Part of the intrigue to Saturday remains Duke is college basketball royalty and Miami isn't. It's building. It's laying a foundation. It's somehow still not ranked this year despite having the portfolio to merit that.

Beating ranked Virginia and Duke in the same week is a nice step for this team. Consecutive trips to the tournament would be a progressive step for this program.

What would having a one-and-done player mean? This is a college basketball conundrum. Krzyzewski wrestled with its minimalist statement on his game until finally accepting it.

Miami never had a player enter the conversation until Brown. Shane Larkin was a sophomore when he rocketed into the NBA discussion. Brown is coming on as his first year closes. He had 30 points against North Carolina. Now this day against Duke.

"I've been playing in big-time games my whole life in AAU and high school," he said. "I play the same way I play every game."

A year ago, Brown did visit Larrañaga on a recruiting trip. It turned out he hadn't returned any early messages from any coach recruiting him. And by Saturday he was the central part of Miami's upset of Duke.

"I think this game is pretty much indicative of games in our conference," Krzyzewski said. "A couple of plays here or there. It was a performance by Brown. Something that separates you like that is all you need."

The biggest games remain. But the big question is moving into the realm of possibility: Could Brown be Miami's first one-and-done freshman?

Seedings, pride on line as UM hosts No.10 Duke

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Feb. 24, 2017

More than a month has passed since Duke went on a 29-3 second-half run as the University of Miami unraveled and watched its double-digit halftime lead disappear at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

Although the Canes have won seven of their nine games since that night, they have not forgotten what it felt like to trudge off that Duke court to the deafening chants and taunts of the Cameron crazies. On Saturday afternoon, Miami has another shot at the Blue Devils. This time, the Hurricanes say things will be different.

For one thing, the game is at home, and a packed house is expected at the Watsco Center. CBS is televising the 4 p.m. game, which always makes the UM students increase their numbers and volume. It is Senior Day, so emotions will be running high in honoring Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy.

And, maybe most motivating, there are Atlantic Coast Conference seedings at stake and Selection Sunday is just a few weeks away.

UM (19-8, 9-6 ACC) trails Duke (22-6, 10-5) by just a single game in the conference standings.

The Blue Devils' loss to Syracuse on Wednesday night created a four-way tie for second place behind North Carolina between Duke, Louisville, Florida State and Notre Dame. UM has games against Duke and FSU remaining, so the Canes could earn a top-four seed and a double-bye in the ACC tournament if they manage to win both of those games.

"I told my team we're one game out of second and one game out of 10th," UM coach Jim Larrañaga said. "The league is very deep and talented, teams are similar."

Duke had won seven in a row before the Syracuse loss. UM is coming off a road win over Virginia and has won three consecutive games without starting point guard Ja'Quan Newton, who was suspended but makes his return on Saturday — although he will not start, Larrañaga said.

Blue Devils coach Mike Krzyzewski was recovering from back surgery and didn't attend the Jan. 21 game against Miami. But he will be on the bench Saturday and expects a highly motivated UM team.

"During this time, you're going to face teams that just inherently should be hungrier than you, and then you have to try to be as hungry. That's a challenge," Krzyzewski said.

Two Hurricanes who will be especially fired up are seniors Reed and Murphy, both of whom have many family members and friends flying in for the game.

"It's a bittersweet feeling," said Reed, who is also among the top scholars in the ACC. "People have been reminding me all week that it's my last home game, so it will definitely be an emotional day for me."

Larrañaga heaped praise on Reed, whom he called "a role model for what a college athlete should be."

The coach named Reed a co-captain as a sophomore, something he said he had never done.

Murphy said he tends to keep his emotions in check and isn't feeling pressure to "do something extraordinary just because it's my last home game." But he reflected on his time at UM, said he has "become a better man off the court" and gave the credit to Larrañaga.

"He's the GOAT [Greatest Of All-Time] for me," Murphy said.

UM men vs. No. 10 Duke

When: Saturday, 4 p.m.

Where: Watsco Center, UM campus

Records: UM (19-8, 9-6 ACC), Duke (22-6, 10-5 ACC)

TV/Radio: CBS/ 560-WQAM

Scouting Report: The Canes have won seven of nine games since losing at Duke Jan. 21, including victories over then-No. 9 North Carolina and No. 18 Virginia. The Blue Devils have won eight of their last nine games and are playing very well since Coach Mike Krzyzewski returned from back surgery. Duke freshman Jayson Tatum has come on strong. Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy will be honored on UM Senior Day. Miami point guard Ja'Quan Newton returns to action after a three-game suspension, but will not start.

Plenty at stake as UM men prepare to host No. 10 Duke

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Feb. 24, 2017

A nationally televised game. A high-profile opponent. And a team still looking for resume-building wins.

There are plenty of storylines for the Hurricanes men's basketball team as it prepares to host 10th-ranked Duke on Saturday afternoon in its final home game of the regular season.

Throw in the fact seniors Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy will be honored ahead of tip-off, that point guard Ja'Quan Newton will be returning from his three-game suspension and that the Hurricanes would like to make up for an ugly performance against the Blue Devils earlier this year and there are all the ingredients for a memorable, emotional afternoon at the Watsco Center on Saturday.

"We expect it'll be electric," Miami coach Jim Larrañaga said. "The students will be turning out in large numbers, the fans know Duke is coming to town, it's on CBS, a nationally televised game and I would expect it to be very much like our home game against North Carolina."

There's no doubt the Hurricanes would like a result like they had against the Tar Heels, too.

Nearly a month ago, Miami upset then-ninth-ranked North Carolina, starting a crucial stretch during which the unranked Hurricanes went on to win six of eight against tough Atlantic Coast Conference foes.

The most recent victory came Monday, when Miami traveled to Charlottesville and upset then No. 18 Virginia 54-48 in overtime. It was a win that had many

college basketball experts moving the Hurricanes off the bubble and into the NCAA Tournament.

But the Hurricanes understand a victory over a Duke team that has improved since the two teams met on Jan. 21 will only continue helping their postseason cause.

And Miami (19-8, 9-6) is also looking to show the nation they're an improved team, as well, after last month's game against the Blue Devils at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

There, the Hurricanes controlled the tempo for much of the first half, even building a 12-point lead. But they failed to put together a complete 40-minute effort and were outscored 45-22 in the second half.

That eventually resulted in a 70-58 Duke win.

Since, the Blue Devils (22-6, 10-5) have only gotten stronger, with legendary coach Mike Krzyzewski returning to the bench after back surgery and injured players returning to the lineup. That's coincided with growth from freshman Jayson Tatum, and the Blue Devils enter Saturday's game having won seven of their last eight – with that lone loss coming on a buzzer-beater at Syracuse on Wednesday.

"They've got a couple more guys rolling and their freshmen are playing well now," Murphy said. "They were playing well before, but even better now. They had a couple close games, good games, and I think they've got a little confidence, too. It's up to us to know the scout and do what we have to do and try to stop them. ... I think they have their mojo back now, but we have to get the 'W' on Saturday."

Helping Miami in that effort Saturday will be Newton, who is set to return after this three-game suspension for violating an undisclosed team rule. Even after missing Miami's wins over Georgia Tech, Clemson and Virginia, Newton is still the Hurricanes' second-leading scorer averaging 15 points.

Larrañaga said the point guard, who started all 24 of Miami's games before his suspension, will come off the bench against the Blue Devils, and he intends to keep the same starting lineup that has played well in his absence, a rotation that includes Murphy, Reed, Anthony Lawrence, Bruce Brown and Ebuka Izundu.

But the coach made it a point to praise how Newton – who took to social media on Monday night to apologize for his actions – has handled his time out of the lineup.

"I thought the most important thing was his body language when we played Clemson on Saturday. Anybody who noticed our bench while the game was going on would see Ja'Quan Newton standing up and clapping and cheering and smiling for his team," Larrañaga said. "To us, attitude is the most important quality. You have to have a positive attitude. So what he's dealing with is adversity and you have to have the ability to overcome adversity. ... Ja'Quan is a tremendous basketball player and we need him to play and play well."

Next Up - Miami

Duke Basketball Report

JD King

Feb. 24, 2017

When Duke and Miami met in Cameron, it was a tale of two halves: Miami was tremendous in the first half and took a 36-25 lead to the locker room. In the second half though, Duke took the Hurricanes to the woodshed and behind a 20-0 run won 70-58.

That was a heck of a turnaround.

Don't expect it twice.

A lot has changed since then and for both teams.

Duke went into that game without Coach K, who was out with back surgery and having lost back-to-back games with Florida State and Louisville.

A third loss would have been devastating.

Miami entered that game as a still-young team. Davon Reed and Ja'Quan Newton were the only meaningful upperclassmen. Freshman Bruce Brown emerged quickly this season and scored 15 against Duke; fellow freshman Dewan Huell had seven.

Reed had 19 and Newton had 13. Murphy was held to four. Miami got no points from the bench.

This team has grown has grown up a lot since then.

After losing to Duke, Miami nipped BC by one then just smoked a complacent UNC by 18.

The 'Canes have only lost to Florida State and Louisville since leaving Cameron.

Newton will come off a three game suspension during which Miami also had other issues including illness and injury.

None of it mattered. Miami knocked off Georgia Tech, Clemson and Virginia with seven players available. This team has shown

real grit and toughness. In our opinion, at this moment, there is no team in the ACC more worthy of respect than the Hurricanes and the case for Coach of The Year will probably come down to Miami's Jim Larrañaga and Georgia Tech's Josh Pastner.

Pastner's done a stunning job but so has Larrañaga.

He'll presumably have eight players for the Duke rematch.

Duke retains a considerable advantage in size. Sophomore Ebuka Izundu is 6-10 and 230 He may become a consistently good player but he's not there yet. In the four games after the Duke game he failed to score. Since then he's hit for 16, 8, 8, 2, 12 and 6. In the last five games he's pulled down 14 rebounds.

He doesn't necessarily have to score or rebound to be effective in Miami's system. Michael Ojo barely plays for FSU but he gives them what they need: a big body in the middle.

On the other hand, Kameron Murphy was weak offensively for a lot of the season. He's really picked it up lately and is averaging 10.8 ppg. He's never been a big scorer so that's great for Miami.

The guy we're keeping an eye on is Dejan Vasiljevic.

He's from Melbourne, and like a lot of Aussie guards has no reservations about shooting.

He's vastly improved - possibly as much as anyone in the ACC - over the last month or so. Miami wouldn't have beaten Tech or Virginia without him.

Duke of course is also coming off of a painful loss at Syracuse. After that game, Mike Krzyzewski didn't kick his team out of the locker room or anything but he did say pretty plainly that Duke didn't win because Duke made too many mistakes and let Syracuse be in a position to win.

Amile Jefferson and Grayson Allen are both playing with lingering injuries and that doesn't help either.

We'll have to see how Duke reacts to that. It could be a positive or a negative. There have been seasons where Duke took a couple of games to shake off a loss.

This game is more important than it would have been if Duke had prevailed in balmy Syracuse (the temperature was in the 60s and people wore shorts during the day - in upstate New York).

Now the Devils face a motivated, united and confident Miami. Duke has some advantages but Miami does as well.

We've said this before, several times lately in fact, but it's true: we keep seeing tantalizing hints from Harry Giles. Against Syracuse it was that incredibly quick little shot under the basket and against Virginia it was a pair of steals, one of which made us sit up a littler straighter.

He's fought back from serious knee problems and is on the verge of regaining his reputation. It may not come before the end of the season, but it won't surprise at all if we see a major eruption from him at any point.

It's also worth pointing out that since that first game, Jayson Tatum has emerged as a highly dangerous player.

Everything has changed except for this: you can't predict much at all in the ACC this season.

Previewing the top 10 college basketball games this weekend

USA Today
Scott Gleeson
Feb. 24, 2017

3.) No. 11 Duke at Miami

Saturday, 4 p.m., CBS

About the Blue Devils (22-6, 10-5): Despite its buzzer-beater loss to Syracuse, Duke is looking like the title contender it was expected to be. Coach K returning to the sidelines has helped, but the play of embattled star Grayson Allen and Player of the Year candidate Luke Kennard has also been critical.

About the Hurricanes (19-8, 9-6): Playing in survival mode, with an NCAA tournament ticket on the line, Miami has won five of six to play itself into the safety zone. The Hurricanes have been simply finding a way to grind out victories, with their most impressive one coming in the form of a 15-point win against North Carolina.

Star watch: Duke guard Kennard (20.1 ppg, 5.1 rpg) and forward Jayson Tatum (16.6 ppg, 7.4 rpg). Miami guard Davon Reed (15.4 ppg, 4.4 rpg) and guard Ja'Quan Newton (15.0 ppg, 3.7 apg).

The pick: Duke. Miami is done playing with its postseason status in peril, and the Blue Devils are looking to bounce back from the 'Cuse loss and keep peaking with March around the corner.

Gonzaga guard Chris Lykes — all 5 foot 8 of him — is the biggest playmaker in D.C.

The Washington Post

Jacob Bogage

Feb. 23, 2017

The local legend of Chris Lykes was born in Dec. 2013, when Gonzaga Coach Steve Turner looked down his bench, pointed to his 5-foot, 6-inch freshman, and tossed him headfirst onto one of high school basketball's biggest stages.

The Eagles opened their conference schedule at rival O'Connell, then led by Maryland Terrapins standout guard Melo Trimble. Gonzaga needed a burst of scoring, so Turner looked to Lykes, a ballhandler with flash and grit, quick enough to get to the hoop at will, smart enough to keep the Eagles out of trouble — he hoped.

Lykes has never again come off the bench again. In 125 varsity games, which included a 2-inch growth spurt, he's averaged 16.7 points per game. His 2,085 career points are the most in Gonzaga's storied basketball history. And he's done it all standing 5-8 in the right pair of shoes.

The Washington Catholic Athletic Conference does not take kindly to ninth-grade upstarts, or to undersized guards who bring the ball in the paint and want to play among the shot blockers.

Chris Lykes does not care. He'll be the first to tell you, followed closely by Turner, then his teammates, then his friends. When Lykes leads the fifth-ranked Eagles into Friday's WCAC quarterfinals against Bishop Ireton, his opposition will have its hands full trying to corral the smallest player on the court.

"I've seen people laugh or stare at me as to why I'm on the court with guys who are much taller than me," Lykes said. "It's happened so often that it doesn't really affect me anymore."

[Allen, Harvey lead DeMatha over rival Gonzaga in a WCAC thriller]

In a clash at rival DeMatha last week, fans holler at him in unison, "You are short."

"It's his fuel to prove somebody wrong," Turner said.

After a blocked shot, students shouted, "Little boy."

"He'll go at the largest dude on the court," Gonzaga forward Eddie Scott said. "He's not afraid of anybody. He'll throw his body around."

And amid the jeers, Lykes jogged down court, nailed a three-pointer and blew kisses to the rafters as if a baby bird flew from his palms.

"Words don't mean a lot to us anymore," said Tyree Randolph, Lykes' close friend and the Gonzaga football team's all-time leading rusher. He stands 5-foot-7. "It gave us that motivation. Hearing, 'You can't, you can't, you can't,' and then you do, it's a great feeling."

Lykes scored 19 points in his varsity debut against O'Connell. When the Eagles trailed with two seconds remaining, Turner drew up a last-second play for his freshman: run off a screen, then make a beeline for the top of the key and get a shot off.

He did, and it went in, too. But Trimble helped O'Connell pull out a 75-73 win.

There are some losses you don't get over. Here was one for Chris Lykes, two points away from leading his team to a season-defining win.

Lykes is always thinking about his legacy. It is inseparable from his stature and from those who question it.

"There's always that next level of doubt," he says.

It started when he began playing basketball in second grade. He was short then, too, and immediately the stares and laughs and doubt began.

"I've heard it all," he said.

By middle school, he'd learned to deal with it all. By high school, he emerged on the AAU circuit as a flashy point guard who played with a chip on his shoulder. He and Randolph adopted the motto "heart over height," pinning it on social media posts and embedding it in their lifestyle.

Lykes has the phrase pasted over a photo of Allen Iverson as his phone background.

[Wilson boys win first title since 1984; Mya Moye leads Anacostia past Bell]

When colleges started recruiting him, scouts wondered if he could get his shot away in the nation's top basketball conferences, Turner said, or if bigger players would simply shove him out of the way in the open floor.

"I know coaches shied away from him because of his size," said Turner, who once was also an undersized point guard at Blair.

"But he's going to be the guy who knocks you out of the tournament," he told them.

Lykes looked for a college coach who embraced those doubts, who saw the race-car type

point guard as his team's leader. He found Jim Larrañaga at Miami, a coach who more than once was handed doubts and turned in results. His 2006 George Mason team defeated a host of basketball blue bloods on the way to a Final Four appearance.

Against North Carolina, he told the Patriots they were "kryptonite" to the Tar Heels' Superman. At Miami six years later, he turned 5-foot-10 point guard Shane Larkin into a first-round NBA draft pick.

"He saw a coach that trusted guys like him and wanted guys like him," Turner said of his point guard.

That's what made Turner decide to recruit Lykes in the first place, he said. Turner knows the doubters. He played against them in high school and college. Now he strategizes against them, the coaches that will send lanky forwards to try to trap Lykes in the corner.

Turner puts a dry-erase marker on a whiteboard and maps Lykes around it. There's something in those Xs and Os more than running an offense. It's a statement of identity and having been there before.

"He has to be me on the court," Turner said.

Which means Turner has to be Lykes on the sideline — at least for this year's team — coaching with the same flair and energy his point guard exudes on the floor. After that three-pointer against DeMatha, Turner threw a fist-pump across his chest and stomped his foot down in celebration.

"If he's not one of the best players in the country," DeMatha Coach Mike Jones said afterward, "I don't know who is."

These moments are glimpses into the future for Lykes — opportunities to cast off the doubts Nobody cares if you're a short basketball coach or engineer, which is what Lykes wants to study at Miami. They care, at some point, if and only if you can get the job done.

Lykes can, his teammates say. When friends and family ask junior forward Myles Dread who the Eagles' little point guard is, he tells them, "Wait and see. I'm his biggest fan."

Newton apologizes, Larrañaga dances and ‘Canes move closer to NCAA tournament

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Feb. 21, 2017

For a good chunk of Monday night, things looked bleak for the Hurricanes men’s basketball team.

Miami trailed Virginia by as many as nine points in a game where defense made a difference and scoring was at a premium. For a third straight game, it was playing without its suspended starting point guard, Ja’Quan Newton. And in the final minutes of regulation, the Hurricanes were on the wrong end of two questionable calls that sent the Cavaliers to the free throw line four times.

Ultimately, though, freshman Bruce Brown hit a 3-pointer with 23.8 seconds left in overtime to help lift Miami to a 54-48 win over Virginia at John Paul Jones Arena in Charlottesville.

And not long after that happened Wednesday night, a lot went down on social media. Newton took to Twitter to apologize for the actions that led to his three game suspension, while once again, one of Miami coach Jim Larrañaga’s locker room celebrations went viral — with good reason.

First, a look at what Newton had to say.

The junior, who has now served his second suspension at Miami, wrote the following on his protected Twitter account late Monday:

“I want to apologize to my teammates, coaches, and most importantly, the fans of the University of Miami. I made a huge mistake and hope that everyone will forgive me. I’m so happy for my brothers being able to pull off a huge road win tonight in my absence and going 3-0

throughout my suspension. Sitting here alone watching the game really hit me tonight and I’m totally disappointed in myself. I promise from this day forward to work harder than [sic] I ever did and to never be a distraction again.”

Newton, who was averaging 15 points before his suspension, was at the Watsco Center loudly cheering his teammates during the first two games he had to sit out, wins over both Georgia Tech and Clemson last week.

But he did not travel to Charlottesville, a fact he acknowledged and one that was noted during the ESPN broadcast. He is slated to return Saturday against the Blue Devils though whether he’ll return to his starting role in the lineup remains to be seen. He had started all 24 games prior to his suspension and the three games he’s sat out means he’s likely got fresher legs than his teammates, many of whom have logged significant minutes in his absence.

In his postgame comments to reporters at Virginia, Larrañaga noted he intended to give his team both Tuesday and Wednesday off before having them return to practice Thursday.

“I think at this time of year, you will probably see signs of fatigue in all players,” Larrañaga said, according to a Miami release. “The grind is very serious. We played Saturday, now it’s Monday and we had a travel day on Sunday. You have to be very careful about your practice time and how well rested your players are.”

Speaking of Larrañaga, since arriving at Miami and leading the Hurricanes to two Sweet 16 runs, the coach has endeared himself to both players and Miami basketball fans and his locker

room celebrations after Miami wins have become the stuff of social media legend.

Monday’s was no different.

As he walked into the locker room after the win — one many college basketball experts think likely helped Miami move off the proverbial bubble and into the NCAA Tournament — Larrañaga was mobbed by his players.

He quickly joined them for a dance that was posted by Miami’s social media team (And ESPN and CBS) and quickly made a gif by Internet-savvy Hurricanes fans.

Expect to see lots of retweeting, reposting and re-everythinging of it if Miami manages another big win later this week.

The Hurricanes are set to host No. 10 Duke at the Watsco Center on Saturday. Another win and the Hurricanes will have lots of reasons to dance — including in March.

NCAA tournament-bound? Miami grabs major win at No. 18 Virginia

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Feb. 20, 2017

No starting point guard, a rotation of seven players, and a Boa constrictor defense coming at them.

A two-day turnaround on the road, a top-20 opponent and — let's call it fair, here — a few questionable moments of officiating.

Miami got it done.

The Hurricanes earned a highly impressive road win on Monday, beating No. 18 Virginia 54-48 in overtime, a defensive struggle the nation watched on ESPN. UM (19-8, 9-6 ACC) moved up to sixth in the league standings, but more importantly, all but clinched an NCAA tournament berth.

Miami has developed nicely down the stretch, but hadn't scored a road win of major importance — it was 3-4 on the road — and was 1-4 against the RPI top 25.

Now it will be impossible for the selection committee to ignore the Hurricanes, as young and inexperienced as they are.

"We made some key defensive stops. We made some key shots," coach Jim Larrañaga said on ESPN afterward. "We just told our players to play with confidence, to believe in themselves."

Bruce Brown's 3-pointer with 26 seconds left in overtime put Miami ahead to stay, and one of several clutch plays for the freshman from Boston.

He sank a pair of free throws with 28 seconds left in regulation to put Miami ahead, and did so again midway through

OT. He finished with a game-high 14 points and went 9-for-10 from the line — showing no fear, despite four turnovers.

Another newcomer, D.J. Vasiljevic, drilled a 3 with 1:02 left in regulation to tie a game the Cavaliers led for the previous 14 minutes. He scored 10.

Davon Reed and Anthony Lawrence shot a combined 2-for-14, but went 8-8 at the line. Lawrence added six boards and five assists and, like Reed (five turnovers, nine points, 1-for-7 from three), kept his head level amid some shaky moments.

Kamari Murphy, emerging as a post scorer at just the right time, had 10 points and 11 rebounds. Ebuka Izundu played well (six points on 3-for-5 shooting).

The Hurricanes shot 37 percent and 21 percent from the outside, compared with 31 and 25 for the Cavaliers. UM also survived 15 turnovers, but made 91 percent of its free throws while Virginia (65 percent) left points on the floor.

The defense may have dulled the proceedings, but they lent drama to every possession. The largest lead was Virginia by seven, with 12 minutes left in the game.

With four seconds left, Miami had the ball. Reed hit a would-be winner from 25 feet, but released the ball a hair late. To overtime they went, and the Hurricanes survived.

Now Miami, 3-0 without Ja'Quan Newton, gets its suspended point guard back for Saturday's home game against No. 11 Duke (4 p.m., CBS). That will boost the rotation to eight, with center Rodney Miller certain to get a few minutes against a longer Duke team (Larrañaga has said multiple times recently he wishes he was

playing Miller more).

What will Monday's win do for Miami's confidence in this final stretch of 10th-ranked Duke (No. 11 in RPI), at Virginia Tech (No. 35), at 19th-ranked Florida State (No. 13)?

It won't hurt it, that's for sure.

New process will determine ACC hoops awards

WRAL Sports
Caulton Tudor
Feb. 20, 2017

It hasn't been a hot talking point – yet – but the voting for the seasonal ACC basketball awards has been changed drastically during the past few weeks.

The conference's 15 schools voted unanimously to take the official awards voting responsibilities away from the Atlantic Coast Sports Media Association (ACMSA) and internalize the process.

When the all-conference teams and various individual awards are announced in a couple of weeks, the voting will have been done by a panel that gives each school four votes – its coach, a member of its radio network crew and two other people who cover the team.

In a letter to ACSMA members, executive director Dave Goren explained that the changes were made by league schools to combat what some schools felt was a geographical bias concentrated in North Carolina and Virginia.

ACSMA members had determined the official ACC all-conference teams since the league's formation in 1953-54. ACSMA will still hold its annual vote and announce the results, but it'll no longer be recognized by the conference.

In 2015-16, the 1st-team consisted of Grayson Allen (Duke), Cat Barber (NC State), Jaron Blossomgame (Clemson), Malcolm Brogdon (Virginia), and Brice Johnson (UNC). Brogdon was voted player of the year, Duke's Brandon Ingram top rookie and Miami's Jim Larrañaga coach of the year.

UNC, which won the regular season race, did not place a player on the 2nd and 3rd all-conference teams.

The 15 head coaches voted exactly the same as ACSMA on 1st-team, the top three awards and even defensive (Brogdon), most improved (Blossomgame) and 6th-man (UNC's Isaiah Hicks) awards.

In 2014-15, the only 1st-team vote-getters from North Carolina and Virginia were Brogdon and Jahliil Okafor (Duke). The coaches and ACSMA 1st-team picks were identical with Rakeem Christmas (Syracuse), Jerian Grant (Notre Dame) and Olivier Hanlan (Boston College) joining Brogdon and Okafor.

That same pattern held except for one spot in 2013-14. Both the coaches and ACSMA 1st-teams included C.J. Fair (Syracuse), Marcus Paige (UNC), Jabari Parker (Duke) and T.J. Warren (State). The media vote had Clemson's K.J. McDaniels on 1st-team. The coaches instead elected Brogdon.

As a former president and frequent member of the ACSMA board of directors, I'm disappointed that the official awards voting procedure has changed. But I do understand, and embrace, the decision if the schools outside Virginia and North Carolina seriously believed they were the victims of voting discrimination.

Whether the same policy will be used in football has not been determined.

The only players from North Carolina and Virginia on the football 1st-team were Woody Baron (Virginia Tech, down lineman), Quin Blanding (Virginia, safety), Nicholas Conte (Virginia, punter), Michael Kiser (Virginia, linebacker), Ryan Switzer (UNC, wide-out) and Mike Weaver (Wake Forest, place kicker).

Nine Clemson players were voted 1st-team in football.

Regardless of how that plays out, one thing is certain for now. The 60 hand-picked basketball voters will have a difficult time sorting through the player of the year field.

With two weeks remaining in regular season, strong cases can be made for up to a dozen players, including at least four from inside North Carolina – John Collins (Wake), Luke Kennard (Duke) and UNC's Justin Jackson and Joel Berry.

But two of the league's top three scorers play for Pitt – Michael Young (20.2 ppg) and James Artis (19.6 ppg) – and the Panthers (15-12, 4-10 ACC) may yet finish last in the standings.

The last player who led the league's scoring and did not land a 1st-team all-conference spot was Terrell Stoglin of Maryland, who averaged 21.6 in 2011-12 and wound up on the 2nd team. The Terps went 17-15 (6-10) that season.

There's no decreed pattern for voting on awards. Some voters put more weight on statistics than others. Some voters tend to give the victors the spoils.

It'll be interesting to see who the new ACC official voters are and even more interesting to see the results they reach.

Young 'Canes growing up with season on line

Sun Sentinel
Dave Hyde
Feb. 18, 2017

Within minutes of his team's latest escape, Jim Larrañaga changed completely from his courtside, suit-and-tie coach's uniform. He donned sweat pants. Tennis shoes. T-shirt and long-sleeve pullover.

"I was sweating too much," the Miami men's basketball coach said as he sat before the media.

Long before his team ebbed and flowed through a 71-65 win against Clemson, Larrañaga knew this season would be a season to sweat out. These Hurricanes are good but young – decidedly young – as three freshmen, two sophomores and two seniors played Saturday.

In November and December, as the youth revealed itself, Miami lurched through good nights and bad nights, up halves followed by down halves, even staggering differences from one time-out to the next.

But after months of harnessing the high school talent and developing it toward Atlantic Coast Conference basketball, Larrañaga had a question Saturday.

"Did you see Dewan defend Blossom game on that one play?" he asked.

That was Miami guard Dewan Huell, one of the freshmen, against Clemson's Jaron Blossom game, a redshirt senior with a chance for the NBA next season. And their personal meeting late in Saturday's game, with Miami clinging to a lead, defines a change.

"Blossom game tried to beat the young guy and take him with his straight-line

drive," Larrañaga said. "Dewan shut it off. It was beautiful."

And then he said what the good coaches can in February, what the collective scores and eyewitness testimony allows: "We're making a lot of progress," he said.

With the Heat, Erik Spoelstra has directed a team full of cast-offs and one-year contracts into the league's hottest team. With the Panthers, a healthier team has finally started to play like it should of late.

But the Hurricanes are right there for development as the season moves on. They have just eight players under scholarship, after all, due to the fall-out of the Nevin Shapiro sanctions, a transfer and strategic recruiting that will pay off next season.

Saturday was a must win for Miami's NCAA Tournament hopes, too. That's because in the all-important RPI calculation of wins and schedules, Miami entered Saturday ranked 50th and Clemson 51st.

Never mind Miami entered the game 7-6 the ACC while Clemson was 4-9. Clemson had some definitive out-of-conference wins, and RPI often is the judge and jury for teams on the edge.

So the instant read to this game is one team made its path easier and the other one more treacherous. That's what made Saturday's progress so interesting, considering the Hurricanes were without second-leading scorer Ja'Quan Newton, who served the second of a three-game disciplinary suspension.

Enter Bruce Brown. He's one of the freshmen who's grown up, even though he's "working on half a tank right now," Larrañaga said.

He's tired. All the kids are are. Larrañaga must judge when to push, when to pause and how to preserve bodies accustomed to a shorter seasons while preparing for big games.

Brown was sick and couldn't get out of bed earlier this week. But he played 37 minutes to help Miami beat Georgia Tech on Wednesday and had nine points and five assists in Saturday's win.

"I think our young guys, our freshmen and sophomores are gaining a lot of confidence and a lot of experience," Larranga said. "And our veterans will say, 'Hey, let's run something for Ebuka,' because they are confident in him."

That's 6-10 sophomore Ebuka Izundu, who a year ago couldn't stay in games due to foul trouble. Now he's learned to play defense, and so could play enough to score 12 points as one of four Hurricanes in double figures.

Larrañaga won his 600th game in January. That was a significant milestone. But win No. 607 could be more important considering Miami's next three games are at No. 14 Virginia, against No. 12 Duke and at No. 17 Florida State.

The coach better keep the post-game sweat suit and pullovers ready. His kids are growing up nicely. But there's a lot of sweating yet to be done.

Hurricanes showing progress in critical win over Clemson

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
Feb. 18, 2017

Miami would like to have Ja'Quan Newton on the floor.

While he's suspended, however, the Hurricanes have proven more than capable of winning.

UM won its second game in a row without its junior point guard, beating Clemson 71-65 at the Watsco Center in a vital chance for both teams to add to their NCAA tournament resumes.

The Hurricanes (18-8, 8-6 ACC) offset the absence of Newton, a talented scorer who can break down the stingiest of defenses, by producing four players in double figures: senior forward Kamari Murphy (career-high 15), senior guard Davon Reed (14), sophomore center Ebuka Izundu (12) and sophomore forward Anthony Lawrence (10). Freshman guard Bruce Brown had nine points.

Miami needed everyone to contribute in a tight game, which it led by one possession for most of the first half, and two scores by most of the second. Its largest lead was eight.

"We all play for each other," said Murphy. "If everyone plays their role, we'll get the win. ... Whoever steps up that day, we'll take it."

What coach Jim Larrañaga liked more: his team had more assists (19) and fewer turnovers (seven) Saturday than in any one of their ACC games this year. That result came against a Clemson team that leads the ACC in steals.

Brown, Reed and Lawrence each finished with five assists. Larrañaga was beaming about some of those passes afterward.

Lawrence threw one behind his head to Murphy for a first-half lay-up. Freshman guard D.J. Vasiljevic stole the ball, read the fast-break defense and dropped it to Lawrence for a slam. With 1:34 left and Miami up three, Reed drove baseline and hooked a pass to the top of the key to Brown for a three-pointer. Ballgame.

"Nineteen assists," Larrañaga said. "I like 'em all."

The crowd of 6,987 liked when Murphy, a 6-foot-8 redshirt senior known for defense and dunks, showed he has a little offensive game. He hit a jumper early, and later used a pump-fake, then

Euro-stepped his way to the basket for two points. He rattled home another jumper on the next possession.

"Teams have got to change their scouting report now," said a smiling Murphy, who made a career-best seven shots on nine attempts, and led Miami in rebounds (nine). He admitted the Euro-step was "just instinct ... I don't think that's part of my game."

Murphy would like to have the soft lefty jump-hook of his 6-10 frontcourt mate, Izundu, whom he said "scores easiest out of anyone on the team." After early-season foul trouble plagued him, Izundu is proving it. He scored 13 points in his first nine conference games, but is averaging 8.8 in his last five, beginning with a career-high 16 on Feb. 4 at North Carolina State.

Vasiljevic, a 6-2 guard from Australia, has shot mostly assisted 3s so far. But Larrañaga said he attacks the basket in practice, and was quite satisfied when Vasiljevic (five points) scored Saturday by splitting a double-team and throwing an off-balance floater at the rim.

He also noted 6-10 freshman forward Dewan Huell (six points), a former McDonald's high school All-American battling a foot injury, called his own name on a play called "Chin Rip," where he scored on an up-and-under layup through contact.

"We're making a lot of progress," Larrañaga said. "Young guys. You just don't know their timetable. Bruce Brown was ready by the time the season began. ... Then you've got guys like Dewan, who really needed to add strength. D.J. needed to play against the fast, quick athlete. In one of our early practices, I forget what Dewan did, but D.J. said, 'Yeah, we don't have those kind of dunks in Australia.'"

"I think our upperclassmen have played well all year, but our freshmen and sophomores are gaining more confidence."

Reed, Miami's steadiest player, grabbed seven boards and played excellent defense on Clemson's 6-7 star Jaron Blossomgame (17.3 points per game), who made 13 of his last 27 threes entering the game. He missed all five he took Saturday and scored 16 points. The Tigers didn't make a 3 in the second half (0-for-8) and finished 3-of-17.

That defense will help Miami on Monday at Virginia, currently ranked No. 14 and one of three ranked teams Miami will face in its final four games. The Hurricanes host No. 12 Duke on Saturday and finish on the road at Virginia Tech (Feb. 27) and at No. 17 Florida State (March 4). If they win one of those, it will greatly boost their resume heading into the ACC tournament (March 7-11 in Brooklyn, N.Y.).

"We don't want to think too far down the line, but every game is crucial," Murphy said. "We want to have a postseason. ... You've always got to protect home court."

For Clemson, Saturday's loss struck a major blow. The Tigers (14-12, 4-10) have a few wins in a loaded ACC, and the fifth-toughest schedule according to KenPom.com, but are now 2-6 on the road in conference play.

"Not for me to say," coach Brad Brownell said when asked what the loss did to his tournament chances. "We lost the game to a top-50 RPI team. I don't think it does much."

Both teams were hot to start, each opening 6-for-7 and 13-for-20 from the floor. That's typical for Clemson, which was ranked 27th in offensive efficiency by KenPom.com. The Hurricanes, stingy defensively all year, settled in and held the Tigers 10 points below their season average.

Clemson cut it to two points with 11:11, and one point with 7:43, but Reed and Lawrence sank threes in response both times.

"Making both free throws, making a big three, a timely shot," Brownell said. "We just didn't get any momentum-type plays in the second half."

Miami's big men help fuel key 71-65 ACC win over Clemson

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Feb. 18, 2017

There have been flashes of their potential in practice. But finally, it's starting to click in games.

And as the injured, depleted Hurricanes try to navigate through the final stretch of the regular season, there's no better time for big men Kamari Murphy and Ebuka Izundu to start playing the way Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga has long envisioned they could.

Against Clemson on Saturday afternoon, Murphy and Izundu combined for 27 points, helping the Hurricanes edge the Tigers 71-65 and pick up another crucial ACC win as Miami continues trying to polish its NCAA Tournament resume and work its way off the bubble.

With the victory, Miami has now won 26 of its last 28 on its home floor at the Watsco Center. More importantly, the Hurricanes have won two straight and four of their last five against conference foes.

That can only help the Hurricanes, who have just four regular-season games and the ACC Tournament left on the schedule ahead of Selection Sunday on March 12.

"I think this game was real important. We're taking it one game at a time, but due to guys being hurt, we know every game is crucial at this point," said Murphy, who finished with a career-high 15 points and a team-high nine rebounds. "Not thinking too far down the line, but we do want to have a postseason, so every game now is crucial to win. And like I said, with guys out, our motto in the locker room has been, 'Find a way,' so everybody's been stepping up. ...

Whoever it takes to step up that day, we'll take it."

Against Clemson – which, like Miami, is trying improve its tournament resume – it was Murphy and Izundu that helped fill the void left by the suspension of guard and second-leading scorer Ja'Quan Newton.

Newton, whose three-game suspension will end next Saturday against Duke, has often provided a scoring punch for the Hurricanes throughout the season. Against the Tigers, both Murphy and Izundu had their moments, with Murphy – one of just two seniors on the roster – hitting four rare jumpers.

Izundu, meanwhile, has started both games Newton has been out and has scored eight-plus points in four of Miami's last five games. Against Clemson, he finished with 12 points, including a late first-half stretch where he had nine of Miami's 11 points. In that stretch, the Hurricanes built a 35-31 lead.

"What we've been doing with the big guys in individual work, is now after months of doing it, starting to show up under game conditions," Larrañaga said. "Before, you could see it in practice from time to time, but it was inconsistent. Now, you're seeing it pretty regularly on the court."

For much of the game, Miami and Clemson (14-12, 4-10) seemed two evenly matched teams trading punches.

Though the Hurricanes (18-8, 8-6) led all through the second half, they were never able to build a lead bigger than eight points, a margin that came after a Murphy layup gave Miami a 43-35 lead with 16:34 left.

The Tigers answered with a four-minute, 13-5 run that was capped by a Jaron Blossomgame jumper that pulled the Tigers within two. Blossomgame finished with a game-high 16 points, but it wasn't enough.

Another of his jumpers with 1:13 left pulled Clemson within 67-63, but the Hurricanes – who have at times struggled from the free throw line this season – clinched the game in part because Davon Reed was able to convert on four free throw attempts in the final minute.

Reed, who has been one of the most consistent Hurricanes all season, finished with 14 points. He has now finished in double digits 22 times this season, including 20 of Miami's last 22 games. Anthony Lawrence, meanwhile, added 10 points for the Hurricanes, who played a clean basketball game, turning the ball over just seven times while totaling 19 assists in the win.

There won't be much time for the Hurricanes to savor what they did Saturday, with Miami set to travel to No. 14 Virginia on Monday. After that, they'll return home to host No. 12 Duke next Saturday before closing the regular season out with games at Virginia Tech and at No. 17 Florida State.

"I think we understand we have to play for each other now," Murphy said. "In the beginning of the season, we had some glitches and we had to find each other's game. Now, I think we all play for each other and we know the common goal. We know what we have to do to win."

Life on the NCAA bubble means sweaty games, sleepless nights for Larrañaga

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Feb. 17, 2017

Of course, North Carolina is Miami's best win to date. Beating the ACC leader on Jan. 28 is the crown jewel of the Hurricanes' in-progress NCAA tournament resume.

The most important win of the season? That might be Georgia Tech.

Miami remained in the postseason hunt with that 70-61 victory Wednesday night, but it's not just the result that made it special.

Consider what had to happen for Miami to beat the Yellow Jackets, who entered with a 6-6 conference record that includes takedowns of No. 6 Florida State, No. 9 UNC and No. 14 Notre Dame.

Starting point guard Ja'Quan Newton served the first of a three-game suspension. Standout freshman guard Bruce Brown, the fill-in point, had tonsillitis, which led to a high fever and dehydration. Freshman forward Dewan Huell injured his foot at Louisville last Saturday and was in the trainer's room constantly. Neither was likely to play.

"Tuesday night I'm at home and I'm trying to figure out what we're going to do," coach Jim Larrañaga told WQAM on Thursday.

"I'm thinking, 'OK, we've got D.J. Vasiljevic, who's a 2-guard, at the 1, we've got Davon Reed at the 2, Anthony Lawrence at the 3, Kamari Murphy at the 4, Ebuka Izundu at the 5 – and Rodney Miller backing all five guys up."

Miller, a freshman center, had played 48 minutes in 13 games.

Before the Newton suspension Miami had eight scholarship players, so Larrañaga "had to get ready our walk-ons, Mike Robinson and Chris Stowell, who are absolutely the most terrific kids but they haven't played a minute in ACC games. We don't have enough guys to get ready for Georgia Tech.

"I told my wife, 'This is crazy. What are we going to do?'"

His players answered that for him.

Brown showed up for the Wednesday morning shootaround, medicated and on intravenous fluids, hoping to play. He went 37 minutes, scoring eight points and dishing out five assists.

Huell scored 13 points in 21 minutes, showcasing his excellent jump-hook and impact defense, displaying traits of the dominant four-man UM believes he can be.

The sweet-shooting Vasiljevic put up 13, tied his season-high in minutes (28) and played heady off-the-ball defense, which greatly pleased Larrañaga. Like the other freshmen, he's coming along.

Davon Reed, as usual, was a rock. He scored 21 on 8-of-11 shooting with seven rebounds in 35 minutes. Fellow senior Kamari Murphy put up eight points and nine boards in 37 minutes.

Even though it used seven players and lost starting center Izundu to cramps in the second half, the Canes held off a late charge from the Yellow Jackets. Had they not, it would have been a big strike against them, in a league where defending your home court against .500 teams is a must.

Sometimes things just fall into place. For example: Larrañaga, who rarely takes off his jacket during games, sweated through his shirt against Tech. For his postgame interview, he changed into a pullover he hadn't worn in a while (since last year's Sweet 16, if you're wondering).

He found \$28 in the pocket.

Now comes Clemson (14-11, 4-9) for a noon Saturday tip at the Watsco Center. Another day in the life on the bubble.

The Tigers, led by 6-7 senior Jaron Blossomgame (17.3 points), are "so talented offensively right now, I was up last night," Larrañaga said. "I couldn't sleep."

In typical Larrañaga fashion, he had a story to tell.

After wiping his brow from the Georgia Tech win, he and his wife, Liz, went to dinner with friends. After arriving home around midnight, he reviewed Miami-Georgia Tech until 2 a.m. Needing to study Clemson, he put on the Tigers' 73-68 win at Wake Forest, a common opponent that ripped apart the Hurricanes a month ago. "That doesn't help," Larrañaga said. "Then I watched them play Virginia until 4 a.m.

"And then I put on CNN, and now I really can't sleep."

Sleep usually comes in April, anyway. He's got miles to go.

Depleted Hurricanes hold off Georgia Tech for key ACC win

Sun Sentinel
Christy Chirinos
Feb. 15, 2017

The Hurricanes have dealt with depth issues all season long.

And Miami's men's basketball team – which has just nine scholarship players on its roster – was dealt another blow just before tip-off against Georgia Tech when Miami announced starting point guard Ja'Quan Newton was suspended for three games after violating an undisclosed team rule.

Without him, the Hurricanes certainly had their struggles against Georgia Tech, though in the end, Miami managed to hold off the surging Yellow Jackets 70-61 to earn a critical Atlantic Coast Conference win on Wednesday night at the Watsco Center.

Senior Davon Reed, one of Miami's leaders, finished with a game-high 21 points to lead three Hurricanes in double figures. Freshmen Dewan Huell and DJ Vasiljevic each added 13 points for Miami, which also outrebounded Georgia Tech 31-17 and was 22-of-27 from the free throw line.

The night could have been even tougher for the Hurricanes, with Miami coach Jim Larrañaga saying postgame that he was unsure whether Huell, who injured his foot Saturday against Louisville, and Brown, who had been ill all week, would be available to play.

The pair gutted through their health issues and ultimately, helped Miami notch a much-needed win as the Hurricanes continue trying to add to their NCAA tournament resume ahead of Selection Sunday.

"How [Huell] was able to come in and go 4-for-7 from the field and give us 21 minutes on a bad foot was just a tremendous effort," Larrañaga said. "Secondly, Bruce showed up Monday morning and our trainer diagnosed him with tonsillitis...Tuesday he showed up with a 102-degree temperature and was feeling awful, so he had no preparation for the game, he or Dewan."

Still, there's no doubt the loss of Newton took a toll.

The Hurricanes played seven of their nine scholarship players, with each earning double-digit minutes. Additionally, Brown, Reed and forward Kamari Murphy each logged more than 35 minutes in the win.

Newton's absence didn't just hurt the Hurricanes physically. Miami, which has at time struggled to put points on the board, missed his scoring touch, too.

The junior is the Hurricanes' second-leading scorer averaging 15 points behind Reed's 15.5. And just as they have in games against Duke and Louisville, the Hurricanes had to endure minute-long scoring droughts, including a four-minute stretch in the first half that allowed Georgia Tech to pull within four.

In the opening minutes of the second half, the Yellow Jackets outscored Miami 11-5, tying the game at 43 before minutes later, they took a brief lead on a 3-pointer from Josh Okogie.

During that stretch, Miami was dealt yet another challenge when Izundu, who had two points and three rebounds at that point, began cramping in both legs and had to be helped off the court by teammates.

He did not return for the remainder of the second half, and in his absence, the Hurricanes shortened rotation was forced to power through.

It did exactly that.

After Okogie's 3-pointer, Miami responded with an 18-4 run fueled by Huell, who had a pair of emphatic dunks during that stretch that helped give Miami a 63-50 lead with 6:36 left.

But Georgia Tech, which has under first-year coach Josh Pastner notched wins this season against then No. 9 North Carolina, then No. 6 Florida State and then No. 14 Notre Dame, wouldn't go away.

Okogie, who has four times this season earned ACC Freshman of the Week honors, connected on another 3-pointer with 3:54 left in the game to pull the Yellow Jackets within seven.

He finished with a team-high 18 points for the Yellow Jackets and was 4-of-5 from 3-point range.

Another Georgia Tech 3-pointer, this one from Justin Moore again pulled Georgia Tech (15-11, 6-7) within seven in the game's final minute, but the Hurricanes managed to hold off the late push thanks in part to the fact they hit on five free throws in the game's final minute.

"As always, the chance to advance in the league and get a win is important. I think we had the odds against us a little bit," Reed said. "We were down, but the guys played well. Everybody stepped up. DJ stepped up, Ebuka stepped up. We had some big plays from everybody. It was a great win for us."

Waardenburg Making Adjustment to Miami

Inside the U

Chris Stock

Feb. 12, 2017

Sam Waardenburg is earning valuable time adjusting to the University of Miami and being in the United States.

Waardenburg, a 6-foot-9 forward from New Zealand, enrolled in December as part of the 2017 class and has been practicing with the team.

He is redshirting this season with hopes of contributing in the 2017-18 season.

“He’s been good” associated head coach Chris Caputo said. “It’s been a tremendous adjustment for him. Coming in right at the start of ACC play he’s really been able to sort of see what the league is like from the front seat. It’s a situation where he’s been able to watch the speed and quickness, the size, some of the environment—just that alone is a neat experience for him to be a part of that with the league being what it is.

“On the court he’s getting a lot of learning every day and a lot of opportunity to compete on the floor to learn and to work in sort of a low-pressure environment where you’re not worried about playing time. You’re just trying to figure out how to play better.

“Then obviously the biggest thing would be the weight room. Just that opportunity to really get in there and lift every single day and become as strong as you possibly can knowing that had he come in the summer being 18 years old and being a little skinny as it is, it would have been a real, real adjustment for him. So to get these eight months advance gives him potentially the opportunity to help us next year. I don’t know if that would have been the case if he showed

up in July just because of how young he is and how thin he is. ... I think in Sam’s case, what does he look like in October? I think that will be very, very interesting because it will be a guy who has been lifting from December to October and not July to October.”

Waardenburg, known for his shooting ability, has shown flashes during practices.

“We’ve been doing some extra stuff with some of the guys playing lower minutes and I think there’s been some very good moments and there’s probably been some moments where he’s been like, ‘Oh OK. I can see some of the areas that I’ve got to improve on,’” Caputo said. “Across the board I think it’s a good thing because of just the more exposure you get particularly when you’re not from here.”

Waardenburg, a three-star prospect in the 2017 class, won tournament MVP honors in October scoring 18 points with eight rebounds and four blocks in the final game to help Rangitoto College win the SAS Secondary Schools National Championship.

He has also represented New Zealand in the 3x3 U18 World Championship in Kazakhstan, was on the U17 team that won a silver at the FIBA Oceania Championships, and the U16 team that won bronze at the Australian State Championships.

He also played in the adidas Nations Tournament in Los Angeles in the summer averaging 13.4 points and 6.4 rebounds in five games and was named one of the top 10 players of the camp.

Miller Enjoying First Season at Miami

Inside the U
Chris Stock,
Feb. 12, 2017

Jim Larrañaga and the Miami coaching staff has done a good job of encouraging freshman center Rodney Miller during the season.

Miller has played sparingly—48 minutes in 13 games—for the Hurricanes.

Still, he is enjoying the experience.

“All of the coaches tell me about progress and how I’m doing,” Miller said.

“It’s definitely helpful for me. I’m not saying that just because I’m not playing and I’m not happy, I’m having a great time. I’m loving it and I’m trusting the process. The coaches are there for every step of the way.”

Larrañaga’s words of encouragement have been especially helpful.

“He talks to me all the time,” Miller said. “He expresses to me about my progress and how he sees improvement every day. I really hold that dear because it keeps my confidence up and I just keep working hard every day.”

Larrañaga has continued to express the progress Miller is making throughout the season and recently said:

“He’s very close,” Larrañaga said. “He’s showing a lot of really good signs.”

In addition to the coaching staff, Miller has enjoyed the camaraderie with his teammates including three fellow freshmen.

“It’s a brotherhood on the team,” Miller said. “I feel like we’re all brothers. Every day in the locker room we’re chatting it up

before and after practice, and even when we get on the court, the competition is amazing. I’m the type of player who loves competition. I love going at it every day in practice and that’s what I get here at UM. I love every day here. It’s fun.”

Miller has shown flashes during practice throughout the season as he continues to develop.

“I feel comfortable on the court and during practice I just do what I have to do for the most part,” Miller said. “My time will come so I’m not really worried about that. I just compete every day in practice, give it my all, and challenge other players.”

Strength is an area of improvement Miller has been focusing on since his arrival from Oak Hill (Va.) Academy.

“I’ve been working with coach (Gus) Felder in the weight room and getting stronger—that and my patience,” Miller said. “I think my patience has gotten a lot better working with the coaches and simplifying things. It’s really sharpening up my game.”

Larrañaga stresses the importance of strength and Miller has noticed a difference.

“I definitely feel that since I’ve gotten stronger I can control my body more and with the control of my body, it improves my game, every part of it, greatly,” Miller said.

Overall, Miller has enjoyed the season as Miami is 16-8 on the year, 6-6 in the ACC.

“I would say so far this season has been going really well,” Miller said. “It’s definitely an experience to say the least. I’m playing with good seniors in Davon

Reed and Kamari Murphy. It’s just been fun and I’m enjoying the process.”

Miller has been learning what it will take to be a productive player in arguably the toughest conference in the country.

“The intensity is crazy,” Miller said. “It’s hard to really explain, but this is really the next level. It’s nothing like high school. I learned that you really have to love the game to really play at this level. You have to be a gym rat and be in the gym to work on your craft if you want to be successful at this level.”

Basketball Buzz: 2/10

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Feb. 10, 2017

Miami won its second consecutive game on Wednesday beating Virginia Tech ahead of its match-up at No. 4 Louisville on Saturday (2 p.m., ESPN2).

Miami (16-7, 6-5 ACC) used a 20-3 run in the second half to break a 47-all tie on their way to a 74-68 win.

"I thought it was a terrific game," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "I was very concerned when we fouled them on their first and second possessions to start the game—not what we wanted. It was the emphasis of not fouling. We switched to the zone to have help defense in the paint and not get stretched out too much—that kept us out of some foul problems.

"I thought in the second half we did a good job of sharing the ball. We only had 10 turnovers and we had 15 assists—that's very good for us. They're a very good offensive team, very hard to guard, and I thought our players hung tough when they made their run and tied the game and we went back at them and were able to finish pretty good. It's a good win."

Miami is in sole possession of eighth in the ACC with seven games left—four against ranked opponents.

"We've been put in a position where we really have to battle now," Larrañaga said. "... Every game is huge."

Virginia Tech head coach Buzz Williams thinks very highly of the ACC.

"I think it will go down in the annals of college basketball history as the best league in a single season," Williams said.

There is discussion the ACC will get as many as 10, possibly 11, teams in the NCAA Tournament.

NEWS & NOTES

- SG Bruce Brown made just 1 of 12 shots for two points against Virginia Tech and the coaches have noticed Brown's demeanor change recently. "I've talked to Bruce, he hasn't appeared to be himself the last two games," Larrañaga said. "He doesn't notice it, but the coaches notice it. Now he might

notice it." Brown was 3 for 8 for seven points with two rebounds last game. His nine points in back-to-back games is his lowest two-game total of the season. "Energy (is different)," Larrañaga said. "Normally he's the smiliest, happiest guy going crazy. He's kind of been subdued." Brown's rebounding has also dropped over the past seven games averaging 4.3 after averaging 7.3 in the first 16 games.

- SF Anthony Lawrence and C Ebuka Izundu have been providing solid contributions off the bench the last two games with Lawrence scoring 31 and Izundu 24—their highest totals in back-to-back games this season. "They've been big-time for us the last two games," shooting guard Davon Reed said. "They're talented players and they're starting to feel comfortable—you can see it on the floor. They're big in their production for us and they help us out a lot. They were able to do it again especially doing it last Saturday (at NC State when they posted career-highs in points)." Larranga said: "I love the way Anthony Lawrence and Ebuka are playing. They play a lot together."

- PG Ja'Quan Newton scored 16 points on 7-of-15 shooting against Virginia Tech, but also had five turnovers. "He plays that way, he's a guy who attacks the basket and challenges the defense constantly," Larrañaga said. "Some of the passes he throws are challenged by the defense and end up as turnovers. At this stage of the season we're not going to correct anything. We can focus on the things we really can control and I think the things are doing. The attention to detail in practice has been very, very good."

- Miami will play at Virginia Tech on Feb. 27. The Hokies provide a unique challenge for teams as they bring their top two scorers off the bench. "They're difficult in every way," Larrañaga said. "They start out with four 3-point shooters on the perimeter—that stretches your defense. They bring LeDay and a lot of times (Chris) Clarke and (Ahmed)Hill off the bench, sometimes Seth Allen. They have three left-handed guards, who normally start, so everything about them requires your players to be very focused because they do a lot of really hard things to defend and they play defense a little bit differently than anybody else in the league. They front the post, it was hard to post feed, and we wanted to get Ebuka the ball. He did a great job in the first half of finishing and in the second half he helped us with a couple block shots (credited with one) and rebounds (not credited with any)."

- SG Dejan Vasiljevic made his first two-point bucket in ACC play against Virginia Tech and hit a 3. "DJ made two big buckets," Larrañaga said. Vasiljevic had only attempted two 2-point attempts of his 47 in ACC play before the game. Vasiljevic shot three 2-pointers in the game. He is averaging 4.3 points and 13.8 minutes in ACC games.

- Virginia Tech head coach Buzz Williams had this to say about Miami's pivotal 20-3 run in Wednesday's game: "We had too many mistakes particularly in the second half—nine turnovers is way too many against a team as good as they are. A turnover against Miami is almost assured of a basket, a blocked shot by Miami is almost assured of a basket, and I think in what we've studied, a questionable shot—whatever you would deem that to be is almost an assured basket in transition. I don't know how many points of their (20) would have been off a turnover, a blocked shot, or a questionable shot, but I would say there were several."

- Williams also discussed the potential of the ACC and how many teams he believes will get into the NCAA Tournament after seven made it last year with six advancing to the Sweet 16. "I think if you studied the numbers it would (get 11 in), but I don't think it will happen and I've said that since media day," he said. "... I think the disparity between the bottom four teams and the top 11 teams in the Big East in 2011 (when I coached at Marquette) is partially the reason what allowed 11 teams to get in. I don't think you will find that disparity in this league and I think that will probably prevent an 11th team going. I think I probably pay attention to it too much just because I have a shallow existence. I don't think this year there will be as many at-large teams from non-BCS leagues and I think there will be some politicalness, not presidential, carried over into March relative to the BCS leagues. I don't think that any coach would argue about the strength of our league, but I think the coaches that are not coaching in our league are going to find for their league as they should."

Reed Playing at a High Level for Miami

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Feb. 9, 2017

Davon Reed continues to excel in ACC play.

Reed scored a game-high 18 points and had six assists to help lead Miami to a 74-68 win over Virginia Tech on Wednesday.

“Davon is really good isn’t he?” head coach Jim Larrañaga said. “Eighteen points, six assists. I’m trying to get him a little additional rest, but it’s hard. He’s just a terrific player.”

Reed, who scored a career-high 26 points with seven 3-pointers in the previous game at NC State, is averaging 17.7 points in ACC games—the fifth-highest by a Hurricane since joining the conference in 2004.

Only Jack McClinton and Guillermo Diaz each posted higher scoring averages in ACC games than Reed with each doing it twice. McClinton’s 21.8 average in 2008-09 tops the list.

Reed is on pace to make the most 3-pointers by a Hurricane in ACC games. He holds the record for highest 3-point percent in a season making 52.7 percent in 2014-15.

Miami (16-7, 6-5) and Virginia Tech (16-7, 5-6) were tied for eighth in the ACC coming into the game. They will play again on Feb. 27. Miami has won seven of the last eight in the series.

“It’s always a grudge match when we play them no matter where it’s at,” Reed said. “I didn’t even realize we were tied for eighth, but any win in the ACC—home or away—and a chance to advance in the league is big-time. It’s good to finally get

two in a row after winning one, losing one, winning one so finally getting on a little winning streak today.”

The Hurricanes went on a 20-3 run to break a 47-all tie in the second half to put the game out of reach for the Hokies on their way to winning their fourth of five games.

“We knew they were a team that could shoot 3s, but also like to attack the basket,” Reed said. “That was a key for us. Early in the game we had some fouls and we decided to go to the three defense and we were able to contain the penetration for the most part and limit our fouls, and I think that is what really changed the game for us.”

Miami travels to No. 4 Louisville (19-5, 7-4) on Saturday (2 p.m., ESPN2). The Cardinals are 12-1 at home this season.

“They’re a great team and they’re known for the defensive schemes, changing defenses constantly trying to speed you up and then falling back to the 2-3 (zone),” Reed said. “They have some talented players so we’ve just got to lock in and get ready to prepare for them.”

Freshmen making their impact felt in ACC men's basketball

AP
Joe Reedy
Feb. 8, 2017

A bevy of talented freshmen in the Atlantic Coast Conference are making their presence felt around the league.

Eight freshmen are averaging in double figures with two — North Carolina State's Dennis Smith Jr. and Georgia Tech's Josh Okogie — leading their teams in scoring. The average number of freshmen coming into the season to average double figures in the conference since 1992-93 was five, according to Basketball Reference.

The class is so deep that Miami coach Jim Larrañaga named 17 he believes deserve consideration to be on the five-player all-freshmen team.

"The talent we have coming in is off the charts," North Carolina coach Roy Williams said. "I think they are much more experienced coming in, but there's also quality and depth on teams to help them develop."

Two of the league's top freshmen will meet on Wednesday when Smith's Wolfpack travel to face No. 14 Florida State and Jonathan Isaac. Both are projected to be lottery picks in the NBA draft if they leave school after this season.

The 6-foot-3, 195-pound Smith has lived up to his preseason billing. He is fifth in the ACC in scoring (19.2) while leading the league in both assists (7.0) and steals (2.2).

After rehabbing his senior year in high school due to a knee injury and enrolling at North Carolina State early, Smith is trying to become only the third freshman in conference history since 1993-94 to average at least 19 points — joining Maryland's Joe Smith (19.4, 1993-94) and

Duke's Jabari Parker (19.1, 2013-14).

Smith — who ranks fourth nationally in assists — is also the first player in ACC history to post two triple-doubles in the same season in league play. He's earned plenty of praise from league coaches along the way, too. After Smith had 13 points, 11 rebounds and 15 assists in an overtime loss last week to Syracuse, Orange coach Jim Boeheim said Smith would "have 50" if the Orange had tried to play him 1-on-1 instead of with their zone.

"He has that rare basketball savvy that very seldom comes along in a player of his age. Guys with his kind of his ability come along once a decade," Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton said.

Isaac arrived at Florida State as one of the most heralded recruits in program history. He has not disappointed with six double-doubles including four in conference play. The 6-10, 210-pound forward is eighth in the ACC in rebounding (7.9) and sixth in free throw percentage (82.9 percent).

Isaac, who is averaging 12.8 points per game, has benefited from being part of an experienced team that has four veteran starters.

"He's defending well and using his length to score," North Carolina State coach Mark Gottfried said.

While Smith and Isaac were heralded high school standouts, Okogie wasn't highly recruited and was thought to be a role player coming off the bench. The 6-4, 207-pound guard has exceeded expectations for the Yellow Jackets, averaging 15.4 points per game and being ACC freshman of the week a league-best four times.

"He's a high-level player. The big thing is he has to stay consistent for us down the stretch," Georgia Tech coach Josh Pastner said.

Said Isaac: "I think this class is ridiculous in terms of freshmen. There are so many different types of players and it is strong at every single position."

Other freshmen scoring in double-figures include:

— Duke's Jayson Tatum and Frank Jackson. Tatum, a 6-8 forward, who missed the first eight games due to a foot injury, is tied for second on the team in scoring, averaging 15.8 points per game, along with 6.9 rebounds per game. Jackson, a 6-3 guard averaging 10.2 points, is one of the few Duke players who has avoided an injury.

— Ky Bowman, Boston College. The 6-1 guard who is averaging 13.5 points per game, is one of just four freshmen nationally with three or more 30-point games (North Carolina State's Smith has four).

— Bruce Brown, Miami. The 6-5 guard is averaging 12.1 points per game and is 19-of-35 on 3-pointers over the past 12 games.

— Tyus Battle, Syracuse. A 6-6 guard, Battle is averaging 10.5 points and scored a career-high 23 in last Saturday's win over No. 9 Virginia.

Larrañaga: Davon Reed One of the Best in the ACC

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Feb. 7, 2017

Davon Reed poured in a career-high 26 points in the win at NC State to continue his impressive senior season.

Reed, a 6-foot-5 shooting guard, is averaging a team-high 15.8 points, 17.7 in 10 ACC games, and has been very good on the defensive end of the floor as a catalyst for Miami's sixth-best defense according to kenpom.com.

"Awesome in every category," head coach Jim Larrañaga said of Reed's season. "Number one off the court, leadership, great. On the court, defensively working his tail off, defending and rebounding. Offensively, scoring the ball at a high rate especially in league play—he's averaging over 17 a game. That's more points than Sheldon McClellan averaged.

"Davon is one of the top players in this league. I know that. I don't know how many of the media or even other coaches look closely enough at him to see all the great things he's doing for us."

Reed also leads the team in 3-pointers made (57) and free-throw percent (81.7), and third on the team in rebounds (95), third in assists (50), third in steals (27), and fourth in blocks (14).

Reed has helped Miami to a 15-7 record, 5-5 in the ACC including a win over ACC-leader North Carolina.

Reed and the Hurricanes return to action Wednesday (9 p.m., RSN) against Virginia Tech (16-6, 5-5 ACC).

UM looks for consistency, resume-building wins

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Feb. 7, 2017

There are eight games left in the regular season. Three of the next four are at home.

And the Hurricanes men's basketball team understands what every one of them – starting with Wednesday night's matchup against Virginia Tech at the Watsco Center – could mean to its future.

As Miami prepares for the final stretch of ACC play, it does so as one of those teams firmly on the NCAA Tournament bubble. The Hurricanes have won some big games this year, namely their upset of then ninth-ranked North Carolina last month and last week's road win at North Carolina State.

But there have been regrettable performances too, including that ugly game at Duke, when Miami dominated early, then fell apart in the second half. There was another second-half collapse against rival Florida State last week. And early in ACC play, Miami looked poised to upset a ranked Notre Dame team before the Hurricanes turned the ball over late and allowed the Irish to escape with a close 67-62 win.

Now, with little time remaining before the ACC Tournament and Selection Sunday, the Hurricanes are determined to find the consistency that has eluded them in conference play.

"I'm really good today, but the next day, what happened to you? I think that's youth," said Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga of his team, which features nine scholarship players and has three freshmen logging significant minutes. "It's about kids growing up and learning.

That's why veteran teams are so good."

The Hurricanes (15-7, 5-5) hope they took a step toward finding some of that consistency on Saturday, when they rallied from a nine-point halftime deficit to notch an 84-79 win over N.C. State in Raleigh, a place where Miami had been 2-7 and hadn't won since 2014. Against the Wolfpack, the Hurricanes had three players — Davon Reed, Ebuka Izundu and Anthony Lawrence Jr. — post career-high scoring totals

They'd like to continue that trend against the Hokies (16-5, 5-5), who enter Wednesday night's matchup much like Miami, in need of quality wins to continue bolstering their tournament resume.

Virginia Tech comes in having lost two of its past three, including a 71-48 loss at No. 12 Virginia on Feb. 1.

The Hokies have had more than a week to prepare for Miami, and they've proven a thorn in the Hurricanes' side before, including last season when they handed Miami a 77-62 loss in the regular-season finale. It was a game that cost the Hurricanes a share of the ACC regular-season title and knocked them down to a No. 3 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

Though both teams look different today than they did last March, the current Hurricanes haven't forgotten about that game or what kind of challenge a Buzz Williams-led team can pose, especially one that features five players averaging double figures. Among those players are Zach LeDay (15.2 ppg) and Seth Allen (12.5 ppg), both of whom played well in that regular-season finale last year.

"We need to come out and win this game, have a big game," said Lawrence, a sophomore who has worked his way

in and out of Miami's multiple starting lineups this season and is averaging seven points. "Last year, they messed us up from winning the ACC [regular-season title]. We're going to come out and have a good game."

If they can do that, and continue building on it in the home stretch which will include a game at No. 4 Louisville on Saturday, the Hurricanes know that tournament resume will only get better.

Hurricanes trying to find consistency in final month of ACC play

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Feb. 7, 2017

Wire-to-wire consistency was never an attribute Miami expected to have this year. Not with this team, which has used three different starting lineups, has nine active scholarship players, four of which are freshmen.

The Hurricanes started 11-2, opened January with a 1-4 stretch and have won three of their last four, including a home upset of No. 9 North Carolina.

“That’s youth,” coach Jim Larrañaga said. “It’s about kids growing up and learning. That’s why veteran teams are so good.”

Starting with Wednesday’s game against Virginia Tech (9 p.m., ACC regional networks), Miami (15-7, 5-5 ACC) has three of its next four games at home, where it is 10-2 this year. Beginning with Saturday’s game at No. 4 Louisville (2 p.m., ESPN) the Hurricanes finish the regular season by playing five of seven games against teams currently ranked 18th or better.

Given how well Miami plays at home, these next three games (Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech next Wednesday, Clemson next Saturday) are prime chances for the Hurricanes to add to their NCAA tournament resume.

Larrañaga wouldn’t entertain that thought.

“What you need to do is play well,” he said. “What we’re attempting to do is continue to tweak our offense to get more opportunities for us to put more points on the board ... and we don’t want to slip defensively. It’s a see-saw.

“To find that nice balance is hard.”

Against the Hokies (16-6, 5-5), Miami would love for more of the same from its most consistent player, senior Davon Reed. He scored a career-high 26 points last Saturday at North Carolina State and did an exemplary job of bottling up star freshman Dennis Smith Jr., a potential lottery pick. Larrañaga said Reed declared he would shut down Smith in the second half, and the coaching staff decided to make a defensive switch.

Smith was 6-for-6 at halftime seeing mostly Ja’Quan Newton, but went 4-for-9 in the second half with Reed, nearly five inches taller than Newton, marking him.

Another major reason for Miami’s 84-79 road win: career highs in points from forward Anthony Lawrence Jr. and center Ebuka Izundu, two sophomores the Hurricanes need beyond Reed (15.8 points), Newton (15.0) and freshman Bruce Brown (12.1, 6.5 rebounds).

Lawrence, who has averaged 31 minutes in his last four games, came in averaging 6.4 points but put up 19 on 7-of-9 shooting. He said he is working on his outside shooting — he went 3-for-5 — but he has to “not get glued to the three” and drive to the basket more.

Izundu, hampered by foul trouble for most of his young career, put up 16 points and six rebounds. For a player who averages a foul every five minutes of game action — a pace that often leaves him affixed to the bench — it was a major positive he gave Miami 27 minutes before fouling out.

Larrañaga praised his offensive touch, and Miami will need more of it. In need of post scoring, coaches spent an early morning Monday working with Izundu, senior Kamari Murphy, and freshmen

Rodney Miller and Dewan Huell.

Huell (6.5 points per game) is the top-scoring big man on a team that gets 73 percent of its scoring from guards. When they’re moving the ball (as Newton and Brown were Saturday) and shooting well (as Reed was), they can win on the road. When not, Miami’s lack of interior offense becomes even more of a sore spot.

The Hokies — an 8-seed in ESPN’s latest bracketology; Miami is an 11 — have strong guard play, but get a lot of offense from 6-7, 235-pound Zach LeDay (15.9 points, 6.6 boards) and sophomore Chris Clarke (11.6, 7.4), who plays way bigger than his size (6-6, 210).

Expect a dogfight when the Canes face the Hokies

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Feb. 7, 2017

Selection Sunday is just over a month away, and the University of Miami and Virginia Tech are deadlocked in the middle of the Atlantic Coast Conference standings with 5-5 league records.

Both teams are eager to add W's and boost their RPI, so when the whistle blows at 9 p.m. Wednesday at the Watsco Center, expect a dogfight.

The Hokies are hungry after losing 71-48 to ninth-ranked state rival Virginia. The Hurricanes, who have been up and down all season, hope to build on their 84-79 road victory at North Carolina State.

Three UM players scored career highs against the Wolfpack — Davon Reed (26 points, including seven three-pointers), Anthony "Amp" Lawrence (19) and Ebuka Izundu (16).

The contributions of Lawrence and Izundu were especially uplifting, said UM coach Jim Larrañaga. Izundu had been scoreless in the previous three games, and was averaging 3.8 points for the season. In addition to combining to outscore the Wolfpack bench 35-2, the Miami duo also grabbed 10 rebounds.

"We got major contributions from two guys off the bench, and we'd love to have that every night," said Larrañaga.

With three of their next four games at home, the Hurricanes (15-7) have a chance to build momentum before a daunting stretch to close the regular season. UM is 23-2 at home over its past 25 games and 10-2 at the Watsco Center this season.

After the game against the Hokies, the Canes travel to play at No. 6 Louisville, then return home to face Georgia Tech and Clemson. Their final four games are at No. 9 Virginia, at home against No. 21 Duke, at Virginia Tech and at No. 15 Florida State.

The Hokies (16-6) present "all kinds of problems," Larrañaga said, because they lead the ACC in getting to the free-throw line, are among the league leaders in field-goal percentage, and also can shoot the three. Virginia Tech's leaders are Seth Allen, Zach LeDay and Justin Bibbs.

Hokies coach Buzz Williams expects the game to be won or lost in the paint.

"Fifty-seven percent of their shots in the last five games have been at the rim, and 61 percent of our shots in the last five games have been at the rim," Williams told Tech Talk. "They get there a little differently than we do. They're longer... and they're second in the league in offensive rebounding, right under North Carolina."

WEDNESDAY: UM MEN VS. VIRGINIA TECH

When/where: 9 p.m.; Watsco Center.

TV/radio: FSFL; WQAM 560.

Records: UM (15-7, 5-5 ACC), Va. Tech (16-6, 5-5).

Scouting report: UM has won six of its past seven games against Virginia Tech and went 2-1 against the Hokies last season. The Canes have won 23 of their past 25 home games. ... The Hokies beat Duke early in the ACC season, and are among the league leaders in shooting percentage and getting to the free-throw line.

Reed scores 26, leads Miami past NC State 84-79

AP
Feb. 4, 2017

RALEIGH, N.C.

Miami got balanced scoring and plenty of it.

Davon Reed scored 26 points to help the Hurricanes beat North Carolina State 84-79 on Saturday.

Reed made 7 of 10 3-point attempts and was one of three Miami players to score a career high against the Wolfpack.

Anthony Lawrence Jr. and Ebuka Izundu came off the bench for the Hurricanes (15-7, 5-5 Atlantic Coast Conference) to top their previous scoring bests with 19 and 16 points, respectively.

“We really directed our comments to our bench before the game, saying that this has to be a total team effort,” Miami coach Jim Larrañaga said. “We can’t just have our three guards score. We need other guys to step in there, and they did.”

Miami exploited a struggling N.C. State defense that had allowed an average of 90 points in its previous four games. The Hurricanes shot 50 percent from the field, including 11 of 21 from 3-point range.

Bruce Brown made a 3-pointer with 6:49 remaining to snap a 64-64 tie, and Miami led the rest of the way.

Ja’Quan Newton added 13 points for the Hurricanes, who rallied from a 12-point deficit late in the first half.

“Our team was resilient,” Larrañaga said.

Dennis Smith Jr. scored 31 points to lead N.C. State (14-10, 3-8).

The Wolfpack lost their third game in a

row despite shooting 56 percent from the floor, including 11 of 18 from 3-point range.

Terry Henderson scored 16 of his 21 points in the first half to help stake the Wolfpack to a 45-36 halftime lead, but he did not attempt a shot from the field in the second half until the closing seconds.

Abdul-Malik Abu and Omer Yurtseven had 10 points each for N.C. State.

BIG PICTURE

Miami: The Hurricanes entered the day in 10th place in the ACC standings, but they climbed back to .500. With three of its next four games at home, Miami has a chance to build some momentum before a difficult stretch of games to close the regular season.

N.C. State: The Wolfpack might have run out of time to save what has been a disappointing season. N.C. State blew a double-digit lead at home for the second game in a row and likely will need a deep run in the conference tournament to rekindle its NCAA Tournament chances.

“We’re a team that’s playing hard and competing hard, but we’re a handful of plays away,” N.C. State coach Mark Gottfried said. “We’ve got to figure out how to get over that hump. That’s where we are.”

ROLE REVERSAL

Miami made a defensive change after Smith and Henderson combined for 33 points in the first half. Reed told Larrañaga that he wanted to guard Smith, and Newton switched over to Henderson. Smith made 4 of 9 attempts in the second half after hitting all six of his shots before halftime.

“He’s a very good player,” Reed said. “Whatever he was doing in the first half was working for him, so to give him a different look in the second half is what we were aiming for.”

STAT OF THE GAME

Miami grabbed 17 offensive rebounds, one more than the Wolfpack managed on the defensive end. The Hurricanes twice scored down the stretch after offensive rebounds to prevent the Wolfpack from rallying.

“You’ve got to get a defensive rebound,” Gottfried said. “That’s part of the defensive possession. That was the Achilles heel today.”

TIP-INS

Izundu did not score in Miami’s previous three games. He and Lawrence combined to make 13 of 18 shots and outscored N.C. State’s bench 35-2. . The Wolfpack allowed at least 82 points for the sixth time in the last seven games. . N.C. State’s last three opponents have shot a combined 38 for 71 (53.5 percent) from 3-point range.

UP NEXT

Miami: The Hurricanes host Virginia Tech on Wednesday night in the first of two scheduled matchups with the Hokies. Miami has won six of the last seven meetings.

N.C. State: The Wolfpack hit the road, where they are just 1-5 this season, to play at No. 15 Florida State on Wednesday night.

Larrañaga Confident in Signee PG Lykes

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 4, 2017

Jim Larrañaga is confident point guard signee Chris Lykes will be successful in college.

Lykes, a four-star prospect, stands 5-foot-8 and is the 13th-best point guard in the 2017 class according to the 247Composite.

“Certainly from what we’ve seen we think he can be a terrific player at the college level because he’s very fast, very quick, very athletic, and with a lot of basketball skill,” Larranga said. “Plus he’s a great competitor and he’s proven it at the high school level. He’s not playing against weak teams in high school. He probably plays in the toughest high school basketball league in the country and the guys he goes against are all high-major players.”

Lykes has helped lead Gonzaga (D.C.) to a 20-3 record following their sixth straight win on Friday night.

Lykes is averaging a team-high 18.3 points and is second on the team averaging 4.2 assists. He is also averaging 2.4 rebounds and 1.7 3-pointers a game while making 86.3 percent (82 of 95) of his free throws.

Larrañaga Encourages Strong Fan Support

Inside The U

Chris Stock

Jan. 31, 2017

The Miami Hurricanes have officially sold out their 7,972-seat arena at the Watsco Center.

However, there have been games, particularly in the non-conference schedule and some ACC games like last week's contest against Boston College, where there has been a number of open seats.

Certainly the open seats have not like in years past, but yet still room to grow as a program.

The Hurricanes were energized by a packed crowd for their last home game beating then-ACC leader, ninth-ranked, and perennial college basketball program North Carolina in commanding fashion, 77-62 leading by as many as 22 at one point.

"It's really just one game on a Saturday in front of a great crowd," head coach Jim Larrañaga. "Didn't you think the crowd was really into it and excited? When the crowd is really into it, it does create an energy in the building that players thrive on. That's why home-court advantage is so important.

"I don't want to tell students who have night class to cut (for Wednesday's 8 p.m. start), but maybe they can come for the second half. We would really like to see that kind of turnout because this is their school. We are their program and I hope they'll take great pride in it. If they can energize us to win games like this, then where we are right now as a team and as a program can be elevated to a much higher place.

"We're already selling out of all of our season tickets, it's the second year in a row, but for us to grow and develop the tradition it's really about the students and the community staying behind the team and keep supporting us so that we can get better and better. I know those guys have great respect for that kind of support. They know we did not always have that. You know we didn't always have that."

Miami has enjoyed success against North Carolina winning five of the last seven meetings in addition to beating fellow-ACC top-tier program Duke four of the last seven times.

Miami was a combined 4-33 against North Carolina and Duke prior to going 9-5 in the last 14 meetings.

"When we took over there were three things people told me we would never be able to do—we would never be able to beat Duke or North Carolina, we'd never be able to win the ACC regular season or tournament, and we'd never really be able to draw great crowds like other schools have," Larrañaga said, "and I think we've done pretty good so far."

Miami won the ACC regular season and tournament title in 2013 and have two Sweet 16 appearances in Larrañaga's five years at UM.

The Hurricanes have also enjoyed plenty of success at home in recent years going 15-1 last season and winning 21 consecutive home games, one shy of a school record, before it was snapped earlier this month.

Miami (14-6, 4-4) has won 23 of its last 24 at home and will look to continue its success on Wednesday (8 p.m., ACC Network) against No. 15 Florida State

(18-4, 6-3).

"It's very important our students turn out," Larrañaga said. "As I've said a million times before, this is their team. They attend as a student to the University of Miami. The University of Miami has chosen to be in the toughest basketball conference in America, the ACC, and the teams in this league have tremendous student support so it's really like a competition. Students come here for Duke, North Carolina, and Florida State.

"We're asking the students to come and cheer for your Miami Hurricanes. This is your team and I expect Wednesday night they will."

Basketball Buzz: 1/31

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Jan. 31, 2017

The Miami Hurricanes are looking for their fourth consecutive win over their rivals when they square off against No. 15 Florida State on Wednesday (8 p.m., ACC Network).

“I think this is the best Florida State team we’ve seen in my six years because they are so long, so athletic, they play unbelievable pressure defense, they have a lot of size, they’re very deep,” head coach Jim Larrañaga said. “They play 12 guys and I think they’ve proven a lot already this season. They were ranked sixth in the country last week. They’re certainly a team that’s competing for the ACC regular season championship.”

Miami (14-6, 4-4 ACC) beat North Carolina 77-62 on Saturday for their second straight win. Miami is now 1-5 against kenpom.com top 50 teams.

Florida State (18-4, 6-3) was lost back-to-back games for the first time this season falling at Georgia Tech and at Syracuse. FSU is 1-3 on the road.

It’s the first of two meetings between the two schools. Florida State will host Miami on March 4.

Miami is ranked 33rd (82nd in offensive adjusted efficiency, 20th in defense) and Florida State is 23rd (32nd in offense, 27th in defense).

“They’re a defensive-minded team,” Larrañaga said. “In fact the defense is creating so many opportunities on offense.”

NEWS & NOTES

- SG Bruce Brown is coming off a season-high 30 points in the win against North Carolina and has shot at least 50 percent in each of his last five games making 29 of 49 shots (59.2 percent) averaging 16.6 points. Brown has shot much better from 3-point range of late making 18 of 31 over the past 10 games after going 5 for 24 in the first 10 games.

- SG Davon Reed will draw the assignment of guarding Florida State SG Dwayne Bacon, who is averaging a team-high 17.2 points a game. “Last year he was guarded by Davon Reed, who will get that assignment again,” Larrañaga said. Bacon scored 10 points on 4-of-12 shooting in the first meeting and nine points on 3-of-7 shooting in the second game.

- Whenever Miami and Florida State play one another, it is always worth bringing up one of the most impressive individual performances in college basketball history when Xavier Rathan-Mayes scored 30 points in the final 4:38 in an 81-77 win by Miami on Feb. 25, 2015 when he was a freshman. Rathan-Mayes is a junior now averaging 10.4 points on a career-best 45.3-percent shooting. “Rathan-Mayes was so good his freshman year I thought he might go pro,” Larrañaga said. “His sophomore year he was even better and I thought for sure he was going pro. Now this year he and Bacon combine to being one of the really strong backcourt combinations.”

- PG Ja’Quan Newton is coming off a strong game scoring 18 points, seven rebounds, and three assists with just two turnovers, which is the lowest he’s had an ACC game this season. Newton has scored in double figures in 17 of 20 games this season including a career-high 23 in the win over Boston College last week and has made all 13 of his free-throw attempts over the past two games. “He’s an attack guard,” Larrañaga said. “He’s always in attack mode. He loves to get in the paint and draw fouls and make shots. His challenge as a player is to really find ways to make his teammates better by making good passes. He can do it at times. The difficulty is when you go into the forest sometimes it’s hard to see the trees and that’s what happens to him. He gets in so tight and those big guys are challenging him; he might be able to make the shot, but it’s really hard for him to find the open man.”

- C Rodney Miller (illness) was not available to play in the win against North Carolina. “He was sick,” Larrañaga said. “He had some kind of abscess in his neck and so he was out all last week. I thought it was the flu, but as it turned out our medical team said it was an abscess. I think he’s doing much better. He told me he felt much better on Saturday. I’m hoping he practices today (on Monday).” Miller has played sparingly this season appearing in 11 of 20 games averaging 1.1 points and 4.0 minutes as the last man off the bench, but his absence leaves Miami with only eight scholarship players a game.

- Miami went to a zone defense to stymie the Tar Heels and it’s something they could do in the future depending on the opponent. “My coaching staff and I discussed it (Monday) morning and we’ll talk about it with the players and how they feel,” Larrañaga said. “We have to do whatever

gives us the best chance to defend and the other day against North Carolina our man-to-man defense has been our bread and butter since we arrived here, but we do have a 2-3 zone and we went to it early in the game when we fell behind to see if we could slow them down. It did. It worked. We won. So now we’ve got to look at Florida State. It’s a new opponent, different personnel. I’m sure the input our players will provide us will give us a chance to have good game preparation.”

- North Carolina head coach Roy Williams praised the Miami defensive efforts in the paint as well as their ability to score in the paint. “They were very active,” Williams said. “They caught the ball, turned around, and laid the ball up every time. When we laid it up they spiked it like a volleyball game. They were active around the rim. They were really, really involved defensively. I would think and hope the 20.7 is the lowest percent I’ve ever had a team shoot in my entire life, much less this year.”

- Florida State is the second-tallest team in the country (Miami is 27th) and the Seminoles have four players averaging at least one block a game led by freshman standout PF Jonathan Isaac at 1.6. “There’s a number of things when you’re playing against shot-blockers—first, if you can get them up in the air with a shot fake they might foul you; second, if you get them up in the air and you shoot in miss, the guy he’s supposed to be guarding should be able to get to the offensive boards and rebound the miss; or third, you drive and draw their attention and kick it out for three. So our guards have to make those decisions. You can tell them what to look for, but you can’t tell them when the game is going on how to quickly react to a situation.”

- Freshman SG Dejan Vasiljevic is on top of “The Ladder”—a shooting drill in practice competing against each other. Davon Reed previously held the top spot before Vasiljevic knocked him off. Ja’Quan Newton and Kamari Murphy are making strong pushes towards the top. Vasiljevic is averaging 6.0 points and has made 35.8 percent of his 3-pointers, which is fourth on the team.

Seminoles must try to slow down Miami's 'lovable' Brown

AP
Steve Wine
Jan. 30, 2017

Boston native and Patriots fan Bruce Brown is also a freshman guard for the Miami Hurricanes, so at the moment he's focused on only one game — Wednesday against No. 15 Florida State.

The Patriots and the Super Bowl can wait.

"We're going to take care of the Falcons," Brown said. "I'm not worried right now about that game until Sunday comes."

A more immediate cause for concern is Florida State (18-4, 6-3 Atlantic Coast Conference), which will be eager to bounce back from back-to-back losses last week at Georgia Tech and at Syracuse.

The Seminoles must slow down Brown, who's coming off a breakout game Saturday, when he scored a season-high 30 points to help Miami upset then-No. 9 North Carolina.

Brown's point total was the highest by a Hurricanes freshman since they joined the ACC in 2004.

"He's the real deal," Seminoles coach Leonard Hamilton said. "He's athletic, a fearless competitor, takes you off the dribble and can get to the basket. If you don't defend him, he's going to score points in bunches."

In the past five games, Brown has averaged 16.6 points while shooting 29 for 49 (69 percent). That includes 10 for 17 (59 percent) from 3-point range.

For the season he's averaging 12.1 points, 6.8 rebounds and 3.3 assists. He's living up to his billing as a top-50 recruit, and part of a talented freshman class that

also includes forward Dewan Huell, shooting guard D.J. Vasiljevic and center Rodney Miller Jr. All but Miller have played significant roles this season for the Hurricanes (14-6, 4-4 ACC).

Coach Jim Larrañaga raves about Brown, and not just because he's coming off his best game. In at least three interview sessions since, Larrañaga has described Brown as "lovable."

"He smiles all the time," Larrañaga said. "He's very friendly. He enjoys the competition. He enjoys being with his teammates. He enjoys watching film with the coaches. He asks questions. He wants to improve. He's a very special individual."

When told of Larrañaga's remarks, Brown responded with — no surprise — a grin.

"I'm a happy guy," Brown said. "My mom always told me, 'Stay positive and keep a smile on your face.'"

And then there's his basketball. He's 6-5 with a 6-8 wingspan and the strength of a former football player — he was a member of the Brookline Patriots in Pop Warner and played receiver and safety in high school. He bench-presses 275 pounds, and has been dunking since the eighth grade.

Brown showed his versatility with a triple-double less than a month into his college career. He has seen significant playing time at point guard, shooting guard and small forward.

"He doesn't really have what I would call weaknesses," Larrañaga said. "He plays every aspect of the game. He's a hard-working defender and a very good defensive rebounder. He'll block shots. He runs the court extremely well. He's

capable of driving and dunking the ball on you, but he's always got a feathery touch from 3. He's a young man with a very, very bright future."

Brown's immediate goal is to build on his performance against the Tar Heels. Facing Miami's biggest rival, he's eager to give the anticipated capacity crowd lots to cheer about.

"It'll be insane — I know the students will be loud," he said. "It's giving me goosebumps right now. I can't wait to play."

How about a prediction?

"The Patriots," Brown said, "will win by two touchdowns."

International Players Concerned About Immigration Ban

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Jan. 30, 2017

International players have been a key part of the University of Miami's men's basketball program since Jim Larrañaga took over as head coach in 2011.

There are three players on Miami's current roster who hail from outside the United States and at least one more is expected to join the team next season.

However, there is a concern from international players about their futures following President Donald Trump's signed executive order on Friday banning travel from seven Muslim-majority countries for 90 days and suspending all refugee admission for 120 days.

"What I found out today because of the president's ban on refugees there's a major concern by international students that there's a problem for them," Larrañaga said on WQAM 560's Hurricane Hotline Monday evening. "I don't know if their visas are going to be rescinded or they're going to be sent out of the country so there's a lot of uncertainty going on in the world right now and a lot of uncertainty about international students and how this new ban will impact them and their families who want to visit."

Miami sophomore center Ebuka Izundu moved to the United States in 2013 from Nigeria, freshman guard Dejan Vasiljevic's parents are from the former Yugoslavia and he was born in Canada before moving to Australia when he was six years old, and freshman forward Sam Waardenburg is from New Zealand.

Highly-regarded recruit Deng Gak has signed a letter of intent with Miami and

plans to join the team next season. Gak was born in Egypt, moved to South Sudan and then to Australia, and is currently attending Blair Academy in Blairstown, N.J.

The ban includes the following countries: Iraq, Iran, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and Libya.

"The world is a complicated place and it's made complicated by all of its diversity," Larrañaga said. "People have different views depending on where they're from. People have different values and what's important to them based on where they're from. So if you come from New York City you feel one way. If you're from Missoula, Montana you can feel differently about the same law or the same values.

"But the one thing we all want is we all want to be safe and to be able to raise our families. There's so much going on in the world. You see things happening every day in the threat of terrorism."

Larrañaga's Hurricanes are 14-6 on the season and will host rival No. 15 Florida State on Wednesday (8 p.m., ACC Network).

Tough road ahead for ACC's elite

ESPN.com
Myron Medcalf
Jan. 28, 2017

Even before Georgia Tech freshman Josh Okogie raced down the floor in Atlanta to win Saturday's game against Notre Dame, the levee between the ACC's elite teams and the middle of the pack had already begun to break.

Okogie's layup sealed the Yellow Jackets' second consecutive victory over a top-15 team, a scenario that seemed incredibly unlikely just a month ago.

Meanwhile, in upstate New York, Florida State was searching for a player to place in the middle of the Syracuse zone and seeking a cure for its foul trouble as three players (Jonathan Isaac, Xavier Rathan-Mayes and Jarquez Smith) picked up four in an eventual 10-point loss.

North Carolina was in Florida facing Miami, which was 0-10 in school history against Tar Heel teams that were ranked in the AP Top 10. By halftime, however, the Hurricanes had ransacked North Carolina and amassed a 17-point edge.

All this happened before you likely finished your lunch -- three games that illustrated the drama attached to life on the road in the ACC.

Miami, Syracuse and Georgia Tech all won and made the dream of a 10-bid ACC (or more) on Selection Sunday seem tangible. The Hurricanes (14-6, 4-4 ACC) are among ESPN bracketologist Joe Lunardi's "Last Four In," and Georgia Tech (13-8, 5-4) -- which hasn't had a winning record in ACC play in 13 years -- found an improbable spot in the "Next Four Out" category after a promising week for first-year coach Josh Pastner.

We now have tournament scenarios

that include nearly a dozen dancing ACC teams.

Meanwhile, North Carolina, Florida State and Notre Dame -- each top-five seeds in the latest Bracketology -- lost on the road.

Why? Because that's what the ACC has become.

Davon Reed celebrates with fans after Miami knocked off North Carolina on Saturday. Rob Foldy/Getty Images
Every conference's supporters will swear their league poses the same no-easy-road-games threat, and they're right on some level. It's not easy to win on the road. You don't need an analytics expert to explain why thousands of people screaming at you and talking about your girlfriend has an impact on the odds of victory.

But the trio of early ACC games on Saturday offered another showing of the conference's strength.

Yes, you've heard that before, too.

The ACC is strong. But what if Saturday's early results suggest the ACC is getting stronger?

Florida State weathered a six-game stretch against ranked teams. Coach Leonard Hamilton's team secured a 5-1 record during that gauntlet. But his team suffered double-digit losses to unranked Georgia Tech and Syracuse teams on the road this week.

Miami had its lopsided history against North Carolina. And Notre Dame's offense, ranked seventh nationally in efficiency, had dismissed more challenging opponents than Georgia Tech.

But there they all were Saturday. In trouble.

Notre Dame lost 62-60 to a Georgia Tech team that Duke beat by 53 points in Durham on Jan. 4. But the Yellow Jackets are showing you can't judge a team with a new coach and evolving young players too early.

Throughout the early struggles, Pastner's team continued to grind. The Yellow Jackets beat VCU in overtime last month. Then the Yellow Jackets knocked off North Carolina at home. Huh? Probably a fluke, right?

Not at all. The Georgia Tech team that lost to the Ohio Bobcats in November is gone. This is a team that's had some time with Pastner, led by a freshman -- Okogie -- who looks to be feeling more comfortable at the college level. The young guard had struggled all afternoon (2-for-5), but he came through at the end.

At Syracuse (13-9, 5-4), one of Jim Boeheim's worst teams defeated one of the ACC's best 82-72. Miami embarrassed a UNC squad (77-62) that has looked Final Four-good at times this season.

If Miami, Georgia Tech and Syracuse compose the ACC's middle-of-the-pack roadblocks, then the league's elite squads are in trouble on the road.

Is the ACC the country's best league? We can table that conversation for now.

Saturday's early outcomes, however, showed that the ACC continues to get better. And that should scare the league's contenders.

Young Hurricanes flash talent in rout of North Carolina

Palm Beach Post

Dave George

Jan. 28, 2017

We've kind of gotten used to the Sweet 16 terminology since Jim Larrañaga came to Miami six years ago. Twice the Hurricanes have gone that deep in the NCAA tournament under him, which first and always is a product of passing many tests in the brutal ACC.

It really didn't look like this was going to be one of those seasons, however, until Saturday afternoon.

That's when the sweetest 16-minute stretch in ages arrived, rocketing Miami out of an 11-2 hole about four minutes into what was supposed to be a comfortable win for the North Carolina Tar Heels and depositing the Hurricanes, somewhat fantastically, atop a 17-point halftime lead.

"I told our guys 'They just beat us by 300 in the first half, so we should be able to beat them by 300 in the second half,' " said North Carolina coach Roy Williams, who was beyond frustration over what turned out to be a 77-62 loss to Miami and a Tar Heel season-low for points.

Already half-dressed to play in the Coaches vs. Cancer attire of business suit and sneakers, Williams probably had half a mind to sub himself into the game a couple of times.

Well, maybe it wasn't that bad, but it was pretty putrid.

For seven consecutive games, North Carolina had scored at least 85 points, which was a school record for a school that positively revels in records. Miami's zone defense, an improvisation of Larrañaga's after preparing almost exclusively to play man-to-man, never came close to letting that happen Saturday.

"We thought it might slow them down for a few possessions," Coach L said,

"and when it worked, we stuck with it."

Bruce Brown was working, too. He scored 30 points, and didn't miss a shot until 10 minutes remained in the game. Needless to say, that's truly sensational for a true freshman, and against a top-10 opponent to boot.

Don't get distracted from that smothering Hurricanes defense, though, or the scrambling effort that allowed Miami to outrebound North Carolina 41-36. Makes you think anything can happen when the top rebounding team in the country gets shoved off the glass. Might, for instance, Miami keep building on its 14-6 record until there's a spot in the NCAA brackets for them once more?

That's still a little too far to shoot at this point. A 4-4 ACC record is good. A home win over Florida State on Wednesday night would be great. An eventual climb into the AP Top 25 would be gargantuan.

Whatever happens the rest of this season, however, Larrañaga continues to teach the habit of winning in Coral Gables, and continues to bring players here who expect nothing less.

The highest-ranked recruiting class in Miami history is coming next year. Lonnie Walker, a 6-foot-4 guard from Reading, Pa., leads a trio of top-100 talents. If he's anything like Brown, a former high school All-America from Boston who also had offers from Louisville and Indiana, the Hurricanes may soon be populated by one-and-done freshman stars.

Sure, that's not an optimal system for conventional roster continuity, but as Kentucky's John Calipari and others have demonstrated, it makes for a steamroller of a long-range plan.

Already, these Hurricanes are young, with Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy as the only seniors and with five freshmen on a roster of 12. What we're seeing now is how restless they can be, too.

Three times in the game's final two minutes Saturday the Hurricanes in-bounded the ball against heavy pressure by throwing it deep to a player releasing downcourt for a dangerous pass and easy points. Jim Kelly, the Pro Football Hall of Famer and Miami alum in attendance on Saturday, couldn't have done it better.

Then there were the six blocked shots by Miami, leading Williams to say "they were spiking them like volleyballs," and the confidence-boosting points that came to the Hurricanes out of utter chaos.

One 3-point shot by Ja'Quan Newton missed everything, for instance, but Brown raced under the basket to collect that airball like a pass and score an uncontested layup of his own. North Carolina's long misses, and they were many on a 7-for-24 shooting day from 3-point range, netted nothing.

Justin Jackson led North Carolina with 21 points but made just 4-of-10 from deep. The Tar Heels (19-4, 7-2), no longer alone atop the ACC standings, needed most of those to go if there was going to be a comeback.

You know, something on the order of Duke's victory over Miami at Cameron Indoor Stadium a few games ago. The Hurricanes led that one 36-25 but couldn't hang on.

The lessons come hard in this league, like that 17-point loss at Wake Forest earlier this month, and they're far from over for Miami. Larrañaga will let this upset percolate for a while, though, in the minds of players who just treated the nation's No. 9 ranking like a mere suggestion, and who deserve to be on cloud nine because of it.

Brown's 30 points propel UM to upset of No.9 North Carolina

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 28, 2017

All season long, the University of Miami men's basketball team has been craving a signature win against a highly ranked team, a résumé-booster, preferably on national TV so the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee and recruits from coast to coast can see.

The Hurricanes got their wish on Saturday afternoon and made a statement loud and clear in front of a sold-out Watsco Center crowd.

They dominated ninth-ranked North Carolina on both ends of the floor, played swarming defense, led by as many as 22 and came away with a 77-62 win and a jolt of confidence heading into Wednesday's home game against No. 6 Florida State.

UM freshman Bruce Brown led all scorers with 30 points on 8-of-11 shooting, and he added four rebounds, five assists and a pair of steals. It was the most points by a Hurricanes freshman since UM joined the Atlantic Coast Conference in 2004. After the game, he jumped into the student section to celebrate along with teammate Ja'Quan Newton, who had 18 points, seven rebounds and three assists.

"Not a lot to say," Tar Heels coach Roy Williams said in a hushed tone after the game. "It was a big-time kicking of our rear ends is what it was. They were much more aggressive going to the boards, going after loose balls ... more aggressive in everything they did."

The Tar Heels, who led the ACC at 89.5 points per game, had just 22 at halftime on Saturday. The 62-point total was a season low. They missed 20 of their final

22 shots in the first half and went more than eight minutes without making a field goal while UM (14-6, 4-4) went on a 24-5 run. Williams said their 20.7 percent first-half shooting percentage might have been "the lowest in my entire life."

Things got so bad for the Tar Heels in the second half that Williams picked up a team stool and smashed it at the foot of his players in front of the bench.

"The first two or three minutes we thought it was going to be easy and they kicked us right in the mouth and kept doing it for about 40 minutes," Williams said. "Brown was tremendous. One of the worst rebounding games we've had all year long. Couldn't get an offensive rebound, couldn't stop them from getting an offensive rebound.

"Weird day for me to look down and see another team had 11 fastbreak points and we had zero. You have to congratulate Miami. They were much more ready to play, were into it, focused. Bottom line is, they kicked our tails on the court and on the bench."

North Carolina (19-4, 7-2) led the nation in offensive rebounding entering Saturday's game and led the ACC in rebounding margin at plus-14.5. On Saturday, the Canes outrebounded the Tar Heels 41-36 and had 11 on the offensive end, just one fewer than UNC's 12. Joel Berry II, who averaged 15.5 points, was held to 0-for-8 shooting and finished with two points from the free-throw line. Kenny Williams went 1 for 8, and big man Kennedy Meeks was held to five points.

UM had eight steals to just two for North Carolina, and six blocks.

"Every time we laid it up, they were spiking it like a volleyball game," Williams

said of UM's defense.

The UM coaching staff gave the players a handout and a text message with seven things they had to do on offense and defense to have a chance to beat the Tar Heels. Canes coach Jim Larrañaga said his players followed the plan perfectly.

Zone defense was not among the bullet points, but the coaches decided to try it when the Heels took an early 11-2 lead. It worked, so they stuck with it for much of the game. After blowing a halftime lead against Duke, Brown said the Canes were determined to "keep our foot on the gas."

The enthusiastic crowd of 7,563 included former UM quarterback Jim Kelly, 14 football recruits who enrolled early and a collection of basketball inductees to the UM Sports Hall of Fame — among them former women's coach Ferne Labati, current women's coach Katie Meier, Tamara James and Steve Edwards.

"This was a big win for us, but there's a lot of basketball left," Newton said. "We want to get FSU, too."

Brown (30 points) leads Miami past No. 9 UNC

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Jan. 28, 2017

Throughout conference play, they've been maddeningly inconsistent.

There have been scoring droughts. Defensive lapses. Turnovers. Struggles at the free throw line.

And so, every expectation outside the Hurricanes' locker room was that the Miami men's basketball team would likely struggle against ninth-ranked, ACC leading-North Carolina, even though they were at home.

Instead, freshman Bruce Brown had one of the best games of his young career, Miami made some key defensive adjustments and the Hurricanes capitalized on one of the worst shooting halves the Tar Heels have played all year to notch a 77-62 upset over North Carolina on Saturday at the Watsco Center.

Brown, playing in his first game against the traditional basketball power, finished with a career-high 30 points to lead three Hurricanes in double figures. Ja'Quan Newton added 18 points, while Davon Reed had 14 to pace Miami, which has now won two in a row against ACC opponents ahead of a Wednesday night showdown against another ranked foe – in-state rival and sixth-ranked Florida State.

"I told the team afterward that I think we've played three – and only three – complete games since the ACC season started," said Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga, who is now 5-4 against North Carolina at Miami. "N.C. State, Notre Dame and today. Some of the other games, we played well for a half, three

quarters. Today, I was pleased with the effort and execution."

Miami's victory marked one of a handful of upsets on the day, with unranked Syracuse topping the Seminoles 82-72 and unranked Georgia Tech edging No. 14 Notre Dame 62-60. But in Coral Gables, the focus was solely on figuring out a way to contend with a North Carolina team that had been averaging 93 points in its past seven games.

In the opening minutes, it appeared as if that wouldn't happen.

While the Hurricanes opened the game 0-of-4 from the field, the Tar Heels seemingly couldn't miss, quickly jumping out to an 11-2 lead that led to a timeout. After that, everything changed.

The Hurricanes began switching in and out of their typical man defense to a zone. The shots started falling, especially from 3-point range and a 20-5 Hurricanes run that spanned more than four minutes set the tone for the rest of the day. While North Carolina (19-4, 7-2) would make a push, after the Hurricanes took a 17-16 lead on a Brown free throw, Miami would not trail again the rest of the way.

"We just stayed together. We were like, 'Keep playing, it's a long game,' " Newton said. "It was 11-2, I think, but we were like, 'Just kept playing. Everything is going to be okay.' We stuck together to help us win the game."

Throughout the rest of the first half, the Hurricanes (14-6, 4-4) just kept adding to their lead, while North Carolina closed out the game's first 20 minutes going 8:36 without a field goal. The second half was more of the same, with Miami's lead growing to as many as 22 points with 14:00 left after Brown turned a steal into

an assist on a beautiful 3-pointer from fellow freshman DJ Vasiljevic.

The Tar Heels, playing without junior swingman Theo Pinson, shot a more respectable 15-of-31 in the second half and cut the deficit to 65-54 with 1:46 left on Nate Britt's layup. But Brown answered on Miami's ensuing possession with a layup of his own, the Hurricanes pushed their lead back up to 13 and they would coast the rest of the way.

"Not a lot to say. That was a big-time kicking of our rear ends is what it was," said North Carolina coach Roy Williams, who was captured by television cameras angrily smashing a chair during a timeout Saturday. "They were much more aggressive, aggressive going to the boards, aggressive going after loose balls and when I say aggressive, it's not intended to mean in any way they were dirty. They were quicker to the ball. The first two, three minutes, I think we felt it was going to be easy and then they hit us right in the mouth and kept hitting us for 40 minutes."

Basketball Buzz: 1/27

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Jan. 27, 2107

The ACC-leading and ninth-ranked North Carolina Tar Heels are up next for the Miami Hurricanes.

Miami (13-6, 3-4 ACC) will be looking to knock off North Carolina (19-3, 7-1) on Saturday (1 p.m., CBS) as the Tar Heels enter leading the ACC in scoring at 89.5 points a game.

“Even if you make a basket they’re going to take the ball and try to race up the court and beat you down the court in the first five seconds,” head coach Jim Larrañaga said. “Because of their speed, athletic ability, and high level of player, they’re able to do that, in my opinion, better than anybody else in the country over the history of the last 50 years. That has not changed.

“The only other college program I know that even compares to that is Michigan State. The five-second layup has to be your number one priority—stop it because there is nothing else if they just keep scoring at the rim. Our guys will hopefully get that clear picture in their mind and stop it. ... When you don’t give them those layups and they have to run offense, you have a better chance of guarding them.

“The only problem in facing a team like Carolina is they are also the best offensive rebounding team in the country and they’re getting a lot of points off second-chance opportunities. So you have to have a team that can really rebound it on the defensive end and you have to have a lot of guys who will do it.”

Miami is coming off a 78-77 win over Boston College on Wednesday as they nearly let a 17-point lead with nine minutes left slip away.

“Every ACC game is going to be like that,” senior forward Kamari Murphy said. “We just beat Boston College by one. Normally when you think about Boston College it’s like, ‘OK maybe an easy win’ sometimes, but this year and in the past years the ACC has been getting better every year. The competition is just even better now and we try to bring it every game.”

North Carolina has won seven straight and has beat Miami in the last two meetings.

NEWS & NOTES

- Anthony Lawrence replaced Dewan Huell

in the starting lineup for Wednesday’s game and Lawrence scored seven points with six rebounds in 30 minutes while Huell scored eight points with three rebounds in 11 minutes in the 78-77 win. “I thought both guys contributed very nicely,” Larrañaga said. “I think Anthony Lawrence gives us an additional ballhandler and 3-point threat. Dewan gives us that length and athletic ability, and a good target near the basket.” (Click for more details)

- PF Dewan Huell (6.8 points on 51.9-percent shooting) has been working on becoming a better offensive player. “Dewan’s been working on his offensive game since day one,” Larrañaga said. “He’s worked with me, coach (Chris) Caputo, and our staff diligently before games. When classes were not in session during the Christmas Break he was coming in early and shooting, working on his ballhandling, working on his passing skills, and he’s very willing student of the game. I’ve been very, very impressed with his focus, work ethic, and his hunger to want to get better.”

- Miami ranks 13th out of 15 ACC teams in turnovers averaging 13.7 a game, which remains an issue. “Right now the challenge for us is to reduce our turnovers so that we don’t give our opponent too many opportunities to get easy baskets off our own mistakes,” Larrañaga said. “Our half-court defense has been very respectful, but if you’re turning the ball over 12, 15, 18 times and the opponent is scoring 20-25 points off of those turnovers and we don’t force a lot of turnovers ourselves there’s a tremendous imbalance and it’s hard to make those up.”

- Miami ranks 11th out of 15 ACC teams in free throw percentage at 69.4 percent, but showed a positive sign in Wednesday’s game making their final 13 attempts. “If you don’t make your free throws and the other team is making theirs, that’s another phase of the game they’re winning,” Larrañaga said.

- PF Kamari Murphy on what the Hurricanes are doing well when they are winning: “(Assistant coach Chris) Caputo is a big statistic guy so basically when we turn the ball over less, when we contest more shots than leave guys open, and when we score off the other team’s turnovers is we tend to win more, but when we do the complete opposite of those—turn the ball over, don’t score very well in the open court and don’t contest shots, we lose. Those are some of the things we have to work on.”

- Miami has nine scholarship players on the team including four freshmen and two sophomores. “I can’t say that we like being so young,” Larrañaga said. “I think the young guys have done a great job, but my druthers would be to have some older guys—I think that’s been our success. ... We would much rather be the older, more experienced team because there’s so many things you have to learn in college. I don’t think high school basketball players have any idea of how complicated game preparation from game to game in college.”

- Murphy believes the coaching staff needed the win against Boston College too after coming into the game having dropped four of the last five. “We needed that win a lot to build our confidence for the younger guys to keep them believing and keep fighting and especially for the coaching staff as well too,” Murphy said. “It’s tough on them when we lose as well. It’s not just us out there, they have to prepare us and get us ready so when we lose, they lose as well. So it was good win. We got it for us and for them.”

- Freshman C Rodney Miller has played sparingly this season appearing in 10 of 19 games for a total of 44 minutes scoring 12 points. “Rodney is my guy,” Murphy said. “He’s that one of those guys that don’t get a lot of playing time, but if you come to one of our practices you’ll see he brings it every time in practice. He practices like he wants to compete for minutes and that’s how you’re supposed to play even though he may or may not get them. He brings it every day in practice. He’s also from the New York side so that’s my guy. He has a great attitude and is a funny guy. He’ll be good. When I leave I’m definitely going to watch the next few years because he’s going to be special.” Larrañaga said: “Rodney just needs time to get stronger and get in better shape. He has to be able to really handle the physicality of the game and the way we look at it is he came in bench-pressing around 200 pounds, but he weighs 250. He needs to be benching 280-300 or maybe he doesn’t have to bench quite so much, but maybe he needs to be able to squat a lot of weight because it’s really in that area where you have to be stronger than the other guy.”

Hurricanes signing class gets a ratings boost

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Jan. 27, 2017

The best recruiting class in Miami history just got better.

Well, sort of.

ESPN boosted its ratings for each of the Hurricanes' three high school signees in 2017. That moved Miami's class up to No. 7 nationally, its highest-ever ranking by the outlet.

Shooting guard Lonnie Walker, a McDonald's All-American, jumped one spot to No. 18 on ESPN's list. Point guard Chris Lykes (No. 46) moved up seven. Power forward Deng Gak (No. 92) climbed two places.

UM also has New Zealand forward Sam Waardenburg, who is already on campus. He is considered a four-star talent who could have cracked the rankings, but ESPN includes only North American high school players in its top 100.

ESPN's take on the class:

The Hurricanes were already in good shape with a pair of ESPN 100 products on board in Chris Lykes and Deng Gak while they simultaneously built their pipeline into the Australia and New Zealand corner of the world with a commitment from Samuel Waardenburg, who is expected to join the team at mid-year. But a commitment from five-star shooting guard Lonnie Walker punctuated Jim Larrañaga's best recruiting class yet. Waardenburg was one of the biggest International standouts from last summer's Adidas Nations event and is a skilled 6-foot-9 forward who specializes in shooting the 3 and spacing the floor. Lykes may be just 5-foot-6, but he is one of the most

dynamic playmakers in the country with the ball in his hands and certainly won't be bad for season ticket sales. Gak is an undeniable talent, yet more of a long-term option, who should grow into an impact player down the road. Walker is the gem as he is a big guard who can make shots in bunches from behind the 3-point line and is an athletic playmaker in the open floor.

Reed remains 'laser-focused' on NCAA tournament

The Hurricane

Cody Brown

Jan. 25, 2017

Miami basketball is amid a turbulent few weeks in the schedule. The team is showing its youth and inexperience, suffering some heartbreaking losses to Duke and Wake Forest.

The bright spot as of late has been senior guard Davon Reed. Not only has he taken on the role of leader and captain of the Canes since the season started, but he has been their best player and a model of consistency to this point.

Coming off a season in which he was a huge contributor to the Hurricanes' Sweet Sixteen run in the NCAA Tournament, Reed has since upped his play. The four-year starter is averaging a career-high in points, assists, steals and free-throw percentage while matching his production in rebounds.

"I've been a leader on this team before, but I think a lot more has been expected of me this year since I'm one of the only returners who has played significant minutes for this team in the past," Reed said.

Reed has displayed his leadership through his work ethic and drive for constant improvement. He didn't take any time off during the summer and said he focused on becoming a more versatile scorer whenever he was in the gym.

Reed told The Miami Hurricane he "went back to the drawing board" and focused on polishing his offensive game and making shots for himself around the basket. He worked on his ball handling, specifically when trying to make better reads coming off screens.

Already arguably the team's best three-point shooter, Reed, shooting over 40 percent from behind the arc, said that was another element to his game that he wanted to enhance.

"You can never be too good of a shooter," Reed said.

The Hurricanes have shown glimpses of elite defensive prowess, and Reed has been a huge part of that, guarding some of the best wing players in the ACC. Reed said the key to making a big difference in the defense was to keep "fine-tuning the little things."

Reed understands what is expected of him and feels that he has prepared himself to take on the challenges that lie ahead. If leadership was a question for Miami after losing four seniors just a season ago, Reed has answered it.

"Just been laser-focused," Davon Reed said about his play. "Just trying to lead this team. I've been through the ups and down of the ACC, so just trying to relay those messages to my team."

When asked about his future professional aspirations, Reed emphasized that his current focus is getting the Hurricanes back into the NCAA Tournament.

"Of course we all have dreams of playing after college, but in the end it's about winning games this year," Reed said. "If we do that, everything else will take care of itself. Just take it one game at a time. Can't look too far ahead or dwell in the past."

After ‘bad week’ Hurricanes out to end slide

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 25, 2017

Coming off what Coach Jim Larrañaga called “the worst half of basketball we’ve played,” the University of Miami Hurricanes hope to bounce back from a humiliating loss at Duke with a victory at home against Boston College (9 p.m. tipoff).

“We had a bad week last week,” Larrañaga said on Monday. “We went on the road and allowed 96 points against Wake Forest and then went to Duke on Saturday, played a very competitive first half, but then not only let it slip away but played the worst half of basketball that we’ve played.”

Miami allowed Duke to go on a 29-3 run after halftime and erase UM’s 11-point lead. The Canes were outscored 45-22 in the second half and lost 70-58, their fourth loss in the past five games. They dropped to 12-6, 2-4 in the ACC, with their only conference wins to North Carolina State and Pitt.

Their challenge against Boston College begins with stopping freshman guard Ky Bowman, who scored 33 points with seven three-pointers against No. 9 North Carolina over the weekend. Bowman and Jerome Robinson combined for 51 points in a 90-82 loss to the Tar Heels, and proved the Eagles (9-11, 2-5 ACC) can make life difficult for even the best ACC teams.

Larrañaga said nobody could have predicted that Bowman – a former UNC football recruit — would play such a big role as a rookie. Bowman dropped 30 points on Syracuse a few weeks ago, and is averaging 13 points per game.

“If you look at the BC roster and see what Ky Bowman has done for them, as a freshman. ... I don’t think anyone was talking about him being one of the best freshmen in the county,” Larrañaga said. “He was not like some of the celebrated freshmen. But he is a guy playing at the highest level of college basketball, not just freshman, but almost like a fifth-year senior, like someone who’s been doing this five or six years.”

Bowman did, however, commit eight turnovers against the Tar Heels. He and Robinson have been turnover-prone, so the Hurricanes will try to capitalize on that. Miami has allowed 61.1 points per game, which ranks 11th in the nation.

Analytics maven Pomeroy encouraged by meeting with NCAA

Daily Press
David Teel
Jan. 24, 2017

No matter how beguiling the subject or lavish the catering, a half-day meeting is a recipe for tedium. Minds wander, personalities clash, fannies fatigue.

But when four college basketball analytics gurus convened last week with NCAA staff to suggest changes in the tournament selection process, for as early as next season, Ken Pomeroy was engaged for the entire four-plus hours.

"I've been in a lot of long meetings where I didn't want to be there after an hour," he said, "but for me, this wasn't like that. I thought the discussion was very fruitful."

Pomeroy majored in civil engineering as a Virginia Tech undergraduate and earned a master's from Wyoming in atmospheric science. But he found his calling in advanced team and player statistics and rankings.

Pomeroy launched Kenpom.com in 2003, and his numbers have become indispensable for more coaches, fans and media each season. It's about time the NCAA tournament selection committee caught on.

Pushed by the National Association of Basketball Coaches — Old Dominion's Jeff Jones is this year's president — the NCAA invited Pomeroy, Kevin Pauga, Jeff Sagarin and Ben Alamar to the association's Indianapolis offices to discuss how their rankings, or a composite, might replace the Rating Percentage Index, a tournament selection staple since 1981.

Pauga's rankings, born during his time as Michigan State's director of basketball operations, appear at KPIsports.net, Sagarin's in USA Today and at Sagarin.com, Alamar's on ESPN.com's Basketball Power Index.

The meeting was run by Dan Gavitt, the NCAA's senior vice president for basketball, and David Worlock, the NCAA's director of media coordination and statistics. Ohio University athletic director Jim Schaus, a selection committee member, also attended.

"I think this is really smart of Danny Gavitt to explore maybe a combination of things, and can you get maybe even more current, as far as evaluating," Notre Dame coach Mike Brey said.

"We've used the RPI effectively," Miami's Jim Larrañaga said, "but there are more things that you can value. ... I think just using one metric, it's helpful, but I don't think nearly as helpful as looking at a global picture as how you can evaluate teams."

Larrañaga is a Pomeroy devotee "because it involves every aspect of the game. Your offensive efficiency, your defensive efficiency, your rebounding efficiency, free throws, every aspect. If you combine those, and you know how to read numbers, then you probably can come up with the right teams at the end of the selection process."

Such sentiment flatters Pomeroy, but he's unsure how, or even if, his rankings should fit into revamping the selection of the tournament's 36 at-large teams. That's because his formula, like Sagarin's and Alamar's, is more predictive, while Pauga's and the RPI's are driven more by game results.

"The committee and fans struggle with what is the best team versus what is the team with the best collection of wins," Pomeroy said. "And those can be two different things. ... For the most part I think the results-based approach is generally what they should lean on."

Pomeroy believes more predictive rankings such as his can be valuable when evaluating a team such as Colonial Athletic Association leader UNC Wilmington. The Seahawks (19-3, 8-0) are dominating the CAA, but if they fail to win the league tournament and accompanying automatic NCAA bid, they would, due to the CAA's overall weakness, lack the quality victories usually needed to secure an at-large NCAA invitation.

All that said, the four new-aged rankings and the old-school RPI don't differ drastically on most teams.

Virginia ranges from sixth (Pomeroy) to 15th (RPI), Virginia Tech from 29th (Pauga) to 50th (Pomeroy). Louisville's rankings are crazy close, from seventh to 10th.

The RPI loves UNC Wilmington at 26th, Sagarin not as much at 56th, but when you're ranking all 352 Division I teams, such variances seem inevitable.

In the Atlantic 10, VCU ranges from 27th (Pauga) to 51st (Pomeroy), Dayton from 28th (RPI) to 39th (Pomeroy). Conference USA leader Middle Tennessee State is most

valued by the RPI at 34th, least by Sagarin at No. 59.

Two of the most glaring discrepancies occur with the ACC's Syracuse and Miami. The results-based RPI and Pauga have the Orange (127th and 110th) and Hurricanes (81st and 68th) virtually no chance of at-large inclusion. But the three predictive ratings have Miami ranging from No. 28 to No. 40, Syracuse from No. 35 to 59.

Pomeroy said there was discussion of developing a composite ranking that employs the RPI and analytics. Pauga suggested two composites, one resume'-based, the other predictive.

To be clear, no ranking is infallible. If perfection existed, there'd be no need for a selection committee.

The question is, which metric will be programmed into panelists' laptops as they view measures such as record versus the top 50 and top 100, and non-conference schedule strength?

"It gets real tricky when you get into all that stuff," VCU coach Will Wade said of analytics. "People complain about the RPI, but it's not the worst thing in the world."

Understand that Wade tracks advanced statistics daily to evaluate the Rams and their opponents. But he opposes using rankings such as Pomeroy's that consider margin of victory, and indeed, the last thing the game needs is coaches running up scores to impress the selection committee.

Pomeroy agrees but is "pretty optimistic" that the NCAA will move beyond the RPI, even if most involved wouldn't understand the mathematics behind the various formulas.

"We avoided," Pomeroy said with a laugh, "talking about the guts of our algorithms."

Brown Continues to Make Push for ACC All Freshmen Team

Canes Warning
Alan Rubenstein
Jan. 23, 2017

Bruce Brown was the 38th ranked player nationally in USA Today's composite rankings of the class of 2016. He has been Miami's best all-around player this season.

Brown has shown his versatility this season as he is the Hurricanes third leading scorer, second leading rebounder, second in assists and first in steals. He posted the program's second ever triple double and first by a freshman in a victory over South Carolina State last month. Brown had 11 points, 11 rebounds and ten assists in 30 minutes.

The triple double was just the 23rd in ACC history and the first since Iman Shumpert from Georgia Tech in 2011. Anthony King produced Miami's other triple double with 11 points, 10 rebounds and 13 blocks against Florida Atlantic in 2004.

Brown has been a focal point for Miami this season with fellow guards Davon Reed and Ja'quan Newton. Brown is averaging 11.1 points per game, 6.9 rebounds, 3.1 assists and 1.6 steals. He is second in the ACC in rebounding and steals among Freshmen.

The Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel's Christy Cabrera Chirinos spoke to Miami coach Jim Larrañaga about the immediate impact that Brown has made:

"I think there are two things that I think about that clearly outweigh his athleticism in my mind," Larrañaga said. "One is his genuine enthusiasm for life. He has a great personality, he's fun to be around and he enjoys being with his teammates. The second thing, and he may have learned this playing all

those sports, is that he's a tremendous competitor. When you take those two characteristics and give him the God-given athletic ability that he has, that's what really makes him very special."

Brown is a part of what many consider the best basketball recruiting class in Miami history with even a better one coming. The Hurricanes have a McDonald's All-American for the second straight season for the first time in school history. Brown's classmate Dewan Huell was one last season and Lonnie Walker is one this year.

Brown, Huell, DJ Vasiljevic and Rodney Miller gave Miami the 10th best class in the country. This season's class ranked 12th in the early signing period. Helping to build a program is what attracted to Miami.

"That's what I wanted, to help build something," the former five-star prospect said. "I think I'm one of the top recruits to ever come here and that played a part in it. And just Coach L, he's been to the Final Four, he's won games. I didn't want to come to college and not win. I love winning."

Brown struggled early shooting the ball, but even that has come on lately. He is shooting 46.8 percent on the season, including a very respectable 38.3 percent from three-range. In ACC play, Brown had connected on ten of his 18 three-point attempts.

Miami should be good for the next few years. Brown will be counted on as a leader next season with the departures of seniors Kamari Murphy and Davon Reed. Brown and Ja'Quan Newton will likely be Larrañaga's leaders on the floor. Walker is likely to step into Reed's starting spot, with sophomore Anthony Lawrence also likely to push for a spot in the starting rotation.

UM's Brown quickly learning ropes of college game

South Florida Sun Sentinel
Christy Cabrera Chirinos
Jan. 20, 2017

The idea of being a two-sport star remains intriguing, even at this point in his career.

In his short time at Miami, Bruce Brown has already emerged as one of the standouts on the Hurricanes men's basketball team. But he's not far removed from catching passes on the football field, and after a few conversations with some Miami football players, he thinks he can still hold his own on the gridiron.

"They've talked a little bit of smack, so I've been wanting to get out there," the 6-foot-5, 190-pound freshman said with a laugh. "It's been tempting to think about, but I don't think I will."

It's hard to fault Brown — who grew up playing both sports — for wondering about the possibilities.

Jimmy Graham and Erik Swoope have already proven Hurricanes basketball players can find success in football, both moving on to NFL careers after their years at Miami. For now, though, Brown says he's eager to continue to developing on the court and becoming the kind of player the Hurricanes need as they push deeper into conference play.

That said, Brown's athleticism has already paid dividends for him and the Hurricanes.

The guard has already worked his way into Miami's starting lineup and regularly elicits cheers from Hurricanes fans at the Watsco Center with his dunks and his ability to get to the rim for rebounds.

More than that, though, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga says it is Brown's personality and work ethic that have made his transition to college basketball easier.

"I think there are two things that I think about that clearly outweigh his athleticism in my mind," Larrañaga said. "One is his genuine enthusiasm for life. He has a great personality, he's fun to be around and he enjoys being with his teammates. The second thing, and he may have learned this playing all those sports, is that he's a tremendous competitor. When you take those two characteristics and give him the God-given athletic ability that he has, that's what really makes him very special."

As well as Brown's adapted to the college game so far, things are about to get tougher.

Saturday, the Hurricanes will travel to No. 18 Duke (14-4, 2-3), where the freshman — who has started 13 of Miami's 17 games and is averaging 10.9 points — will get his first chance to play at one of college basketball's most iconic venues, Cameron Indoor Arena.

After that, the Hurricanes — who have dropped three of their first five conference games — have matchups looming against Boston College, No. 9 North Carolina and No. 10 Florida State.

But the chance to play in games like those and doing his part to help make the Hurricanes (12-5, 2-3) a consistent contender in the ACC is part of what made Miami an attractive option for Brown.

"That's what I wanted, to help build something," the former five-star prospect said. "I think I'm one of the top recruits to ever come here and that played a part in it. And just Coach L, he's been to the Final Four, he's won games. I didn't want to come to college and not win. I love winning."

Earlier this season, that respect for Larrañaga and his own drive helped Brown navigate the emotional day he learned that his beloved uncle, Edward Dillard, had died.

Brown's mother, Roberta, had hoped her son wouldn't learn of his uncle's death until after he completed the two finals he was set to take that day, but the freshman knew something had happened when he woke up the morning of Dec. 6 and saw countless missed calls from siblings on his phone.

When he later learned of his uncle's death, it didn't take him long to decide he would still play in Miami's game against South Carolina State that night. He wanted to take the court in his uncle's honor.

Larrañaga and the Hurricanes asked Brown if they could all play for Dillard that night. It was a gesture that touched Brown, who went on to post just the second triple-double in program history that night.

He finished with 11 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists in Miami's 82-46 win. And while he fought back tears as he walked off the court, back in the quiet of his dorm room, Brown was emotional.

His teammates, meanwhile, were just happy they were able to help the young player they had already accepted as part of their family.

"That was a very special thing that we were a part of," senior Davon Reed said. "You could see he wanted to play that game for his uncle and Coach L wanted it as well. And we as a team, said we were going to go out there for him. He was so focused and passionate that night. It was special for all of us."

Basketball team aiming for another upset at Duke

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 20, 2017

Once upon a time, a trip to Cameron Indoor Stadium to play Duke would have seemed an overwhelming challenge for the University of Miami men's basketball team. That changed the moment Jim Larrañaga became coach.

Since he was hired in 2011, the Hurricanes have beaten the Blue Devils four out of six times, three times by double digits. Two years ago, the Canes went to Durham and shocked the eventual national champions with a 90-74 victory. Last season, Miami won 80-69 with the help of 21 points from Sheldon McClellan and 11 assists by Angel Rodriguez — more than the entire Duke team.

UM hopes to win for a third year in a row as the Canes head into Cameron for a Saturday night ESPN game.

They're facing an 18th-ranked Duke team that's coming off back-to-back losses to Florida State and Louisville. The Blue Devils are 14-4 overall and 2-3 in the Atlantic Coast Conference, the first time since 2007 they're below .500 in the conference through five games.

"We're coming off of two straight losses to two very good teams on the road in hostile environments against a very good Florida State team and a very good Louisville team," said acting coach Jeff Capel, who is filling in for Mike Krzyzewski following his back surgery. "I think we've done some things to get better. It hasn't equated in wins, but it's part of the process of growing as a team. We have to do a lot more."

Coach K will not be back in time for Saturday's game, and Duke might also

be missing co-captain Amile Jefferson, whom Capel described as "day-to-day" with a bone bruise in his right foot.

The Blue Devils are led by Grayson Allen and Luke Kennard. Allen has been the subject of national scrutiny — and the target of taunting by opposing fans — after tripping three opponents in the past year and serving a one-game suspension.

UM is 12-5 overall and 2-3 in the ACC. The Hurricanes have been inconsistent, which is to be expected considering three freshmen are playing significant minutes. After holding Pittsburgh to 46 points, they lost 96-79 at Wake Forest on Wednesday night. There are no UM players in the top five of any ACC category, but as a team UM is ranked second in the conference and 12th nationally with 61.5 points allowed.

"My coaching staff has been delivering the message of how important defense is to winning, and our players have been very receptive," Larrañaga said on Monday. "There's no question our two seniors [forward Kamari Murphy and guard Davon Reed] have been just absolutely terrific at the defensive end of the floor."

Reed leads UM in scoring at 15.2 points per game and had 14 against Duke last season. Ja'Quan Newton is averaging 14.7 points and also had a big game against Duke last time with 15 points, five rebounds and five assists.

Larrañaga said there is no way to prepare his freshmen for their first visit to Cameron, but more important than the building are the people inside.

"Cameron Indoor Stadium is a legendary arena, but a lot of it has to do with

success," Larrañaga said. "You're not playing against the Cameron crazies. They add to the environment, but what makes Duke so good is they've got the winningest coach in college basketball history. They have nine McDonald's All-Americans and a very enthusiastic crowd that supports that great cast."

SATURDAY: UM MEN AT NO. 18 DUKE
When/where: 8:15 p.m.; Cameron Indoor Stadium, Durham, N.C.

TV/radio: ESPN; WQAM 560.

Records: UM 12-5, 2-3 ACC; Duke 14-4, 2-3.

Scouting report: The Blue Devils are coming off back-to-back losses to Florida State and Louisville. Miami is coming off a 96-79 loss at Wake Forest. ... UM beat Duke 80-69 last season, but the Canes were No. 15 in the nation at the time and were very experienced.

Walker accepts McDonald's All American Game jersey

USA Today HS Sports

Josh Barnett

Jan. 20, 2017

Lonnie Walker from Reading (Pa.) received his honorary jersey for the McDonald's All American Game during the McDonald's Hometown Heroes presented by American Family Insurance on Friday. His reaction?

"My hands were shaking and my palms were sweaty just to be able to touch the jersey itself," Walker said. "The whole event was ridiculous. I was ecstatic.

"The group here was amazing. I've never seen so many people at something like this. It was such an honor. Being able to receive something like this was a blessing and I can't thank anyone but the main upstairs."

Walker shared his selection Sunday night in an emotional moment with his family.

"It kinda took a while for it to hit me," he said. "My grandparents cried and there were a lot of emotions. It's the pinnacle of high school basketball that everyone wants to achieve. It hit me in the middle of the night and that's when I realized I was a McDonald's All American. There were tears of joy in my eyes, just an amazing, amazing feeling. I can't even explain it to myself. I'm just so thankful for what I have accomplished."

Walker, a 6-4 shooting guard, is ranked as the No. 18 player in the Class of 2017 by ESPN.com.

The McDonald's game is March 29 at the United Center in Chicago, and he goes with a goal.

"Being able to put on that jersey and say I'm a McDonald's All American and prove

that I'm just as good as any other player in the country and that I'm tough and motivated," he said. "I'm way better than what people have seen. I want to show off my talent and my craft.

"Rankings don't matter, but I think I can be higher than that. I think I'm a lot better than where people place me so I want to go and make a statement and show that I'm going to make an impact at Miami."

Walker had 13 offers and took his official visits to Miami, Kentucky, Villanova, Syracuse and Arizona, but he said he was impressed with Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga.

"Once I got there, I saw the whole team right away and they were excited to see me," he said.

"I jelled with the players immediately. They wanted what was best for me, and I could see in their eyes that they wanted me to come there.

"The bond with Coach L was more than I had with any other coach. He sees more in me than just basketball. He sees that academically I can do something in life. Having a coach who wants you on the court but more off the court, he wants me to become a man and thrive for greatness outside of the game. That reminded me a lot of my father. Coach L believed in me and trusted in me, whether it's basketball or being smart and intellectual to move on in life."

Sports Buzz

Miami Herald
Barry Jackson
Jan. 18, 2017

- Here's what ESPN's Dick Vitale said about UM in a conference call today in advance of Saturday night's UM at Duke game on ESPN:

Obviously making decisions at the end of the game has to be a big thing they have to be concerned about because they're so inexperienced on the perimeter. I think they were dominated last year by the play of (Angel) Rodriguez and (Sheldon) McClellan, so that's a concern. Not to be so up and down, be able to be more consistent - they get pounded at Syracuse the second half, Jim (Larrañaga) was not happy with the performance at all. Then they come back, go on the road, beat Pittsburgh which really had some good moments this year, blew them away. So consistency.

"The kid (Bruce) Brown, I think he's going to be a terrific player. The kid (Dewan) Huell has things you can't teach - the size, the athleticism, has to learn to create space to get free for his shot, has to learn how to score, how to get up and use that speed and quickness in transition. They have a lot of parts there. (Ja'Quan) Newton can score. They have a lot of parts, can be a very dangerous basketball team. I do not see them at the level I saw the year they were, I thought, sensational with (Shane) Larkin & Co."

He added, "the kid they miss from last year, no one talks about him ever - the defensive kid in the middle, (Tonye) Jekiri. He blocked shots, created all kinds of trouble for people trying to get in the lane at all with his intimidation factor. That was big...."

"Jim Larrañaga has had pretty good talent, is getting the maximum out of his talent. I remember doing a game a couple of years ago and it was one of the worst beatings I've seen Duke take. ... I've never seen a Duke team whipped that badly. Guard play is essential, there's no question. Last year they had Rodriguez, McClellan. I don't know if they have that kind of guard play this year...."

"[JaQuan Newton] certainly a big-time scorer coming out of high school, if my memory recollects he broke every record in the Catholic league. He's a scorer, is a penetrator, not what you'd call a legitimate point guard. He'll get in the lane and create some offense. He's not what they had last year with Angel Rodriguez, a true point guard. He's a guy that will put points on the board for you, attacks, is a very positive influence on that Miami team."

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/sports/spt-columns-blogs/barry-jackson/article127404994.html#storylink=cpy>

ESPN Conference Call with Basketball Analysts Vitale and Greenberg

ESPN Media Zone

Anna Negron

Jan. 18, 2017

ESPN college basketball analysts Dick Vitale and Seth Greenberg participated in a media conference call today. The 13th season of College Gameday begins Saturday at No. 18 Duke prior to their matchup against Miami (8:15 p.m., ESPN). Rece Davis, Greenberg, Jay Bilas and Jay Williams will be live from campus this Saturday. Vitale will call a number of top games for the remainder of the season, including the matchup between No. 12 Louisville and No. 10 Florida State on Saturday (2 p.m., ESPN).

Transcript of the call is available below.

Q. I'd just like to get your thoughts on Ja'Quan Newton from Miami, who's having a sensational year, and obviously what a big game with Duke coming up.

DICK VITALE: Well, you know, he's certainly a big-time scorer. Coming out of high school he was unbelievable down there in Philadelphia. If my memory recollects, I think he broke every record in the Catholic league as well as at his school, where they've got a great player, the kid going to Kentucky, Green.

But he's a scorer, he's a penetrator. He's not really what you call a legitimate point guard, he's a guy that's going to get in the lane and create some offense, and he's done a great job for them with Jimmy Larrañaga. He's not like what they had last year with Rodriguez, a true point guard. McClellan was their scoring guard. He was one of the premier sixth men in basketball.

He's a guy that's going to put points on the board for you. He's not afraid to take the big shot. He attacks. He's always in attack mode. So he's a very positive influence on that Miami team.

SETH GREENBERG: I'm a big Newton fan, just real quickly. He's a city guard. He's more a city guard than a Philly guard in a lot of ways. When I think of Philly guards I think of the kid that's going to Kentucky this year, Quade Green, but Ja'Quan Newton is a guy who's a ball guard. He's a scoring point guard that can make plays. He's got a great feel, and Jim gives him a lot of freedom, and when that team gets stuck, the ball is going to be in his hands, and he's going to go make a play.

Q. I'm just curious for both of your takes on Miami's success against Duke under Jim Larrañaga. I know teams change from year to year, but is there something that you've seen that's a common thread in that success that Larrañaga has had against the Blue Devils?

SETH GREENBERG: I think there's two things that Jim does. Jim has become a disciple of the Dick Bennett philosophy a little bit. He's been able to own the tempo of his games. He's had very good guard play. To play against Duke you need good guard play. To play against and have success against Duke, you've got to play more off spacing rather than sets, and then you've got to attack that spacing because they're going to guard the whole floor. To play against Duke you've got to

take them out of transition and set your defense, which they do a great job of. They play with great floor balance.

And they've had athleticism, size and experience, and the teams that beat Duke, they have athleticism, size and experience.

Miami has been able to stay old, which is important. You see Mike Brey has had some success against Duke. They've been able to stay old.

Miami has had success against Duke; Notre Dame, they've had good guard play. They've played on space, high ball screens, spread ball screens, attacking people off the bounce, getting paint touches off the dribble, and you know, finally you've got to be able to set your defense and keep them in front, and I think that's the key to playing against Duke, and I think Jim has really done a good job of identifying it and executing it.

DICK VITALE: Well, I think to jump in here, I think Jim also has had pretty good talent. He's had pretty good talent and he's getting the maximum out of his talent, especially on the perimeter. I remember doing a game a couple of years ago when they played Duke, and it was probably one of the worst beatings I ever seen Duke take. I don't know if you remember that, they just ran up and down the court. Larkin and company was lay-up after lay-up. I never seen anything like it. I mean, I never seen a Duke team whipped that badly.

I don't know if you remember that, but anyway, guard play is essential. There's no question. And last year he got Rodriguez, McClellan, you're strong on the perimeter. I don't know if that kind of guard play this year. I know Newton is a very good scorer. I had them recently. I had them in a game against Notre Dame, went down to the wire, and making good decisions at the end of the game was the difference, and certainly Notre Dame, that is one of their great strengths. Any time you've got a formula where you're making free throws, leading the nation, and you're least number of turnovers, assist-to-turnover ratio is No. 1, and you're not turning the ball over, you're making threes, you're always going to have a chance to win, and in the Miami game with Notre Dame, Miami at the end of the game made some bad plays.

Q. I know you've already talked a little bit about Miami, and I was hoping you could expand a little bit more and share your thoughts overall on Miami's team and the strengths and weaknesses you see there.

DICK VITALE: Well, you know, I did Miami just recently. Obviously making the decisions at the end of the game is going to be a big thing they've got to be concerned about because they're so inexperienced on the perimeter. They were dominated last year by Rodriguez and McClellan, so that's a concern for them. Not to be so up and down, be able to be more consistent. They go to Syracuse and they get pounded at Syracuse

the second half. Jimmy was not happy with the performance at all. He said defensively that was the one time we really broke down defensively, going up there, and then they come back, they go on the road after the loss to show some character after the loss to Notre Dame, and that's certainly not a bad loss because we're seeing how good Notre Dame really is, and they go on the road, and they beat Pittsburgh, who's really had some good moments this year, and they beat them by 26, I believe, blew them away. So consistent.

I love — a positive with them is the kid Brown. I think he's going to be a terrific player. The kid Uhl has got things you can't teach, the size, the athleticism, has to learn to create space to get free for his shot. He has to learn how to score, how to get up and use that speed and quickness in transition. But they've got a lot of parts there.

Newton we talked about earlier, can score. They've got a lot of points to be a very dangerous basketball team, but I do not see them at the level I saw the year they were, I thought, sensation at with Larkin and company.

SETH GREENBERG: I just think they've got to take better care of the basketball. They turn it over at a high percentage. 20 percent of their possessions end in a turnover, and that's not Jim Larrañaga basketball. The only other thing I'd add is they really don't get anything from their front court per se. They're so perimeter oriented. They need to get some type of consistency from their front court. He's been spotty at best, and that's what happens when you don't have guys to play through some in the post, you're going to end up on your perimeter game, and their shot selection at times could be a little suspect, but I'm a big Reed fan. I think he's a terrific player. He's got a physicality to his game. He's got a versatility to his game. But the one thing I would say is as good as Murphy is defensively, he doesn't give them really anything offensively, and I think if they can get something a little more consistent in their front court offensively it would make the game easier for their guards.

DICK VITALE: The only kid they miss from last year, nobody talks about him ever, the defensive kid in the middle, Jekiri. He blocked shots, he took away — he created all kinds of trouble for people, trying to get in the lane and all. Not only was he blocking shots but just with his intimidation factor, always thinking about the shot blocking, and that was big.

Reed, I felt so bad for him on the turnover against Notre Dame, the ball slipped out of his hands and just was — you felt bad for the kid.

Turnovers, frontcourt play plaguing Miami — but reasons for optimism, ESPN analysts say

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Jan. 18, 2017

In advance of Miami's 8 p.m. game at Wake Forest — and its Saturday showdown at No. 18 Duke, a game ESPN will feature on its season debut of the hoops version of College GameDay — ESPN commentators Dick Vitale and Seth Greenberg shared their thoughts on the Hurricanes.

Both see good and bad with UM, which takes a 12-4 (2-2 ACC) record into Winston-Salem. The Demon Deacons are 10-7 (1-4), but have lost to five ranked teams: Villanova, Xavier, Florida State, Virginia and North Carolina. They are 2-6 in their last eight, but have the type of post scorer (6-foot-10 West Palm Beach native John Collins, who averages 15.8 points and 8.9 rebounds) who can make it tough on the guard-heavy Canes.

Those guards are a reason for optimism and concern, both Greenberg and Vitale said.

“Making decisions at the end of the game has got to be big thing they've got to be concerned about,” Vitale said. “They're so inexperienced on the perimeter. They were dominated last year by the play of [Angel] Rodriguez and [Sheldon] McClellan. [They need to] not to be so up-and-down, be able to be more consistent.

“They got pounded by Syracuse in the second half. Jim [Larrañaga] was not happy with that performance at all. He said that was the one time they really broke down defensively, going up there.” Vitale was impressed with Miami's bounce-back win at Pittsburgh, which came after a loss at home to a veteran Notre Dame squad. “[Pitt] has really had

some good moments this year, and they blew them away,” Vitale said, exhorting Miami to show “some consistency.”

Greenberg said Miami must take better care of the ball. “Nearly 20 percent of their possessions end in a turnover, and that's not Jim Larrañaga basketball,” he said. The Hurricanes commit a turnover on 17.1 percent of offensive possessions, according to TeamRankings. That is tied for 222nd nationally. Boston College and Georgia Tech are the only ACC teams who rank lower in that category.

Miami is committing 13.6 turnovers per game (192nd). Last year, it averaged 11, which was tied for 35th.

“The only thing I would add is that they really don't get anything from their frontcourt,” Greenberg said. They're so perimeter-oriented. They've got to get some consistency from their frontcourt. It's been spotty at best. That's what happens when you don't have guys you can play through in the post — you're going to end up in your perimeter game. Their shot selection at times can be a little suspect.

“As good as [Kamari] Murphy is defensively, he doesn't give them really anything offensively. If they got something a little more consistently from the frontcourt, it would make it easier on the guards.”

Vitale is high on freshman guard Bruce Brown — “I think he's going to be a terrific player” — and said freshman forward Dewan Huell “has things you can't teach: the size, the athleticism. Has to learn to create space and get free for his shot. Has to learn how to score, how to use that speed and quickness in transition.”

Junior Ja'Quan Newton, who has been

turnover-prone in his first season running the point full-time, is “not what you'd call a legitimate point guard,” Vitale said, “but he can put points on the board for you. He's not afraid to take the big shot. He's always in attack mode.”

Greenberg: “I'm a big Newton fan. He's more of a [New York] City guard than a Philly guard [Newton is from Philadelphia]. ... He's a ball guard. He can score, make plays, he's got a great feel, and Jim gives him a lot of freedom. When the ball gets stuck, he's going to make a play.”

Greenberg said he's also “a big [Davon] Reed fan. I think he's a terrific player. He's got a physicality to his game, a versatility to his game.”

Vitale, in summation:

“They've got a lot of parts to be a very dangerous basketball team, but I don't see them at the level [they were at] with [Shane] Larkin and Co.”

Coach L, senior players look to improve performance for most challenging season matchups

The Miami Hurricane
Isaiah Kim-Martinez
Jan. 18, 2017

Hurricanes senior guard Davon Reed has said it all year: The ACC is the best conference in college basketball. The teams know that, the media know that and the fans definitely know that. Conference play has consistently been a tell-tale sign for Miami's ceiling of success year after year.

The first five games of the ACC schedule have brought mixed results for the Hurricanes. The team has appeared cohesive at some moments and undisciplined at others, which was somewhat expected from this young team.

"We are going to go through some bumps, but we are nowhere near our peak yet," Reed said.

Miami will need to hit that peak soon. With the toughest part of the schedule to come, including matchups against Duke, North Carolina and Florida State, it's time to capitalize on the team's strengths and minimize weaknesses.

Assist-to-turnover ratio has been a problem for UM all season long, especially in ACC play. The team ranks last in the conference in assists, averaging just around 12 dimes a game and also averaging over 13 turnovers a game. Not a good combo.

"We still have way too many turnovers," Head Coach Jim Larrañaga said. "We have to improve that aspect of our offense. We really want to get 16 assists every game."

Junior starting point guard Ja'Quan Newton is having his best scoring season

but has been inconsistent as the team's floor general, averaging over three turnovers of his own every game.

"I want to cut down on my turnovers," Newton said. "Sometimes I make stupid decisions when I'm trying to get others involved. They are unforced."

Making smarter, simpler passes hasn't been the only issue for the Hurricanes. They also rank near the bottom of the ACC in points per game. Larrañaga has said that the goal for the Canes is to score at least 75 points per game. So far in conference play, that has only happened twice.

On the other hand, Miami has been one of the best rebounding teams, ranking No. 3 in the conference in that category and out-rebounding three of five ACC opponents so far this season. Both redshirt senior forward Kamari Murphy and freshman guard Bruce Brown have made big impacts on the boards, combining to average over 15 rebounds a contest.

"I've been in a position to learn from the seniors," Brown said. "They have been teaching me everything they know."

Miami has also been a tough defensive team at times this season, allowing just 62 points per game to ACC foes before allowing Wake Forest to score 96. After the win against Pittsburgh, Reed said that the staples have been the Canes' man-to-man defense and ability to keep other teams from beating them off the dribble.

On the offensive side of the ball, the team has benefitted from Reed's resurgence. After a slow start to the season, the senior captain has averaged 18 points a game in the past five matchups while

shooting 44 percent from the field.

"Some of our younger players have adjusted well to this point and are more familiar with the offense and what they should be looking for," Larrañaga said. "Davon has been the recipient of some better passing."

The team is shooting threes at a much better efficiency than it was at the beginning of the season, now hitting 37 percent from downtown (a very similar percentage to that of last season's Sweet Sixteen team). UM plays at a medium tempo but can adjust to play faster or slower depending on the opponent. Thus, the three-point shot fluctuates.

Hurricanes basketball will face off against some of the toughest teams in the country in the next couple weeks, and the outcomes will reveal the fate of the season.

"Gotta bring it every night," Reed said. "No nights off, home or away."

The Tale of Two CanesHoops Teams

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Jan. 18, 2017

With a 2-2 conference record following an unexceptional out-of-conference performance, the young Canes basketball team has some work to do to achieve the consistency necessary to make a major impact this season (and a ticket to the Big Dance in March).

Currently, both ESPN's Joe Lunardi and CBS Sports' Jerry Palm have Miami as a 10 seed in March, in spite of two wins of 18-plus points against fellow NCAA tournament contenders NC State and Pittsburgh that made the Hurricanes look like a potentially tough out for any opponent. Led by a tough defense that rates as 11th best nationally, per KenPom.com's adjusted defense rankings, and is holding ACC opponents to 61.5 points per game (59.3 points per game over the whole season, good for fourth in the nation), opponents are finding few easy buckets against Miami. Yet those buckets can be hard to come by for the Hurricanes as well, who are averaging just 67.5 points in ACC play (last in the conference) and are in the bottom third in nearly all offensive statistics. But the split personality exists even on the same side of the ball – in its blowout win at Pittsburgh, the team turned the ball over 15 times, but added 17 assists and hit 10 three-pointers. Coach Jim Larrañaga liked that the ball didn't "stick" as much, but still prefers it stays with his team. "We really want to get 16 assists every game, and this was one of the games where we were able to do that," Larrañaga said. "We still have way too many turnovers and we have to improve that aspect of our offense."

The ratio was much rougher on the Hurricanes in its heartbreaking home

loss to Notre Dame just two days earlier, where the team had 13 turnovers but only seven assists in a game where neither team shot well. Though the defense was stout for most of the game, keeping Notre Dame well under its 81 points per game average and blocking 12 shots, Miami only had three steals and was unable to turn these into easy buckets. In the end, poor shooting and turnovers doomed the Hurricanes. Looking at a box score where Miami out-rebounded Notre Dame and matched them in shooting, Larrañaga summed up where the team is currently. "We talk all of the time about how important it is to do the little things well...the game came down to little things, he said. "We turned the ball over at critical times...we are a good free-throw shooting team, but we went 8-of-14 from the foul line and they went 12-of-14. So we shot the same number of free throws that they did, but they outscored us by four...when we have 13 turnovers and they have six, that really is the difference in the game, the free throws and the turnovers."

As the season moves forward, the Hurricanes need to play more complete games as they did in Pittsburgh, rather than struggling on one end of the court like against Notre Dame or Syracuse. Miami has faced a lot of zone this year, reducing the effectiveness of its primary ball handlers and its pick-and-roll offense. The key to a more effective offense starts with reducing turnovers and producing more assists, which is surely a point of emphasis in practice. The ACC schedule makers haven't done Miami, which had by some preseason measures the toughest conference schedule in the entire country, any favors. The Hurricanes have two more road games up next, at a pesky Wake Forest team that sports a top 40 RPI, and at Cameron Indoor against #18 Duke. Both teams are in the top 50 in

offense, and even with stingy defense, it could be a long week in North Carolina if Miami gives away too many possessions.

We'll find out soon which Miami Hurricanes team shows up.

Larrañaga joins elite coaching group after 600th victory

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 16, 2017

University of Miami coach Jim Larrañaga won his 600th career game, a milestone shared by Mike Krzyzewski, Jim Boeheim, Roy Williams and Rick Pitino.

University of Miami basketball coach Jim Larrañaga began this week in an especially good mood.

His team overwhelmed Pitt on the road, 72-46 on Saturday, and the victory was No. 600 in Larrañaga's 33-year career. He becomes the fifth active ACC coach to reach that milestone, and the other four are in the Basketball Hall of Fame – Mike Krzyzewski, Jim Boeheim, Roy Williams and Rick Pitino.

"I'm trying to catch Boeheim and Coach K," Larrañaga said, smiling. "If I coach until I'm 120, I might catch them."

Duke's Krzyzewski leads the way with 1,057, followed by Syracuse's Boeheim (894), North Carolina's Williams (798) and Louisville's Pitino (757). Larrañaga ranks 14th among all active NCAA coaches.

The Hurricane players surprised their coach with a locker room celebration. They sat motionless as he walked in and declared: "Hell of a job, guys." Then, a player yelled "600!" and the entire team jumped up and wrapped Coach L in a group hug.

Several of his former players gave him shout-outs on Twitter, as did college basketball analysts.

"One of the truly underrated college coaches," wrote John Feinstein.

ESPN commentator Chris Spatola Tweeted: "600 wins at Bowling Green, George Mason and Miami not easy to do. One of the most underrated coaches ever."

Among those who called to congratulate him: Krzyzewski, Doc Rivers, Rick Barry, Danny Ainge, Brad Stevens, Dick Vitale and John Swofford.

There was more to celebrate on Sunday, as 2017 recruit Lonnie Walker was named to the McDonald's All-America team. Walker, of Reading, Pa., is the fifth McDonald's All-American in UM program history, joining Dewan Huell (2016), Darius Rice (2000), Steve Edwards (1992) and Tito Horford (1985).

Walker, 6-5, is ranked No. 19 in the ESPN Top 100, Miami's highest-ranked recruit in the last 15 years. He joins Chris Lykes, ranked 52nd in the country, and Deng Gak, ranked 93rd, in Miami's class of 2017.

Basketball Buzz: 1/16

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Jan. 16, 2017

The Miami Hurricanes are preparing to travel to Wake Forest on Wednesday (8 p.m., ACC Network).

Miami (12-4, 2-2 ACC) split two games in a three-day span falling 67-62 to Notre Dame at home ending a 21-game home-winning streak and winning 72-46 at Pittsburgh on Saturday.

Wake Forest (10-7, 1-4) has lost four of five, but three of the losses have been to ranked opponents.

Miami is ranked 31st by kenpom.com. Wake Forest is 41st.

NEWS & NOTES

- SF Anthony Lawrence sprained his right wrist in the game against N.C. State on Dec. 31 and has played through the injury taping his wrist. “We went to Syracuse and to Notre Dame and his hand wasn’t right,” Larrañaga said. “It seemed like (against Pittsburgh) the wrist loosened up.” Lawrence scored nine points on 4-of-5 shooting with five rebounds, two assists, and two steals in 26 minutes against Pittsburgh.

- SG Dejan Vasiljevic has been Miami’s top 3-pointer shooter making 40.3 percent, but he has been solely a 3-pointer shooter, which could make him easier to defend as the team continues ACC play. Vasiljevic has only made five shots inside the arc all season compared to 31 behind the arc and has not made a 2-point shot since Dec. 16, a span of six games. He has only attempted one 2-point shot in his last five games going 11 for 28 from behind the arc.

- SG Davon Reed has scored at least 17 points in six of the last seven games after doing it only twice in the previous nine. He is shooting 49.0 percent (48 for 98) from the floor over his past eight games.

- PG Ja’Quan Newton continues to lead the Hurricanes in scoring at 15.1 a contest while

shooting a career-best 47.4 percent from the field. He has scored in double figures in 14 of 16 games.

- The Hurricanes’ goal is to average at least one point per possession on offense, which they fell short of their goal in Thursday’s game against Notre Dame scoring 62 points on 64 possessions (0.97 points per possession).

- Miami responded by scoring 72 points on 63 possessions (1.14 points per possession) in Saturday’s game at Pittsburgh.

- PF Kamari Murphy had the primary responsibility of guarding Notre Dame’s leading scorer Bonzie Colson and held him to a season-low eight points on 2-for-12 shooting. Colson came into the game averaging 16.4 points a game. “Their length and athletic ability really bothered him,” Notre Dame head coach Mike Brey said. “They really bothered him with stuff. They took away things. We couldn’t feed the post. The nice thing is he at least rebounded for us. It wasn’t an offensive night for him, but he got up on the backboard for us. They totally took him away and it’s the first time someone has totally taken him away.”

- SG Davon Reed on the defense in holding Pittsburgh to 46 points and 34-percent shooting from the field: “I think our guys were locked in from the start. After losing last game and giving up a few pints and turning the ball over, we really wanted to emphasize staying committed to the defensive end. We were so focused on playing defense and the score just reflected that.”

- One of the reasons for Miami’s defensive success against Pittsburgh was forcing the Panthers into taking a number of jump shots. “We’ve been a good defensive team all year,” Reed said. “Our staple has been our man-to-man defense and not letting teams beat us off the dribble. We wanted to let Michael Young shoot the mid-range. To have him put the ball on the ground before he shot and I think we were able to do that to most of their team.”

- While the Hurricanes did play tough defense against Young, who came into the game averaging 22.0 points a game, but was held to two, he played with a swollen eye and had a mask on after suffering a broken orbital bone the previous game. “Young wasn’t able to do what he normally does,” Larrañaga said. “You have to give a lot of credit to Kamari Murphy. However, you also have to understand if a guy has blurred vision or one eye he can’t see out of, it’s tough. If he’s wearing a mask, that’s a major obstacle for him.”

- The Hurricanes entered Saturday’s game against Pittsburgh with consecutive losses to Syracuse and Notre Dame, and struggling against a zone defense in both. Miami was much better against the zone against Pittsburgh. “Some of it has to do with shooting,” Larrañaga said. “When you’re making shots, you feel good. Davon Reed made a couple shots early and Ja’Quan Newton got into the defense and made a couple of lay-ups early. Dejan Vasiljevic came in and made a 3. It’s kind of contagious when you’re playing good. Anthony Lawrence came in and made a steal and he got a lay-up, actually two dunks in the first half—Lawrence is a major key for us.”

- Miami set an ACC school-record with 12 blocks against Notre Dame and followed it with a six-block performances against Pittsburgh. SG Davon Reed has five of the team’s 18 blocks in the past two games.

- SG Bruce Brown has been impressed with fellow freshman C Rodney Miller: “Rodney you don’t see a lot, but he’s doing really well in practice.”

- Some of the responsibilities the four freshmen have during the season include taking the weights off the bench and starting the showers after practices and games.

- Miami five-star signee SG Lonnie Walker was named to the McDonald’s All-American Game. Walker will be the fifth Hurricane to play in the prestigious event.

MAKE THE RIGHT REED: MIAMI'S SENIOR EXCELS IN FEATURED ROLE

ACCSports.com

Brian Geisinger

Jan. 16, 2017

The Miami Hurricanes are a tricky team to figure out.

The Canes have great a defense and excellent young talent, like Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell. However, all but two of Miami's wins this season have come against teams currently outside of KenPom.com's top 100. The lone exception — prior to this past weekend's win over Pittsburgh — was NC State. Because of course.

Davon Reed has been a constant for Jim Larrañaga's club, though. Reed was a fixture of Miami's rotation during his first three seasons in Coral Gables, but he's never played like this before (33.9 minutes per game), nor has he ever been a featured piece, which is exactly where he finds himself in 2016-17 — second on Miami in scoring at 14.7 points. Ja'Quan Newton paces the team's scoring: 15.1 points per game.

In the win over Pitt, Reed scored 18 points on 11 field-goal attempts in 35 minutes of action. Reed has averaged 19 points while shooting 41.2 percent on three-pointers in Miami's two conference victories.

Nearly 22 percent of Miami's possessions end with Reed shooting, getting fouled or turning the ball over when he's on the floor. That's an above-average and career-high rate. He's shooting more threes than ever before, too: roughly 55 percent of his field-goal attempts have come from beyond the arc. In conference games, Reed is jacking a prolific 7.8 three-pointers per game.

According to Synergy, Reed is shooting 52.4 percent off screens this season,

per Synergy Sports; he is also scoring 1.35 points per possession on such opportunities, which ranks second in the ACC.

Reed has been very good in the catch-and-shoot game, too. In fact, he has been one of the best in the conference. Per Synergy, Reed shoots better than 40 percent on catch-and-shoot opportunities; he's also scoring 1.21 points per possession on these juicy possessions, which ranks 33rd in the ACC.

Miami — 2-2 in ACC play — is on the road for the next two games: Wake Forest, then a Saturday showdown with Duke. After that, though, the Hurricanes return home for three straight at the Watsco Center: Boston College, North Carolina and Florida State.

Larrañaga Belongs in the Basketball Hall of Fame

Canes Warning
Alan Rubenstein
Jan. 16, 2017

The Miami Hurricanes win over Pittsburgh gave Jim Larrañaga his 600th career coaching victory. Larrañaga ranks 40th all-time among Division I coaches.

Although the majority of his victories came at Mid-Major schools Bowling Green and George Mason, Larrañaga deserves a spot in the Basketball Hall of Fame. He is the 96th coach overall to reach the milestone and is 14th in wins among active Division I coaches.

The Hall is full of coaches that coached at nearly every level of basketball. Larrañaga was a journeyman coach before leading George Mason on one of the most improbable runs in NCAA Tournament history. The Patriots became the first true Mid-Major team to advance to a Final Four since Pennsylvania in 1979.

UNLV advanced to the Final Four since then as a member of the Big West in 1987, '90 and '91, but the Runnin' Rebels were among the best programs in the country for at least ten years during those years.

Larrañaga's career is far more than the 2006 Final Four run. He is one of 15 coaches all-time with 100 or more wins at three Division I schools, four of whom are still active. Larrañaga also has 10 20-win seasons in his career and six conference titles, including two of those outright.

The Hurricanes have two NCAA appearances in Larrañaga's five seasons. They advanced to the NCAA Sweet 16 in both 2013 and 2016. The 2013 team is arguably the best in Miami history. They are the only team in the history of Miami Basketball to win an outright conference basketball championship.

They also captured the ACC Tournament Championship that season.

Larrañaga left George Mason as the school's winningest coach and also has the most wins in the history of the Colonial Athletic Conference.

There are only three coaches that have won more games than Larrañaga and taken a team to a Final Four that are not in the Basketball Hall of Fame.

Kansas' Bill Self has 608 wins, two Final Four appearances and a National Championship. Mike Montgomery who coached at California, Montana and Stanford had 676 wins and took the Cardinal to the 1998 Final Four, and Billy Tubbs led Oklahoma to the 1988 Final Four and finished his career with 641 victories.

Larrañaga was 64 when he began his first season at Miami. He has proven he can coach at college basketball's highest level. Currently 67, Larrañaga has pulled in the best recruiting classes in Miami history back to back years.

Bruce Brown, Dewan Huell and DJ Vasiljevic are important contributors as Freshmen and Lonnie Walker is expected to be next season. Huell and Walker are the first McDonald's All-Americans Miami has ever signed in back to back seasons.

It might take a few more years with some other great coaches still awaiting enshrinement in Springfield, but Larrañaga has proven enough to get there.

Hoops signee Lonnie Walker named McDonald's All-American

State of the U
Cam Underwood
Jan. 15, 2017

Add another one for Canes Hoops. On Sunday night, the rosters for the 2017 McDonald's All-American game were announced. Miami will be represented in this elite prospect showcase as 5-star SG signee Lonnie Walker was named to the East team.

The highest rated recruit in Miami's 2017 class, the 6'5" Walker is a dynamic wing player who can impact games all over the court. A consensus top 20 prospect in America, Walker is going to play on the East team in this year's McDonald's All-American game.

Walker will become the fifth McDonald's All-American to play at Miami, joining Dewan Huell (2016 McDonald's All-American), Darius Rice (2000), Steve Edwards (1992) and Tito Horford (1985).

Walker is a 6-foot-5-inch shooting guard ranked No. 19 in the ESPN Top 100, Miami's highest-ranked recruit in the three-player class of top-100 signees and its highest in the last 15 years. He joins Chris Lykes, ranked 52nd in the country, and Deng Gak, ranked 93rd, in Miami's class of 2017.

Walker attends Reading High School in Pennsylvania, where he led the Red Knights to a 29-4 record and a trip to the PIAA Class 4A state semifinals last season. Walker, who averaged 16.9 points, 5.3 rebounds and 3.6 assists per game, was the Pennsylvania Gatorade Player of the Year as a junior under the guidance of coach Rick Perez.

While playing on the EYBL AAU circuit in 2016, Walker averaged 16.6 points per game, knocking down 45.5 percent of

his shots. He also tallied 4.7 rebounds, 3.0 assists and 1.3 steals per outing for coaches Rob Brown and Aaron Burt of Team Final from the Philadelphia area, the same AAU program current Canes Ja'Quan Newton and Davon Reed played for.

Walker, who has great vision and ball handling skills, can shoot from the outside or penetrate and finish at the rim. He is a long defender with a 6-foot-10-inch wingspan who causes havoc for opposing guards. He chose Miami over offers from Kentucky, Arizona, Villanova and Syracuse.

Congratulations to Lonnie on this outstanding achievement. I can't wait to see him ball out in this game, and dominate at the Watsco Center starting next fall.

Lonnie Walker's Recruiting Process

Reading Eagle
Mike McGovern
Jan. 15, 2017

As early as seventh grade, Lonnie Walker IV imagined what the recruiting process might be like and what a rush it would be for the best college basketball coaches in the country to have his house on their list of destinations.

"I would envision it, like, 'Oh, John Calipari's coming to my house,'" said Walker, a Reading High senior and the reigning Gatorade player of the year in Pennsylvania.

"I always told my dad in seventh grade that John Calipari would come to my house," he said. "And then, boom, John Calipari is actually in my house talking to me. He actually came to my barber shop.

"The little details that you envision and then your dream starts to become a reality."

Walker's dream came full circle when he chose the University of Miami, because Jim Larrañaga left no doubt the player-coach bond would extend beyond the basketball court.

"The Walker family made it clear this was about loyalty and relationships," said Reading High coach Rick Perez. "You can get sold out to big dreams and promises, but it was never about that. And if someone tried to make it about that, they never entertained it.

"It was beautiful to see them take a situation and keep the genuineness in the entire process."

And in a perfect world, it would serve as a lesson for others.

Miami's win over Pittsburgh gives Larrañaga his 600th career victory

ESPN.com
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Miami's win over Pittsburgh on Saturday gave coach Jim Larrañaga 600 victories in his career.

Davon Reed finished with 18 points, Bruce Brown added 17, and the Hurricanes held the Panthers without a field goal for almost 10 minutes in a 72-46 blowout. Miami (12-4, 2-2 ACC) ended a two-game losing streak by outrebounding Pitt 37-23 and holding the Panthers (12-6, 1-4) to just 34 percent shooting (18-of-53).

The Hurricanes scored 14 straight during a run that spanned the end of the first half and the beginning of the second to get all the breathing room they would need, then continued to pour it on to hand the Panthers their worst loss in the 15-year history of the Petersen Events Center. Miami players celebrated the victory with Larrañaga in the locker room after the game.

"[Our guys] had a chip on their shoulder and it really helped," Larrañaga said. "It was just a great physical effort as well as great focus and mental preparation."

Larrañaga joins Mike Krzyzewski, Jim Boeheim, Rick Pitino and Roy Williams among ACC coaches with 600 wins. The other four are in the Basketball Hall of Fame.

Jamel Artis led Pitt with 15 points a game after scoring a career-high 43 in a loss to Louisville on Wednesday.

Larrañaga develops close to his Cuban heritage

Pittsburgh Post Gazette
Craig Meyer
Jan. 14, 2017

Mere months after Jim Larrañaga did what few thought to be possible — leading tiny George Mason past a handful of college basketball's preeminent powers and into the Final Four — his cultural identity was reborn at a Las Vegas dinner table.

In 2006, while helping to coach at Michael Jordan's fantasy camp, a three-day event in which wealthy patrons paid close to \$20,000 to rub elbows with the game's all-time great, Larrañaga sat with Jose and Jorge Mas, two prominent Miami businessmen. The trio began discussing their ethnic backgrounds, with the two brothers delving into their Cuban heritage. Larrañaga asked if they knew the nationality of his last name.

"It looks Italian," Larrañaga recalled Jose saying.

No, Larrañaga replied, informing them of a tilde over the "n." He, too, had ties to Cuba. And, in that moment, Larrañaga's true name was inadvertently unearthed.

Five years later, Larrañaga was named the head coach at University of Miami, the Mas brothers' alma mater, and near the end of his second season, references to him on the athletic department's website started to come with the correct spelling, tilde and all. This Bronx-born coach who many assumed for years was Italian, has reinvigorated the Hurricanes basketball program in his 5½ years at the school while, in some ways, reshaping his identity.

As his team prepares to face Pitt Saturday, he continues to reshape that identity.

"The tilde [~] is a symbol, a letter that's a part of our culture," said Tony Hernandez, Miami's deputy director of athletics. "It's what he's done with it. You could have the [tilde] and not do the other things he has done and nobody would really be looking up to him. What he's done and the way he's

embraced this community and this culture, he's become a part of South Florida and, by doing that, people really look up to the program and him and what he has done here."

Larrañaga's family history is a long and expansive one that, for years, was belied by the go-to spelling of his last name.

The roots of that tree go back to Spain. At some unknown point, the Larrañaga family moved to Havana, Cuba, where his grandfather was raised and eventually met his wife. After marrying and relocating to Key West, Fla., they had two children, one of whom moved to New York in his 20s, got married and raised six children, including Jim, in the Bronx.

On his first day of kindergarten in 1954, Larrañaga's teacher was unable to pronounce his last name in its preferred form, instead saying it with extra emphasis on the third 'a.' It stuck.

"From that day forward, all my friends and everybody just referred to me as LARE-uh-NAY-guh," Larrañaga said. "I finally just gave in to that."

When he got into coaching, he didn't make an attempt to re-establish the original spelling and reading of his name, if only because there was such variance to it anyway. None of his five siblings, for instance, pronounce their last name the same way.

As technology progressed, he couldn't figure out how to put the tilde over the n when typing and, although he would include it in his signature, it often looked like nothing more than a line because of how quickly he wrote it. In his 14 seasons at George Mason, the school never used the tilde, largely because it wasn't aware of his Cuban background.

When the Miami job came open in 2011, Larrañaga reached out to Jose Mas, who was good friends with several members of the school's board of trustees, about suggesting

him as a candidate. That conversation eventually led to an interview and a job offer, with the school well aware of his Cuban lineage before he arrived on campus.

The man who had dreamt of coaching in the ACC since his days as an assistant at Virginia in the late 1970s and early 1980s had found his way back to the conference. With that opportunity has come success. The Hurricanes won at least 20 games four times in Larrañaga's first five seasons, something that had been done only six times from 1966 until his arrival, and twice made the Sweet 16, the second and third such appearances in program history.

"He has been able to build our program to a level it's never been at before," Hernandez said. "For us to have two Sweet 16 seasons, to win the ACC tournament and regular season [in 2013], to be able to accomplish what he has in a short period of time is really remarkable."

Those strides have gone beyond the court, where Larrañaga's lineage, personality and his team's record have connected Miami basketball with the surrounding community and made it relevant in a way it hadn't been before. In November, the university sold out its season-ticket allotment for the second consecutive season, the first time in program history that had been done.

To those at the school such as Hernandez, the tilde's impact only goes so far and means so much. It is, after all, just a difference of a single letter. Larrañaga's overall influence, however, has been undeniable.

"We don't have the tradition that a Duke has or a North Carolina has, or even that a Pittsburgh has," Larrañaga said. "We just haven't been at it nearly as long as some of these other programs. But we're heading in that direction. We've established a very unique culture here and people have really bought into it. We're very happy with the direction we're going in."

Sports Newsmaker of the Year: Reading High's Lonnie Walker IV

Reading Eagle
Mike McGovern
Jan. 13, 2017

The celebration lasted all day, which was fitting, because there was plenty to celebrate.

The Reading High basketball team was three days removed from the end of an uplifting and inspirational season that made as much impact off the court as on it.

The "City Tour" was set to begin at 8 a.m., with the team traveling by trolley. The itinerary included visits to 18 schools in the district and a ceremony at the City Park Bandshell.

But just before the trolley took off from the rear of the Reading School District administration building, Lonnie Walker IV - who, a day earlier, had been named Gatorade's Pennsylvania player of the year - decided to take a walk across Court Street to the Manor at Market Square.

He did it without warning or fanfare, without expectation that anyone would notice, which is why it made such an impression on Dr. Khalid Mumin, the Reading School District superintendent.

"We're all out there, waving our Red Knights towels," Mumin said, "and Lonnie, unscripted - UN-scripted - walks across the street to a geriatric center."

Where he approached a gentleman in a wheelchair.

Walker chatted briefly with the man, who knew who he was; took a picture with him; gave him a T-shirt and a Red Knights towel; and made the guy's day. Maybe his year.

"I'll tell you, it was unbelievable," Mumin said. "I thought, that's the kind of kid he is, very humble, very genuine."

"He really represents the City of Reading. That's so important for our kids, because he has a golden opportunity to be able to motivate kids to strive and reach for more."

"I told him last year: 'You got the hot hand; I gotta follow that hot hand, because the kids believe you; they believe in you. They hear me, but I'm an adult. I need you to keep this message strong because you inspire your peers.'"

"He takes that as a badge of honor and responsibility, which is so exciting. It's bigger than basketball."

Which is saying something when you're talking about Lonnie Walker, the Reading Eagle's 2016 Sports Newsmaker of the Year.

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Lonnie Walker was the face of a Reading High team that was one of the most accomplished in the 117-year history of the program.

With Walker averaging 16.9 points and making it nearly impossible for fans to remain in their seats, the Red Knights went 28-4, barely broke a sweat in winning Berks and District 3 championships, reached the PIAA semifinals for the first time in 33 years and set the school record for postseason victories (10).

The team's success and the personal accolades Walker accumulated - All-Berks player of the year, first-team All-State, the Gatorade award - satisfying as they were, meant even more because of those who joined him on the journey.

Damon Stern, Khary Mauras, Keyon McCutchen, all seniors, and Walker, a year younger, became friends nearly a decade ago and basketball was the bond.

Over the years, their chemistry and cohesion became second nature. They played to each other's strengths and compensated for each other's weaknesses. They could communicate without words, and they developed a sixth sense that allowed the four to become one.

"We all had the same dream," Walker said. "We used to come to Reading High games (as kids), and we all just looked at each other, like, 'This is going to be us.' And now we're actually playing together, so what can we do? Everything was already there; everything was perfect."

The Red Knights' joyride through the season included a 23-game winning streak; the two titles; a pair of victories over archrival Chester, one of which came in the PIAA quarterfinals; and more goodwill than a high school basketball team should be able to create.

"A lot of people would always tell me, 'It wasn't just that

you won, but how you carried yourselves, how you showed yourselves to other people,'" Walker said. "You weren't ignorant or anything; you were loving and you had respect for everyone."

All of the Red Knights had a hand in building the team's enviable reputation, but Walker was the "integral part," according to Reading High coach Rick Perez.

"He has a gift, a gift that can't be taught," Perez said. "That's a testament to his family, the values that he's grown up with."

"A lot of us as human beings don't handle fame or notoriety the right way. But this is a young man that has shown our community how to handle that since Day 1."

The Red Knights' season ended with a loss to Pittsburgh Allderdice, and with it vanished the dream of capturing that elusive state championship.

There was sadness, but not for long.

"There was like a five-minute gap that it hurt," Walker said. "But on the bus ride back, we just reminisced. Look at what we did: Khary and me each got 1,000 points; Damon came out of nowhere."

"It was a beautiful thing. It gives me chills down my back every time I think about it."

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Lonnie Walker spent so much time away from home during the summer - four weeks straight in one stretch - he could've been considered a non-resident.

Attending camps and playing AAU ball took him from coast to coast with plenty of stops in between. That side trip to the Bahamas wasn't bad, either.

Along the way, he spent lots of time in the air and in airports, stayed in swanky hotels, picked up plenty of free product, played "side-by-side" with the Pistons' Stanley Johnson and the Pelicans' Anthony Davis and did the LeBron James dunk - with LeBron James watching.

"He shook my hand," Walker said, smiling. "Told me, 'Nice try.'"

It was an experience that left him in awe.

"Especially for someone like me, coming from a place like this," Walker said. "I'm always just amazed at how far I came and everything I did."

"Before school started in August, I sat down and looked at all the things I've accomplished, all the things that I've done and just got overjoyed. I talked to my grandmom about it for hours."

"It was one of those moments you can speak about it, but the feelings you have for it are completely different."

Lonnie Walker is completely different, too. He doesn't fit the stereotype of the in-demand, off-the-charts high school basketball player who is consumed by the sport and might be seduced by the attention.

"I'm far from what people think I am," he said.

Basketball is rarely a topic of conversation at home or with his friends. He plays video games - FIFA, UFC or 2K - and watches "Spongebob," "Animal Planet," MTV or movies.

But you won't find him tuned in to "SportsCenter" and "you'll never catch (him)" watching an NCAA basketball game, unless the University of Miami is playing.

Choosing the Hurricanes as the winner in a recruiting battle that played out for most of the year and involved a Who's Who of coaches has changed his viewing habits just a bit, but not his priorities.

"I've always been a big-picture guy, even growing up," Walker said. "If my father was a cocky dude and said, 'You need to make it to the NBA,' and my mom said I had to go to the NBA and my friends were like: 'We don't care about your academics; we don't care about who you are; all we care about is that you play basketball.'"

"But I don't have friends like that; I don't have family like that. I have friends who want to push me on the academic side, who want to push me to become a better person. I also have a family that's by my side, who says, 'All right, you're great in basketball, but that's not what I see you as.'"

Walker plans to major in pre-med at Miami. He sees himself as a surgeon.

"My father - and having Coach Perez, the assistant coaches

and my mother - they know that basketball is a temporary thing," he said. "(My dad) understands you can do great things in basketball, but being intelligent will take you a long way."

"That's who I've always been. My focus is on basketball, but it's not my top priority."

Lonnie Walker is an exceptional kid, for reasons other than, as Dr. Mumin put it, his ability to "jump over the rim, snap a picture and then throw down a reverse dunk."

"He's a different breed," said Perez, who met Walker when he was in sixth grade. "He's always been that way. The way he handles things on the court is amazing. He handles things in life the same way, with such grace."

"He's a superstar; he's Reading's superstar, and you would never know it. He leads with humility, always keeping things in perspective. It's amazing."

Part of that perspective he comes by honestly. He might be "Reading's superstar," but at home, he always knows he's "still a normal person."

"I can have a 35-point, 10-rebound game," he said, "but my dad is telling me I still have dishes to do. It's one of those humbling moments."

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When Dr. Khalid Mumin was working in the Centennial School District in Bucks County, there was an "eighth-grade phenom" at Klinger Middle School named Horace Spencer, who, by the time he arrived at William Tennent High (2011-12), was a highly sought-after recruit.

But instead of finishing his high school career in Warminster, Spencer, now a sophomore at Auburn, went west, to Findlay Prep in Henderson, Nev., for his junior and senior seasons.

"I always wondered what type of impact Horace could've had if he stayed," Mumin said. "I always wanted to answer that question. Then I see Lonnie, and I said, 'Man, this is larger than life.'"

"If you can get a kid who's committed to staying home, there's the opportunity to really motivate that village of learners."

"The City of Reading is a tough place; parents can speak to the kids 'til they're blue in the face; administrators and teachers, too. But when their peers say it and it's believable and it's attainable, the kids will jump through hoops to exceed those expectations."

Walker has set the bar as high as the rim. For someone to reach it, or soar over it, will require unwavering resolve, a tireless work ethic and an all-in mentality that extends from the court to the classroom.

And that's the point; that's the legacy Walker wants to leave: Few kids are likely to achieve his level of excellence, but every kid can try.

The effort, athletically and academically, is what's so important to Walker. It's why, when he talks to kids throughout the district, he asks them about the books they're reading, stresses the importance of hard work and emphasizes that, while basketball can be a vehicle, good grades are a pathway.

He has encountered parents with tears in their eyes, telling Walker, "Thank you, because my son's doing this or that, or thank you because now my son believes in himself."

He's gotten letters from kids, telling him, "I never cared about school, but now I like school."

"That is very dope, way bigger than basketball," Walker said. "Being able to change peoples' lives and make them believe in whatever they want to do. It warms my heart."

"I can't even explain it. Winning is a great thing, but when you win and change peoples' lives while you're doing it, that speaks volumes."

Erik Swoope: 'I've proven to myself that I can do this'

Indianapolis Star
Stephen Holder
Jan. 13, 2017

Signing with an NFL team was a shock. Making the practice squad for a couple years was a stunner. But what Erik Swoope accomplished in 2016 topped it all.

That's when this Indianapolis Colts tight end became a football player.

You know his story. Former college basketball player at Miami (Fla.) and accidental NFL project. The Colts taught him how to put on pads and get in a three-point stance. Pop Warner-level stuff.

That was two years ago. It wasn't until the 2016 season that Swoope went from developmental player to, well, a player. And that was his biggest jump yet.

"To me, I've proven to myself that I can do this," Swoope said, while carefully pointing out how much more he must grow. "I didn't really approach it with doubt, but how could I not be uncertain? I had never done it. I don't know what it's going to look like. I don't know if just because I was physical in training camp that it's going to carry over for 16 games. Is my body going to hold up? I don't know? I've never done this before. That uncertainty, being able to weather that storm, has probably been the best feeling."

The to-do list for Swoope remains quite long. He's got to become a more accomplished blocker, as you can easily imagine. And he's still learning many of the technical details that will make him a more polished player.

But this story is about what he did, as opposed to what he might do. And what Swoope did is prove that he is a viable tight end option for the Colts — and then some.

This was not necessarily clear at the outset of the season. But Swoope responded surprisingly well when starter Dwayne Allen went down with an injury, requiring Swoope to take on an expanded role. Swoope played

a total of 38 snaps in Weeks 1 through 5, his time limited mostly to special teams. But after Allen went down in Week 6, Swoope's playing time skyrocketed.

So, too, did his production.

Allen was lost in the first quarter of the Oct. 16 game at Houston, and Swoope immediately rose to the occasion. With the Colts losing several other offensive players in that game — leaving fellow tight end Jack Doyle to play receiver by the fourth quarter — Swoope stepped up and made his first career reception. And it was no garden-variety reception, either. Swoope hauled in a 35-yard pass from quarterback Andrew Luck, a play that put the Colts in position for an Adam Vinatieri field goal. Swoope played 41 snaps in that game, more than he had in all of the Colts' previous five games combined.

The corresponding confidence boost was immeasurable. And the confidence flowed both ways.

"When you gain trust," Swoope said, "your role grows and the temperament of those around you changes."

That carried over to the following game, where Swoope made an athletic 34-yard reception against the Tennessee Titans. That was the continuation of something that would be a bit of a trend with Swoope. He showed himself to be a legitimate downfield threat, at least as tight ends go. Swoope made just 15 catches in 2016, admittedly a small sample size. But he made them count. Swoope had four receptions of 30 yards or longer, including one for 45 yards against the Oakland Raiders. Swoope's per-catch average of 19.8 yards — while not the best measurement of receivers — was a team high.

Again, he's far from polished. But here's what is unmistakable about Swoope: He's one heck of an athlete, perhaps comparable to former Colts tight end Coby Fleener. He's certainly the best athlete among the team's current crop of tight ends, something that

distinguishes him from Allen and Doyle. At 6-5 and 257, Swoope's bulked up a bit, but he's still got the long basketball body. And he possesses basketball traits, too, like soft hands and a natural quickness.

But as he reflects on the season, what Swoope dwells on are his many "welcome-to-the-NFL" moments. Those are to be expected for a kid who played football for the first time in 2014.

"I was talking to my family about this," Swoope said. "I know there were moments this year when I would line up and think, 'Von Miller is looking dead in my face.' Or I'm lining up and (thinking), 'I'm really about to collide with Khalil Mack.' Every game, there was that. I'd be standing there like this is a dude that I never thought I'd even be in the same room with. And now, I have to go attack him and make a play for Frank (Gore) or make a play for Andrew (Luck). There were a lot of times I'd sit on the plane on the way back home and think, 'I really just did that.'"

Swoope will need to deal with a bit of business before the 2017 season. He's an exclusive-rights free agent, but as long as the team wants him back, he has no real negotiating rights. So, look for him to return for another season, with similar goals in mind.

"It's just about building," he said. "Don't think for one second that this year was my peak. Keep being a sponge."

If Swoope can in 2017 make the kind of massive leap he made last season, then this certainly won't be the last story you read about him. Perhaps there will be a few more stunners to come.

SG Brown: Canes Will Be Ready for Zone

Inside The U

Chris Stock

Jan. 12, 2017

The Miami Hurricanes struggled against Syracuse's 2-3 zone in their last game falling 70-55.

Miami knocked down 11 3-pointers, but made just 10 of 28 shots (35.7 percent) from inside the arc and had 15 turnovers.

"The 2-3 was a problem," freshman guard Bruce Brown said. "I thought we should have moved the ball a lot more. We took too many dribbles and also the lob was open every time."

Brown hit a pair of 3-pointers to finish with nine points, but no starter scored in double figures for Miami.

"At some point they are giving something up, but sometimes we couldn't figure it out so it's kind of hard to figure out what they are giving up at that time," Brown said.

Syracuse's length disrupted the Hurricanes.

"I know a couple times I was driving and Tyler Lydon didn't block my shot, but made me throw something up there," Brown said. "The length was crazy. When we drove they knew what to do to step up or for me to pass."

Brown believes the Hurricanes are better equipped to face zone moving forward, which they could see against No. 20 Notre Dame on Thursday (7 p.m., ESPN).

"I don't think we'll struggle with it," Brown said. "Obviously that's (Syracuse's) number one defense and other teams we play, I don't think that will be their number one defense. If they

zone us, I think we'll be ready. We have been working on it in practice."

Notre Dame (14-2, 3-0 ACC) has been frequently playing zone this year according to kenpom.com, which studies defensive tendencies.

Miami (11-3, 1-1) will be looking to bounce back at home where they have won 21 straight before taking off on the road for the next three games.

"It's very important," Brown said. "We start off ACC play really well. We won our first game and lost our second so getting this win would be great for us."

Notre Dame is led in scoring by Bonzie Colson (16.4 points), Brown's former AAU teammate, and they have four players averaging at least 14 points a game in Steve Vasturia (15.0), V.J. Beachem (14.6), and Matt Farrell (14.0) to go with four players with at least 25 3s on the season.

"Defensively we have to take away the 3-point line and not foul because they are No. 1 in the country from the free-throw line and they make 3s," Brown said. "They have a lot of 3-point shooters and we can't give them open looks."

Brown enters the game averaging 10.9 points, 7.3 rebounds, 3.2 assists, and 1.6 steals while shooting 44.9 percent from the field in 29.5 minutes.

"I think I'm playing well," Brown said. "I think I can play better. I can rebound the ball a little more, score the ball more, and make my free throws—I think I'm 50 percent during ACC play."

Brown is 4 for 8 from the free-throw line in his past three games after making 28 of his previous 34 (82.4 percent) attempts.

"I'm shooting them long every time I miss," Brown said. "I guess maybe too much power from my legs or something. We're shooting a lot of free throws in practice though."

Overall, Brown believes he has made a smooth adjustment to the college game.

"I think I'm adjusting really well," he said. "But that comes with my coaches helping me watching film and knowing what I'm reading on the offensive end and the defensive end."

Freshmen face next test as ACC schedule heats up vs. Notre Dame

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Jan. 12, 2017

It was during an offseason workout that Bruce Brown got his first college reality check.

Brown, one of the most decorated, highly touted men's basketball prospects in Hurricanes history, was on the court facing one of his future teammates, Davon Reed. Brown, a Jordan Brand Classic All-American and a five-star prospect known for his athleticism, tried to move Reed out of his way.

But despite his best efforts, Bruce couldn't push past the 6-foot-6, 220-pound Reed, a Miami veteran.

Suddenly, Bruce was faced with the reality that stuns many top-tier prospects as they begin transitioning to the high-level of play at an ACC program like Miami: the game, in many ways, is different now.

"I tried to push off a little bit, but [Reed] just stood there," said the guard, who now started 10 games and is averaging 10.9 points as Miami's third-leading scorer. "I was just like, 'Wow. I've got to get in the weight room if I'm going to compete with these guys.'"

Jim Larrañaga, Dejan Vasiljevic
Miami Hurricanes men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga, right, talks with Dejan Vasiljevic, left, late in the second half of a Jan. 4 game vs. Syracuse. (Nick Lisi/AP)
Brown and his fellow freshman — forward Dewan Huell, guard DJ Vasiljevic, and center Rodney Miller — have all spent plenty of time in the weight room since those July workouts with their older, more experienced teammates. They've gotten to know those teammates and their new coaches. They've learned

coach Jim Larrañaga and the Hurricanes' system, a system that has helped Miami advance to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament twice over the course of the past four years. And three of them — Brown, Huell and Vasiljevic — are logging significant minutes for a young team in transition.

Now the young Hurricanes face their next test: a Thursday night, nationally televised matchup (ESPN) against Notre Dame (14-2, 3-0), one of the last two teams unbeaten in ACC play through the first two weeks of the conference schedule.

They'll play that game and try to defend a 21-game home winning streak that has become a source of pride for the Hurricanes (11-3, 1-1), who haven't lost at the Watsco Center since Nov. 27, 2015. And they'll take the next steps, Larrañaga hopes, in continuing their physical development to become the players he needs them to be as the schedule gets tougher and Miami pushes for another NCAA Tournament berth.

"I think they've all done a very good job," Larrañaga said of how the freshman have played through Miami's first 14 games. "If you look at Dewan Huell, he's gained like 15 pounds and gotten a lot stronger. ... Rodney Miller has made a very good adjustment. He had the longest way to go ... and Bruce Brown now benches 300-pounds. You can see the significant difference in who's more ready to play."

For the freshmen, making the transition has been easier because of the effort so many of the Hurricanes veterans have put forward in helping them progress. With only nine scholarship players on the roster, Larrañaga notes, there is no infighting for playing time. Youngsters and veterans are getting their minutes.

And if the Hurricanes are going to challenge in the ACC, they're going to need to work together. So Reed, Kamari Murphy and Ja'Quan Newton have become instrumental in tutoring Miami's younger players. They're still making mistakes and learning, but the challenge hasn't been quite as tough as maybe the youngsters imagined it would be during those early workouts.

"Once ACC play starts, it's a different ball game. It's the best conference in college basketball right now. A lot of athletic, strong people that are bigger than me," said Vasiljevic, who hails from Australia. "That's what I had to adjust to coming in. ... But now I'm in the best shape I'm in. ... I'm learning every day and I've definitely grown up, being in that rotation. As coach says, you're not a freshman anymore. You're one of the guys. You're competing every day and people don't look at you as a freshman. They see you as a player. I feel like I've grown up."

Versatile freshmen make Larrañaga's Hurricanes dangerous

AP
Steven Wine
Jan. 12, 2017

The Miami Hurricanes' deep, versatile freshman class is providing scoring, rebounding and even hot water.

In other words, the freshmen do whatever's asked of them.

"Sometimes after practice we tell them, 'You've got to get the Gatorade out of the training room,'" junior guard Ja'Quan Newton said Tuesday. "Or they have to turn the showers on when everybody's tired."

It's a way for the upperclassmen to remind the newcomers they're still freshmen. It can be easy to forget, because they're not playing like it.

Three first-year players will have significant roles Thursday — as usual — when they Hurricanes (11-3, 1-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) host No. 20 Notre Dame (14-2, 3-0).

Heavily recruited Bruce Brown ranks third on the team in scoring (10.9 points per game) and second in rebounding (7.3). Australian D.J. Vasiljevic is the Hurricanes' best 3-point shooter (28 for 66 for 42 percent). Dewan Huell, a precocious 6-11 forward, is third in rebounding and sixth in scoring.

"They've been key additions to the team," Newton said. "When you're just good and you know how to play the game, that's what happens. The whole age thing and being a freshman, I think that's overrated."

Maybe so, but Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga has rarely relied so heavily on such inexperienced players. He had a

senior-dominated team a year ago that won 27 games, and in 2013, when Miami took the ACC title.

Notre Dame coach Mike Brey has lost to the Hurricanes in his past two visits to Miami.

"They have really jumped on us there," Brey said. "It's the teams Jim Larrañaga has had. The teams we've played have been old; they've done a great job of staying old. And we've kind of been treated like boys."

Larrañaga laughed when he heard Brey's description of past matchups.

"That is not the case this year," Larrañaga said. "We have two seniors, and his team is very old and very experienced. That's a very high-powered team that has a chance to go very far in the ACC and the NCAA tournament."

Short-term expectations are more modest for the Hurricanes, but their young talent gives them potential to make a big splash at any time — such as Thursday.

The reliance on freshmen also makes the Hurricanes inconsistent. They played well to win their league opener at home against North Carolina State, and then lost by 15 points at Syracuse last week.

"It's youth," Larrañaga said. "We only had two players who had ever been to Syracuse, and the dome there is a different facility. You really have to prepare yourself. With a veteran team like we had last year and the year before, we had a much better chance of winning on the road because we had older guys, guys who were 21, 22 years old."

When asked about the challenge of

developing a young roster, Larrañaga recalled his 2004-05 team at George Mason, which barely finished above .500. But the top seven players returned the next season, and George Mason went to the Final Four.

The Hurricanes believe they're headed the same direction. In the meantime, any opponent underestimating Miami's youngsters could be in hot water. They know how to turn it on.

Critical stretch beginning for Miami basketball

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Jan. 12, 2017

If you're a college basketball coach, especially one who coaches a team that's in a bit of a reloading year, you probably hope every opponent plays its worst game against you.

Unfortunately for Jim Larrañaga, his Hurricanes' best win of the season isn't looking so shiny right now. Miami's win over North Carolina State last week appeared decent, but the Wolfpack have lost three of four, including a 51-point hammering by North Carolina.

Miami (11-3, 1-1 ACC) needs to bank a few quality wins during this meat grinder of a conference schedule, lest it fall out of NCAA tournament contention. Not a bad time to do so Thursday, with No. 20 Notre Dame (14-2, 3-0) in Coral Gables (7 p.m., ESPN).

Unlike last year, when a veteran Hurricanes squad knocked around a young Irish club, Notre Dame comes in with three juniors and two seniors. Given Miami's youth – four freshmen and two sophomores playing heavy minutes – and the fact they're trying to get junior Ja'Quan Newton comfortable running the point full-time, its main issue has been turnovers and inconsistent shooting. Notre Dame could take advantage of that, with aggressive post man Bonzie Colson (who averages 16.4 points and leads the ACC with 10.8 rebounds) and a capable group of shooters led by Steve Vasturia, who scores 15.0 points and shoots 43.2 percent from deep.

As of Wednesday, Miami was a No. 8 seed in the bracketology of ESPN's Joe Lunardi. The Hurricanes were one of 10 ACC teams in the tournament. The

others: 2-seeds North Carolina and Duke, 3-seeds Virginia and Florida State, 4-seed Louisville, 5-seed Notre Dame, 6-seed Clemson, 7-seed Virginia Tech and 9-seed Pittsburgh. Lunardi also had N.C. State as one of his "next four out."

Miami handled a less-than-impressive nonconference schedule and lost to two teams Lunardi has making the tournament (5-seed Florida, 8-seed Iowa State). UM also lost by 15 at Syracuse, which Lunardi doesn't have in.

CBS Sports' Jerry Palm doesn't have Miami making the tournament – or in his "first four out." Palm considers Miami the No. 69 team in his RPI ratings.

If the Canes are to rise, they'll need to not fall apart in the next three weeks, with consecutive road games at Pitt, Wake Forest and Duke, and home games against surprising Boston College and ACC title contenders UNC and Florida State. These games are the difference between "a lock," "needs to win a couple in Brooklyn," "NIT-bound" or worse.

An injury to a starter could sink Miami, which has nine scholarship players and is using all but one of them heavily. Freshman Bruce Brown (10.9 points, 7.3 points, 3.2 assists per game) has been a major asset and senior Davon Reed (14.0) and Newton (15.2) can score, but Miami isn't making foul shots consistently (70.3 percent) and must cut down on the turnovers (187, compared with 169 assists).

Teams change every year in some way, but most of Miami's players – save for defense-first forward Kamari Murphy – are playing new roles. Newton is a full-time point. Reed is the leader. Brown, Dewan Huell, D.J. Vasiljevic and Rodney Miller are adjusting to the ACC. Ebuka

Izundu and Anthony Lawrence are being counted on for more. With two seniors and all these young players, it's hard to see this team challenging the top of the league. But there's enough talent here to win their share.

After last week's loss at Syracuse, beating Notre Dame at home would be a major confidence boost. A ranked opponent. ESPN in town. Dick Vitale on the call. Most importantly, a strong conference win. Can they do it?

Noteworthy: Miami will wear retro uniforms Thursday. They are modeled after the 1960s teams.

Far away from backyard kangaroos, Aussie guard leading UM on, off court

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Jan. 12, 2017

Once his teammates got past the questions about kangaroos and koala bears and began to understand his accent, they realized what University of Miami coaches discovered the moment they started recruiting Dejan "DJ" Vasiljevic: This Aussie can play.

The Australian freshman combo guard can shoot the three-pointer like nobody's business; and now, after a few months under the tutelage of coach Jim Larrañaga, he can defend, too.

The coaching staff of 20th-ranked Notre Dame, Miami's home opponent on Thursday night, surely has warned the Fighting Irish to be aware of No. 4.

Vasiljevic led the Hurricanes with 18 points on six three-pointers in a loss at Syracuse last week. He has come in off the bench and provided a spark in every game this season and is a big reason why UM is 11-3.

"He's a very mature, conscientious young man," Larrañaga said. "When he first arrived, I said offensively he'd have no trouble because he's smart, can shoot, can handle. His challenge would be on the defensive end of the floor. But I've been very, very impressed with how he's been able to defend."

His teammates are equally impressed.

"DJ spreads the floor for me," said starting freshman guard Bruce Brown, who averages 10.9 points and 7.3 rebounds. "Every time he's on the floor, Coach L is telling me to find him. He makes shots. I love assists, so every time I'm pushing the ball, I've got to know

where DJ is because he's going to run to the three-point line, and he makes it most of the time."

Vasiljevic, a Canadian native of Serbian roots, moved to Melbourne, Australia, at age 6. Both of his parents were semi-pro handball players, but his love was basketball. He starred on the Australian U17 and U19 national teams, and UM coaches noticed him when he played against Yale and California when those teams traveled Down Under in the summer of 2015.

UM assistant coach Adam Fisher flew down to meet him and "fell in love with the kid," Larrañaga said. "He told me we really need to make a push for DJ."

Larrañaga never saw Vasiljevic play in person before offering him a scholarship, but he had a strong hunch from phone calls and video.

His intuition proved right.

Vasiljevic, who is studying business management and economics, quickly emerged as a leader. He feels comfortable offering senior Davon Reed shooting tips, suggests plays to the coaching staff, and keeps the freshmen in line.

THURSDAY: UM MEN VS. NO. 20 NOTRE DAME
When/where: 7 p.m.; Watsco Center, UM campus.

TV/radio: ESPN; WQAM 560, WURN 1040, WVUM 90.5 FM.

Records: UM 11-3, 1-1 ACC; Notre Dame 14-2, 3-0.

Scouting report: The Hurricanes have won 21 games in a row at home and are 8-0 at home this season. ... They beat

Notre Dame 68-50 last season. ... The Irish are experienced and excellent free-throw shooters. ... UM will be wearing throwback uniforms from the 1960s.

Freshman PF Huell Aiming For Consistency

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Jan. 11, 2017

Dewan Huell has been up-and-down during the first half of his freshman season at Miami.

Huell scored in double figures in five of Miami's first seven games, but averaged 4.0 points over the next seven.

"I think I've been inconsistent too much and that's a problem," Huell said. "It's the same problem I had in high school. I've got to work on that."

Consistency is something Huell has dealt with during his career prior to Miami when he was a standout at Miami Norland Senior High School where he won three state titles on his way to becoming a top 30 recruit and McDonald's All-American.

"My senior year I was inconsistent a lot and I wanted to work on that and I'm still working on it," Huell said.

He believes the key is to, "Just stay in the gym, have confidence in yourself, and belief that it is going to come."

Head coach Jim Larrañaga believes Huell is still adjusting to the college game and learning how to be more effective.

"I think one of the challenges for Dewan is in his high school situation he was able to average 19, 20 points a game by being a little bigger, more athletic than the players he went against," Larrañaga said. "At the college level he's got to develop a little bit more skill and understanding as to how he's being guarded and how he can score within the framework of our offense, but we're also developing an understanding of his game and we're making some adjustments in our offense and hopefully that will give him some better opportunities to score the ball."

Huell is averaging 7.1 points and 4.4 rebounds in 20.1 minutes for the Hurricanes (11-3, 1-1 ACC), who host No. 20 Notre Dame (14-2,

3-0) on Thursday (7 p.m., ESPN) after losing 70-55 at Syracuse last week.

"Coach L was talking about it right after we lost the game and said we've got to bounce back against Notre Dame and if we don't, then it'll be real scary because we go on the road for three games," Huell said.

Miami has won 21 straight games at home. It is the fourth-longest active streak in the nation.

"Davon Reed always tells us that we don't lose at home so we hope to keep that alive," Huell said.

Huell will be looking to be more aggressive against the Fighting Irish after averaging 3.0 points on 6-of-15 shooting over the past four games.

"I just have to be more aggressive and more confident—that's it," he said.

Despite the recent low-scoring outputs, Larrañaga has seen improvements from the 6-foot-11 forward.

"He's gained like 15 pounds and gotten a lot stronger," Larrañaga said. "His offensive game is still a work in a progress, but he's getting better and better, and working hard. He does a lot of individual work in what we call unrequired. He's done a lot of that."

Huell made 3 of 5 shots for six points against Syracuse on Jan. 4, but Larrañaga believes his teammates could have helped him have a more productive game against the 2-3 zone.

"I probably would have thrown him the ball 10 times against Syracuse over the top of the defense throwing lobs, the only thing is we're not a great passing team in throwing the lobs," Larrañaga said. "We threw three of them and two of them were turnovers and one was to Kamari Murphy who dunked it. But had we had Angel Rodriguez he might have thrown five or six of them that Dewan Huell would have caught. Some of it has to do with your skill level and his teammates'

skill level and lob passing is not a strength of ours. When we played North Florida in the second game of the season we threw six lob passes and all of them were turnovers. I told the guys, 'You've got to stop throwing it,' but in my heart I don't want them to stop. I want us to look for that, but I want us to be more skillful in throwing the pass so we're going to still throw it; maybe not as often as I would like, but we'll try and hopefully Dewan will be the recipient of some of those."

Huell had two offensive rebounds in the game, but he believes he could have had more.

"I could have gotten more offensive rebounds in the zone and I should have attacked the glass harder than I did," Huell said.

If a team plays zone against Miami, Huell believes they will be ready:

"Moving forward, we all watch film individually and with the coaches and we all see what we could have done better and how to beat the zone so if a team plays zone again it won't be the same result."

Notre Dame has played a significant amount of zone this season and could employ a zone against Miami given the Hurricanes' recent performance.

Larrañaga milestone

Miami Herald
Barry Jackson
Jan. 4, 2017

- Jim Larrañaga has done a remarkable job with this UM basketball program, and for some perspective on how good his career has been, consider:

A win Wednesday in Syracuse would make him the 97th college-basketball coach all time and 15th active with 600 career wins (against 393 losses) in 33 seasons. And keep in mind that the four ACC coaches with 600 wins (Mike Krzyzewski, Jim Boeheim, Rick Pitino, Roy Williams) are in the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass.

Among active college coaches who are now at major programs, Larrañaga will be the sixth with 600 wins who's not in the Hall of Fame, joining Bob Huggins, Lon Kruger, Rick Barnes, Bill Self and John Beilein.

Larrañaga has won 27 games at American International, 170 at Bowling Green, 273 at George Mason and 129 at Miami.

ACC recruiting breakdown

Inside the U
Kevin Flaherty
Jan. 3, 2017

With seven teams in the Top 10, the ACC ranks as the top conference in college basketball this season.

And the league is only going to continue to get better, thanks to a strong overall recruiting haul including a Duke class that should once again compete for No. 1 in the 247Sports Composite.

247Sports director of basketball scouting Jerry Meyer breaks down the top ACC classes and players heading into 2017, along with some recruiting battles to watch.

TOP FIVE ACC CLASSES SO FAR

Number is national 247Sports Composite ranking

- 6. Duke
- 7. Louisville
- 10. Miami

First of all, it was a huge recruiting win landing Lonnie Walker over a number of blue bloods, including schools like Kentucky and Arizona. He can really do anything you want from a shooting guard. He's physical and ready to go, and he'd be incredible next to Bruce Brown. He's similar to him in terms of being just physically tough. Chris Lykes is a dynamic point guard, and Miami's had success in the past with undersized point guards who could score. He'll probably be a crowd favorite. [Jim] Larrañaga has done a good job developing big guys, and Deng Gak has to get much stronger. But the big (schools) were recruiting him as well. They've had a very successful year recruiting.

- 16. Florida State
- 26. North Carolina

TOP FIVE PLAYERS HEADED TO ACC SCHOOLS

Number is overall ranking in 247Sports Composite

- 21. SG Lonnie Walker, Miami
A very complete player and a physical, hard-edged player. A guy you would expect to make an impact right away.

Kiwi teen Waardenburg signs with Hurricanes

AFP News
Dec. 30, 2016

New Zealand teen forward Sam Waardenburg signed with the University of Miami, the school announced Thursday on its website, giving the Hurricanes three players from the South Pacific.

Miami coach Jim Larrañaga, who has guided the Hurricanes into the “Sweet 16” of the US national college basketball championship twice in the past four seasons, said the 17-year-old playmaker will join the team immediately but is only expected to begin competition in the 2017-18 campaign.

“Sam is a very skilled player with a high basketball IQ,” Larrañaga said. “He has the ability to play both inside and outside. He has great international experience and has competed against some of the best high school players from around the world.

“We’re excited about him joining us mid-year so he can make the adjustments to the American college game before competing next season.”

The Hurricanes also have Australians D.J. Vasiljevic and incoming freshman Deng Gak from the Trans-Tasman region.

In October, Waardenburg was tournament Most Valuable Player in sparking Auckland’s Rangitoto College to the SAS Secondary Schools National Championship title, scoring 18 points, pulling down eight rebounds and blocking four shots in the final.

The Junior Tall Blacks standout displayed his skills in the past off-season during a scouting event in Los Angeles, averaging

13.4 points and 6.4 rebounds over five games to be named one of the camp’s top 10 players.

Waardenbrug -- who was also courted by Utah, Virginia and South Methodist -- was also named the most outstanding player at both the All Asia Camp in Beijing and the Basketball Without Borders camp in Australia.

Last season, the Hurricanes matched their deepest run ever in the US tournament before losing 92-69 to eventual US champion Villanova.

From D-League, McClellan learns to ride the roller coaster

The Washington Post
Candace Buckner
Dec. 20, 2016

INDIANAPOLIS — As Bankers Life Fieldhouse began to buzz with activity and remixed jock jams blared from the speakers, Sheldon McClellan tried to find some quiet time to himself. Before the Washington Wizards faced the Indiana Pacers on Monday night, McClellan sat in a courtside seat, cradling a basketball on his lap. He wanted to “zone out” as a basketball student — which meant stealing moves from the veterans who were warming up on the floor.

“Just learn anything about basketball as I can,” McClellan said. “I just love watching basketball, so I sit here and watch people shoot, watch how engaged they are and try to perfect the game plan.”

McClellan recently returned to the Wizards from an extended stay in the NBA Development League. Soon, he could do more than just watch his peers.

The Wizards sent the undrafted rookie to the Delaware 87ers on Dec. 6 with a purpose. Sure, McClellan needed quality practice and playing time since both were in limited supply in Washington. But the Wizards (12-15) needed to season McClellan for a chance to break into the rotation. As the team readies for a Wednesday night contest against the Chicago Bulls (14-13), against whom McClellan earned his first NBA start more than a month ago, he understands how the D-League experience was intended to prepare him for a possibly larger role.

“A big part about that is just staying ready. Doing the little things on and off the court to let them know that they can depend on you and trust you when they put you into the game,” McClellan said.

“Just being on time, coming in early, staying late. Things like that, I already don’t really have a problem with because I love the game so much. I just want to improve and get better anyway I can.”

McClellan, 23, has played in an unusual rookie season, zooming from minimal playing time to starting two games, then slamming the brakes back to DNPs.

“It’s definitely a roller coaster. It’s tough, especially as a rookie,” McClellan said. “There are people who have higher standards than you that’s in front of you, so you’ve got to wait your time and just stay ready whenever your name is called. It’s going to be a bumpy ride and I understand that. I’m just staying ready.”

On Nov. 12, McClellan leapfrogged veteran Marcus Thornton to start against the Bulls, in place of the injured Bradley Beal. Thornton remained on the bench to provide a scoring boost to the depleted depth while McClellan matched against future Hall of Famer Dwyane Wade. After another start the next game against the Philadelphia 76ers, Beal returned healthy and McClellan moved down the bench. As the Wizards gathered for the morning meeting before their Dec. 5 game in Brooklyn, Coach Scott Brooks informed McClellan of his assignment to Delaware, the D-League affiliate of the 76ers.

Over six games in the D-League, McClellan faced his share of trash talkers.

“They kind of took it personal,” McClellan said of opponents who defended him. “[But] I feel like I have a point to prove, too. I feel like I should be in the NBA playing quality minutes.”

McClellan started slowly with Delaware but averaged 10.7 points (on 55 percent shooting) in 25.6 minutes per game.

The Wizards recalled him last Saturday, before the start of the Wizards’ road trip through Indiana, Chicago and Milwaukee. Brooks said he wants to work McClellan into at least one of the games.

“I’m going to try to get him in, somehow, someway,” Brooks said. “I want to see where he has improved. It’s hard to play a lot of guys but I definitely liked what he did in the D-League and [want to] see some minutes out of him. Maybe not a lot, but six or seven-minute spurt is always a good indication and it gives a guy a fair chance to get into the game. So I’d like to do that on this road trip sometime.”

McClellan did not expect to stay as long as he did in Delaware but views the 10 days as progress. Never one to hide his confidence, McClellan felt he “won those matchups” against the D-League players who tried to rile him up. Now, he feels ready for a greater role with the Wizards.

“I think I am. I think I can provide a lot of defense, playing hard, rebounding and I think I can bring a lot of things to the team that can help the team win that game,” McClellan said. “Most of all, I just want to go out there and compete and play hard. If I do that, I’d definitely have a chance to play some rotational minutes.”

Caputo Discusses Miami's Success in Recruiting

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Dec. 19, 2016

Jim Larrañaga and his coaching staff have put together strong recruiting classes in 2016 and 2017.

Miami's 2017 class, which features a five-star and two four-star signees, is ranked 10th nationally and third in the ACC.

The Hurricanes have climbed into the ranks of some of the nation's top programs with their recruiting efforts in recent years.

"Over the last few years we have opened the eyes of some of these guys," associated head coach Chris Caputo said. "But ultimately I think the experience that a lot of the players who have played here and who currently play here playing for coach and being at the University of Miami is a great place. There's no doubt that not only it's a great brand—people say that it's a great brand—but it's more than a great brand. It's a great place.

"From that perspective, maybe we have opened some eyes with our success, but I think our best selling point or our best salesman a lot of the times is our current or former players and what they have gone through with their experience whether it be former players talking to the media about their experience or current guys when kids come on a visit. I think the experience has been very positive and I think that's been a huge thing for us."

Larrañaga took over the Miami program in 2011, won the ACC regular season and tournament title the following year, and posted two Sweet 16 appearances during the Hurricanes' most successful five-year run in program history.

The success of the Miami basketball program also includes selling out the Watsco Center this year.

"I know coach always says people told him when he was thinking about taking the job that there's no way you'll sell the place out and obviously we've done that and that's not something we ever believed," Caputo said. "If you look at the product that's being put on the floor with the best basketball league in the country at reasonable prices at an arena that's a really nice venue to watch college basketball. I don't think there's a better bang for your buck in the area."

Miami has started the 2016-17 season with an 8-2 record and hopes to continue to build a successful program that consistently builds on its eight NCAA tournament appearances—three since 2008.

"It's really what the university deserves," Caputo said of the growing fan support in lieu of success. "It's what our program deserves and I think it's a great step forward in building this program to where in many, many years it's going to look like this."

The Hurricanes return to the court at home on Thursday (7:00 p.m., ACC Network Extra) against George Washington.

Brown's all-around game having huge impact on Miami

The Miami Hurricane

Josh White

Dec. 16, 2016

At the University of Miami, freshmen have made an enormous impact across many sports this fall. On the hardwood, one Hurricane has already impressed fans and media alike.

Before the season started, UM coaches raved about freshman guard Bruce Brown's ability to contribute in a multitude of ways on the court. He has shown that to this point in the season.

Brown, a 6-foot-5, 190-pound combo guard from Wakefield, Massachusetts – a small suburb just 30 minutes outside of Boston – has been nothing short of sensational, contributing game after game with his unique blend of athleticism, vision and playmaking ability.

Days after being named ACC Freshman of the Week, Brown put forth a spectacular performance in a game against South Carolina State last week. Playing with a heavy heart after hearing news of his uncle's death, Brown recorded just the second triple-double in school history (the other by Anthony King in 2004) and only the 23rd in the 64-year existence of the ACC. He racked up 11 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists in 30 minutes of play.

"It was a very emotional day for me today," Brown said after the game. "My uncle actually passed away this morning. The game was for him. I played every possession like it was my last. He was watching."

Brown has seen success in his young career as a Hurricane, averaging 10 points, just under seven rebounds and three assists a game. However, he never

forgets his humble beginnings.

"I started playing basketball when I was six years old," Brown said. "I was learning the fundamentals of basketball: how to pass, dribble and shoot. I was good at defense, but I wasn't very good on the offensive end. I always missed wide-open layups."

Brown, who models his game after NBA superstar Russell Westbrook, elevated his skills at the middle school level and focused on his ability to drive to the basket. He got taller and longer, and would work on his game for hours, ultimately leading to his first dunk in the eighth grade. A four-sport athlete at Wakefield High School, Brown transferred to Vermont Academy after his sophomore season to focus on basketball.

"I continued to work on my shot and just worked hard during the offseason," Brown said.

Competing for the Boston Amateur Basketball Club—an AAU team—and Vermont Academy, Brown developed into one of the best high school players in the country, drawing the attention of many Division I powerhouse basketball colleges including Indiana, Connecticut, Michigan, Louisville and Georgetown. However, Brown elected to pick Miami, largely because of the coaching staff.

"I'm learning from everyone: watching film with Coach Brunt, getting shots up with Coach Caputo," Brown said. "Coach L lets us play. He lets us do us."

Brown, who won the 2016 New England Prep School Basketball Class AA State Tournament and was named the 2016 NEPSAC Tournament MVP, has had a strong impression on his teammates.

"I think he has a chance to be a very, very special player in this league," senior captain Davon Reed said. "He has an incredible athleticism about him, confidence, a knack for getting in the paint, finishing around the rim; defensively he can be a pest, and he can really make an impact."

The Jordan Brand Classic All-American has dynamic skills on the court, but a big part of what makes him a special player goes beyond that.

"I think the greatest thing about Bruce is his personality, his enthusiasm, his smile, his energy that he brings to practice every day and brings to the court every game," Head Coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He's such a hard worker."

While the charismatic, high-flying Brown has attracted some national attention, he doesn't put too much pressure on himself. He continues to play basketball the only way he knows how.

"You always got to have fun," Brown said.

Brown will look to lead Miami to its fourth consecutive victory when the team hosts FAU at 7 p.m. on Friday at the Watsco Center.

Larrañaga on FAU, Lonnie Walker's dunks, recruiting, Rodney Miller

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Dec. 15, 2016

Notes from a chat with Jim Larrañaga in the visitor's locker room at the Watsco Center (the main press room was being used for Thursday's graduation ceremonies):

In advance of Friday's game against Florida Atlantic (7 p.m., ESPN3.com), Larrañaga was especially wary of his young team's focus. Players are finished with exams, and are in a stretch where they play one game in 15 days. He's had them practice more than in past seasons, when he had more veteran teams.

Lest they think they are merely tuning up for ACC play (the opener: North Carolina State on Dec. 31), this should get their attention:

The Owls may be 3-5, but their most recent win was a 79-77 overtime upset at Ohio State. Leading scorer Adonis Filer poured in a season-high 23 and the Buckeyes turned the ball over 12 times. Larrañaga said FAU, coached by former NBA guard Michael Curry, has "very good, high-major players at every position," including guard transfers Filer (Clemson), Frank Booker (Oklahoma) and center Ronald Delph (7-0, 245), who is averaging 10.9 points and 9.5 rebounds. He originally signed with Auburn.

"The ACC is light years away," Larrañaga said. "We've got a lot of work to do."

Larrañaga's take on FAU-Ohio State: "They shot great from three. And Ohio State did what we've been doing – they turned it over too often, and gave them uncontested layups and threes in transition."

"We've already played three high-major opponents. We're 1-2, and we turned the ball over against two of them a lot. What's going to happen when we play in the league? If we start turning the ball over a lot, we're going to struggle."

For better or worse, Miami's roster is at nine scholarship players after the recent dismissal of guard Rashad Muhammad. The rotation is currently at eight, and Larrañaga would love to bump that number up.

Freshmen center Rodney Miller, listed at 7-feet and 258 pounds, is Miami's largest player and most skilled member of its frontcourt. His conditioning is holding him back, however. Larrañaga feels Miller will be able to help against teams with big centers, like FAU, but probably won't be a factor against smaller, faster frontcourts.

"I don't think he's going to be able to play a lot of extended minutes," he said. "But I think he's very capable of helping us."

One thing that excited Larrañaga: Watching his recruiting class ball out last weekend. Top-20 guard Lonnie Walker, top-60 guard Chris Lykes and top-100 forward Deng Gak each played in tournaments. Each won a championship. Each was named MVP.

Larrañaga watched Walker and Lykes, while assistant Adam Fisher made the extra trip to see Gak.

"I can say I saw three for sure, four incredible dunks by the same guy Tuesday, in Reading, Pennsylvania," Larrañaga said. "They were impressive. Lonnie Walker IV. Oof. Unbelievable."

Larrañaga — who put on a t-shirt bearing the Reading High logo for the game —

showed reporters a picture of Walker getting way up, reaching way back, and throwing it down.

"This is one of his dunks," Larrañaga said. "His head was on the rim by the time he finished his elevation."

The class, he proudly noted, is currently rated No. 6 by HoopScoop and No. 7 by ESPN.

"What it says to us as a program, we believe we've recruited the right guys, and other people believe we've recruited the right guys. Now, whether they can actually produce at the level we've projected, we really won't know for quite some time.

"We're seeing what Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell and DJ [Vasiljevic] can do, but we've only played nine games. Wait until we've had to play Duke and Carolina and Virginia to really judge them. It's a lot harder."

Keys to success for five elite defensive teams

NCAA.com
Brian Mull
Dec. 7, 2016

We've become accustomed to suffocating defense from Louisville under Rick Pitino or driving lanes clogged by Virginia's Pack-Line with coach Tony Bennett at the helm. (West) Press Virginia is real and ferocious.

Today, we focus on five other programs who are winning games with defense and analyze each one's route to slowing down opponents. The number in parentheses is points allowed per possession and according national rank. Most of the data was supplied by Synergy Sports Tech, KenPom and Hoop-math.com

Miami (FL) - (0.85 ppp - 9th)

The Hurricanes lost three starters off a squad that won 27 games and advanced to the Sweet 16. They've yet to misstep defensively, although both losses (Iowa State, Florida) came against teams with top-30 offenses.

Miami coach Jim Larrañaga shared one aspect of his defensive philosophy with The Miami Herald after the Hurricanes held Wofford to 57 points and 5 of 23 3-point shooting.

"Our defensive strategy in practice every day is to chase shooters off of screens so that they can't get a rhythm three," Larrañaga said. "Through constant practice at that, it's really about developing the habits, and [Saturday] we did it. Partially it is that those guys that were out there worked really, really hard."

Opponents are shooting 28.3 percent on 3-pointers vs. Miami.

The Canes' transition defense needs improvement, but they've thrived against the pick & roll and spot-up shooters per Synergy Sports. Teams have managed only 51 points in 94 pick & roll possessions. Davon Reed, a 6-6, 220-pound senior with 107 games to his credit, has shuttered scoring in his area, yielding 30 points on the 63 possessions when he was Miami's primary defender.

Brown gets triple-double as UM cruises past SC State

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Dec. 6, 2016

Freshman guard Bruce Brown woke up Tuesday morning to the news that his uncle Edward Dillard, who was in a coma, had died. Brown's night ended with the second triple-double in University of Miami history as the Hurricanes thumped South Carolina State 82-46.

Brown, displaying his all-around game and poise that belies his youth, had 11 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists. He dedicated the historic performance to his uncle.

"It was a very emotional day for me," said Brown. "This was for him. He was watching."

The only other time a UM player had a triple-double was Nov. 29, 2004, when Anthony King had 11 points, 10 rebounds and 13 blocks against Florida Atlantic University.

Brown was told by assistant coaches that he was close to a triple-double when he got his seventh assist, so he approached UM head coach Jim Larrañaga during a time out. and pleaded to be left in.

"I said, 'Please don't take me out until I get three more assists,' " Brown said, smiling.

The 10th assist that sealed the triple-double came with 2:59 remaining in the game. He kicked the ball out to Australian freshman sharpshooter D.J. Vasiljevic, who drained it for his game-leading 17th point of the night to give Miami a 39-point lead. He was 5 of 11 from three-point range.

"I had told D.J. before that play, 'If I give it to you, shoot it,' " Brown said.

Vasiljevic said that basket was special for him, as well.

"I'll do anything for Bruce, and I knew it was emotional for him," Vasiljevic said. "It meant something to myself and the whole team."

Larrañaga said he believed Brown's was the first triple-double by a player of his in 33 years of coaching.

"[Triple-doubles] are rare because guards don't normally rebound, except for a guy like Russell Westbrook, who is a terror on the backboards, and it's rare you have a big guy with a lot of assists," Larrañaga said. "Bruce had nine rebounds at the half. He's a terrific rebounder. He's handling the ball like a point guard and creates shots for other people."

Final exams for the fall semester begin on Thursday at UM, and the Hurricanes (7-2) can only hope they ace those tests with the ease they did Tuesday night's victory.

The Canes took an 18-0 lead in the first seven minutes on a three-point basket by Vasiljevic while the Bulldogs missed their first 10 shots. The Canes led 42-14 at halftime after dominating the Bulldogs 22-2 in the paint. Davon Reed added 15 points.

"We knew if we allowed them to get paint touches, it could be a long night for us," said South Carolina State coach Murray Garvin. "They did so many things good at the beginning, and it killed our spirit. We were never in the game after that. You can't beat the YMCA Bullfrogs giving them an 18-0 start."

The Canes are off 10 days for finals and return to the court Dec. 16 against FAU.

Brown records triple-double in his late uncle's honor

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Dec. 6, 2016

Jim Larrañaga believes this about funerals: rather than mourn a death, they should celebrate a life.

He has held that belief for 20 years, going back to the 1996 memorial for Chris Daniels. The starting center for Dayton and older brother of Larrañaga's Bowling Green star, Antonio Daniels, he died suddenly at 22 from a heart condition. The way the family turned grief into joy made a lasting impact.

"They sang, they had speakers, they told wonderful stories about Chris. Antonio spoke about what a great brother he had," Larrañaga said. "We all left there uplifted."

So when Miami freshman guard Bruce Brown received word early Tuesday that his uncle died, Larrañaga asked if it was OK the team played that night's game in his honor.

Turns out, Brown had the same idea.

With his uncle on his mind, Brown recorded the second triple-double in Hurricanes history. In UM's 82-46 win over South Carolina State, Brown set career highs in rebounds (11) and assists (10) and scored 11 points in 30 minutes.

His is the 23rd triple-double in the ACC's 64-year history, and the first since Georgia Tech's Iman Shumpert in 2011. The only other Miami player to achieve the feat: Anthony King, who had 11 points, 10 rebounds and 13 blocks against Florida Atlantic in 2004.

Brown, a 6-foot-5 guard from the Boston neighborhood of Dorchester, Mass.,

wears an ever-present smile. It broke as he matter-of-factly shared the news about his mother's brother, Edward Dillard, who had been in a coma before he died.

"It was a very emotional day for me," Brown said.

Larrañaga said Wednesday he "had his antenna up" about Dillard's condition and was in contact with Brown's mother, Roberta, who lives in Atlanta. After he and an assistant consoled Brown that morning, he spoke to the team before the game and told them to "celebrate Bruce's uncle's life, all the great things he did and the impact he had on Bruce and his family."

The Hurricanes (7-2) went out and held South Carolina State to 14 points in the first half.

And Brown? He had five rebounds, four assists, three points and a steal before South Carolina State scored its first basket, at the 13:27 mark.

He had five points, nine rebounds and seven assists at halftime. As the game wore on, Larrañaga's assistants informed him he was close to the rare feat, which prompted a funny interaction.

"I went to Coach L and said, 'Please don't take me out until I get three more assists and one more point,'" Brown said.

Larrañaga obliged. With 2:59 left in the game, Brown got the final assist by whipping a pass to sweet-shooting freshman D.J. Vasiljevic, who sank a three from the right wing.

"I'll do anything for Bruce," Vasiljevic said. "I knew it was emotional for him, his uncle passing away. The shot meant

something to me and the team also. I'm happy he got the triple-double."

Through nine games – the last three in the starting lineup – Brown is Miami's third-leading scorer (10.0) and is second in rebounds (6.8), assists (2.9) and steals (1.6). He was named ACC freshman of the week last week for his play in wins over Rutgers and Wofford.

Where does he go from here?

"I'm just going to go out there," he said, "and play every play like it's my last."

SCHOOL MATES AND TITLES FOR DEJAN VASILJEVIC

Basketball Victoria
Jarrod Potter
Dec. 7, 2016

It was his moment to shine at schools last year. The long-time Victoria Metropolitan and Australian representative hadn't featured in the Helloworld Australian School Championships before then... but what a debut tournament he brought to Canberra.

With a gold medal around his neck and the perfect end to his time on the school courts – what did he take away from the experience? Cameraderie – between team mates, opponents and other players you meet at the championships – and having a great time made the most difference.

“Just got to play hard I guess, but the main thing is to just have fun,” Vasiljevic said. “You're there for a week with pretty much your best friends, the kids you go to school with and your coach is probably like a father figure to you during the tournament.

“Make a lot of new friends too – whether in the lower divisions or the higher division that I played in – you have fun on the court, the referees talk to you and you just have fun.”

“It was an amazing experience – having that week just for my team mates and my school representing Canberra and Lake Ginninderra as well.

“And winning that championship was probably the best week of that year and it was a great tournament to be a part of.”

Few could match his explosiveness and tenacious work-rate as Vasiljevic starred in an already all-star Lake Ginninderra side. They had the team on paper and the rest of the competition knew it. With Vasiljevic, fellow collegiate athlete Jack White and Bul Kuol carving up the Championship Men's Division, everyone was gunning for the Lakers.

But that was outside their control – DJ and his mates just focused on the tasks at hand.

“We were the team – we were the ones being hunted because of myself and Jack White – who is at Duke now,” Vasiljevic said. “We were the hunted team and a talented squad, but we had so much confidence in

us and the way we practiced twice a week leading up into the tournament – we had tremendous confidence coming in to win that championship and we did.

“The performance I put in myself, I just felt like I was comfortable with the team and we came about winners.”

Taking apart Ignatius Park College 90-75 in the Championship final was the crowning achievement of his 2015. He lapped up any perceived pressure and enjoyed his moment under the spotlight.

The big stage has been his playground for years after all, having gone to two World Championships and countless national titles, but this time around it was all about the team.

Whatever he did in the championship game was only for the championship and not his own stat-sheet. With that sheer determination to push Lake G across the line, Vasiljevic lit up the Tuggeranong Southern Cross Stadium.

It was the fitting start and end to his time in the school jersey, as Vasiljevic dropped 45 points and reeled in 14 rebounds. But that was what the team needed – not what he coveted – and in the end it's the championship with mates that he remembers most fondly.

“I'm kind of used to the big stage right now,” Vasiljevic said. “Throughout my junior career growing up and having that big moment and taking those big shots I needed to, but those 45 points doesn't mean anything to me, the championship means more it's just what I did for the team.

“Alongside no one says I also had 14 rebounds so I did just what I had to do for the team.

It was always something he wanted to feature in, but his hectic schedule could not accommodate the school championships until last season. His drive and motivation always meant another team was knocking on his door and another camp, squad or tournament was just around the corner.

It wasn't always that way. That hunger to succeed started in Year 9 after he was cut from the first side. From then on, Vasiljevic

went to work.

Training harder. Performing better. Excelling everywhere.

The results started mounting as he popped up onto the Victorian and Australian radar... and his ticket to Lake G proved the perfect final stage for his transition to the senior ranks.

“It all started in the ninth grade when I got cut from the first team – I just wanted to be better than everybody I guess and just worked hard,” Vasiljevic said. “You can ask anyone in Victoria and Australia how hard I worked to be better than anyone.

“After that my junior career just kicked off – making state teams, making national teams, performing at big stages and moving to Canberra and playing in that school championship was probably the best thing and I'm proud of what I've done.”

With 'national school champion' added to his junior resume, DJ had a short stint with Diamond Valley's BIG V team before packing his bags and heading to Miami to join The U.

The freshman guard is learning the ropes as he takes his game to the desired next level, and he's kept up the hard work he cultivated in Victoria and has transplanted to the Hurricanes.

“Bit of ups and downs as a freshman – a lot of learning and getting to know the guys,” Vasiljevic said. “The competition is a lot different as I mentioned before – a lot of athletic guys, quicker guys, and you just have to adjust.”

Therein lies the great opportunity a tournament like the Australian School Championships can provide. Whether you win the title, battle for the minor placings or just come for the experience – there's always something bold to aim for on and off the school courts.

Brown earns ACC Freshman of the Week honors

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Dec. 5, 2016

Already, some of the freshmen on Miami's football team have shown they're some of the top players in the conference, earning ACC honors.

Now the Hurricanes' basketball team is showing it has some talented young players too, with guard Bruce Brown earning ACC Freshmen of the Week honors on Monday after helping Miami post a 2-0 record last week.

In the Hurricanes' wins over Rutgers and Wofford, Brown averaged 11.5 points and seven rebounds, along with 1.5 assists and 1.5 steals. He shot 70 percent from the field in those wins, and converted on all seven of his free throw attempts.

This season, the former Jordan Brand Classic All-American who hails from Boston, is averaging 9.9 points, 6.3 rebounds and two assists through eight games.

Brown is the first Hurricanes basketball player to earn conference honors this season. Miami is slated to take on South Carolina State on Tuesday before a 10-day break during final exams.

Hometown Hurricane: Dewan Huell

Miami Athletics
Camron Ghorbi
Dec. 2, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Who?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Coach Jamal Brunt High on Signee PG Lykes

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Dec. 5, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ewing's Davon Reed continues to lead Miami

Trentonian

George O'Gorman

Dec. 1, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

Advocare Invitational serves as learning experience for young 'Canes

State of the U
David Perez
Nov. 27, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 29, 2016

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

1. What team will we see on Sunday?

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

2. Can Miami run a half-court offense?

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

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

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

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

PF Murphy Enjoys a Defensive Challenge

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Nov. 23, 2016

Kamari Murphy has always enjoyed challenges of defending good players.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Addition of Walker Moves Hurricanes Recruiting Class to Ninth

Fansided

Alan Rubenstein

Nov. 23, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Well-traveled shooter finds a home with Hurricanes

Associated Press

Steven Wine

Nov. 22, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How did Miami land Reading High's Walker?

Reading Eagle

Mike Drago

Nov. 20, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

As was Larrañaga.

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

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

Blue bloods all.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

conversations and text messages.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reading High's Walker ends suspense, picks Miami

Reading Eagle

Mike Drago

Nov. 17, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Miami caught my attention a lot.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shooting guard Lonnie Walker commits to Miami

ESPN
Jeff Borzello
Nov. 17, 2016

Five-star wing Lonnie Walker has committed to Miami.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACCSports.com
Brian Geisinger
Nov. 17, 2016

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

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

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

Bruce Brown are both averaging one steal per game.

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

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

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

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

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 16, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

it No. 22.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miami shocks recruiting world, beating out Kentucky and Villanova

CBS Sports

Matt Norlander

Nov. 16, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

Via Scout.com:

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

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

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

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

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

Five-Star Shooting Guard Lonnie Walker Commits To Miami

Campus Insiders

Sam Falcone

Nov. 16, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miami lands 5-star recruit Lonnie Walker

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 16, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Australian freshman guard settles in to Hurricanes family

The Miami Hurricane

Josh White

Nov. 16, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

others around him.

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

Ja'Quan Newton embraces role as floor general

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vitale and Fraschilla Weigh in on Canes

Miami Herald
Barry Jackson
Nov. 15, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UM plays at North Florida on Wednesday.

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

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

C Izundu Looking to Excel in Second Season

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Nov. 15, 2016

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

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

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

The block helped ignite Izundu.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He feels comfortable playing at 230 pounds instead of 200.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WIZARDS ROOKIE SHELDON McCLELLAN STANDING OUT ON AND OFF COURT

CSN MidAtlantic
Chase Hughes
Nov. 15, 2016

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

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

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

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

Wall alluded to that after practice on Tuesday.

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

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

be good to have that element in a locker room.

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

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

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

ACC Basketball Preview: Miami

ACC Sports War

Mike McDaniel

Nov. 14, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

competitiveness drive him and his team to great successes.

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

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

Canes freshmen play large role in season-opening win

Miami Herald
Steve Gorten
Nov. 11, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miami will next play Wednesday at North Florida.

Larrañaga Thanks Staff for Support of Hoops

HurricaneSports.com

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Nov. 10, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sophomore Anthony Lawrence and Ebuka Izundu will help too.

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

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

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

Basketball: 10 questions for the 2016-17 Miami Hurricanes

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 10, 2016

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

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

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

Put another way:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Freshmen will be key as UM rebuilds after Sweet 16 run

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 10, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hurricanes 2016-17 Basketball Team Preview and Prediction

Athlon Sports

Nov. 9, 2016

Davon Reed leads new cast of characters in Coral Gables

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

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

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

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

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

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

At a Glance

HEAD COACH: Jim Larrañaga

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

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

2016-17 PREDICTION: Eighth in ACC

KEY LOSSES:

F Ivan Cruz Uceda (5.4 ppg, 2.6 rpg)

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

G Sheldon McClellan (16.3 ppg, 3.2 rpg)

G James Palmer (3.4 ppg, 1.1 rpg)

G Angel Rodriguez (12.6 ppg, 4.5 apg)

Frontcourt

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

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

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

Backcourt

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

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

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

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

Newcomers

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

Final Analysis

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

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

Vasiljevic won't let Miami lifestyle distract him

FOX Sports Australia
Olgun Uluc
Nov. 8, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That's when Vasiljevic started working on his body.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sports Business Journal

Michael Smith

Nov. 7, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

Actually, yes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Those three approaches hardly qualify as marketing strategies, though.

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

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

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

The coach

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

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

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

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

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

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

The arena

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

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

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

"Some were parents of students at Clemson that are just

big basketball fans," Babb said. "We also discovered some old friends of Brad's from when he coached at UNC-Wilmington. Even in a football environment, Aaron's personal passion was to fight for basketball."

The marketing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Erik Swoope: From project to player

Indianapolis Star

Zak Keefer

Nov. 5, 2016

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

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

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

Swoope laughed in his face.

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

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

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

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

Nineteen NFL teams called Fisher after the workout.

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

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

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

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

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

Two years passed. The project became a player.

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

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

How the hell did I get here?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By his own admission, Swoope had no idea what was going Buy Photo

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Project had his shot.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Erik Swoope isn't laughing anymore.

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

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

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Nov. 4, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larrañaga Tapped into Iron Arrow

HurricaneSports.com

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

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

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

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

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

Meet the Godfather of Urban Farming, Who's Breeding the Next Generation of People to Feed the World

Sweet Green
Nov. 3, 2017

Will Allen is a legendary urban farmer, the CEO of Growing Power and an all-around badass.

"I started doing this because I wanted to prove that you could cash flow an urban or small-scale farm," says Will Allen. "It just kept snowballing, and we kept building infrastructure, and there were a lot of naysayers."

There's no better way to silence naysayers than to build the largest urban farm in the world, which is precisely what Will Allen has done with Growing Power. His non-profit network of urban farms produces more than 1 million pounds of food a year on just 300 acres, thanks to innovative growing techniques and a firm commitment to his mission.

That success, and Allen's involvement in 70 urban farming initiatives throughout the world have made him quite the celebrity in the food world—he's the godfather of urban ag. In 2008, he received a Genius Grant from the MacArthur Foundation, and in 2010, he was named one of Time's 100 Most Influential People.

"I never did this for an award, but winning them helps put farming more on the radar," says Allen. And that's what it's all about.

"It's an art form to be able to do this—this is the way we did it back in the day before they made the machines," says Allen of 'broadcasting' seeds. "Most people are spending money to plant two-by-two rows, but you get more production if you do it this way. Then we put worm castings, and then water it, and it pops up in about a day."

Growing Power is ground zero for the next generation of agriculture. It's the vehicle through which Will Allen is living his purpose to "bring good food to everybody, and to educate people about food, from field to fork."

To that end, Growing Power's impact extends far beyond just Chicago and Milwaukee. Will Allen's team teaches sustainable food systems to a breadth of people from all around the world, including aspiring farmers, curious architects and city planners.

"A lot of people have never farmed before, but they like the idea and want to farm," says Allen. But the act of farming is relentless, exhausting, and not for the faint of heart—you have to grow passion to stay in the field. "I'd say about 50% of people who start farming drop out because they don't have that real passion—they have a bad year, or they run up against trying times, and they just don't stick with it."

Those odds don't bode well for the future of food. Which is why it's so important to get people passionate about local food and the work of growers like Will Allen.

Hoophouses are the future of farming—because of climate change and weather and floods, you can build them anywhere on higher ground and be an effective grower, year-round, so long as you're maintaining the soil.

It's important to realize that Growing Power isn't just about food. Yes, it's proving you can grow mass volumes of food within city limits. But it's also creating jobs in communities where unemployment rates

sometimes hit 90%, and creating more access for real food in "food deserts." And that's huge, because studies have shown a 20-year difference in life expectancy between upscale communities and inner cities, largely credited to food access. Sustainable urban food systems can help solve both problems, and the long term goal is to end poverty through the power of food.

"You have all these areas where 16-, 18-, 40- and 50-year-olds haven't had jobs for years," he says. The only way to break that cycle is to teach valuable job skills, so Allen is showing these populations that farming is a vehicle to a better and healthier life, and taking them along a "continuum" as they develop a deep passion for farming and food.

He's hoping Growing Power will spark passion and drive people to pursue one of the 100 career paths in sustainable farming and food, especially in cities. After all, we're going to have to feed a rapidly growing population in the coming decades, so it's an industry where the opportunity is only going to get bigger.

Compost enriched with worm castings. The productivity at Growing Power's urban farms is unexpected—any grower will tell you that farming is all about soil health, and the soil sitting 25 feet above city sewage pipes doesn't really give you much to work with. But that's never stopped Will Allen.

"I'm a real competitive person—if somebody tells me I can't do something, it just fires me up," he says.

To scale Growing Power, he's leveraged innovative tactics to optimize productivity on limited tracts of land. Remember, this is urban farming, where you don't have the luxury of space. The goal is productivity, so our minds were blown when Allen told us some of his kale has been harvested 20 times, and it just keeps coming back. (At other farms, we've seen kale kick the dust after 3–5 rounds, so whatever Allen is doing is working.)

"It's all about how much you can fill in a square foot—I look at agriculture from the acreage."

To drive efficiency, he's gotten scrappy. Allen "broadcasts" seeds to distribute them with optimal density, a skill he learned from his sharecropper dad. And he's built beds between made-from-scratch hoophouses to get even more out of the land. And those harsh Midwestern winters? Not a problem—he stacks his greenhouses with "hot mix" compost that heats up to 150 degrees, warming the hoophouse enough to grow 365 days a year.

"It's all about the soil. We grow soil. I've done that since I was almost born," says Will, raking a pile of compost on the main site of Growing Power in Milwaukee.

This compost is not your typical compost. Supermarkets pay Growing Power to pick up their waste (another revenue stream for the non-profit), and then red wiggler worms go to work, in a process called vermicomposting. The worms blow through compost, and the castings (a.k.a. worm poop) multiply the soil's microorganisms by 13x. The result is supercharged organic matter that's a fertile home for growth. Which means Growing Power can keep up the intensive cycle of compost, plant, harvest, compost, plant, harvest ... and keep the soil healthy and vital throughout.

"It's a lot of hard work, a lot of physical labor," but it works—a study in Europe found that worm castings increased yield on a vineyard by 50%. Plus, the vermicompost kills weeds, circumventing the need for pesticides. So while Growing Power may not be certified organic, in practice, they're "beyond organic." And if you thought Growing Power was limited to produce, you'd be wrong—they're also growing lake perch and plants like watercress and wheatgrass in aquaponic systems. In these handbuilt, \$4,000 closed systems, pumps and gravity work together to circulate and filter water and nitrogen from the perch tank to the plants and back again, in a virtuous cycle. It's a classic win-win, and the symbiosis is one of the key ways Allen hopes to feed urban populations in the coming years, thanks to its low cost and small footprint.

"I train people how to do this all over the country," he says, of his techniques. "This is the future of gardening."

Wheatgrass grows in one of the aquaponic systems. To think this all started with just one chunk of land in 1993 is inspiring, to say the least. Today, Will Allen is the world's preeminent urban farmer, running 20 farm sites in Milwaukee and Chicago, while also innovating his techniques, applying for grants, jetsetting for speaking gigs, and marketing Growing Power to new customers. It's a rigorous routine that requires a 4 a.m. wake up every day, but if anyone's going to make Growing Power—and sustainable urban agriculture—succeed in the long-term, it's him.

Because the more Growing Power accomplishes, the more people will see the potential of urban agriculture and buy into it as a viable way to feed the world, and to end poverty.

"I have to keep pushing forward," says Allen. "I know I have to do something real that people can see." And this right here? This is real.

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

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Nov. 2, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Larrañaga at ACC Operation Basketball

FanSided

Alan Rubenstein

Nov. 1, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reed and Murphy Meet the Press at Operation Basketball

FanSided

Alan Rubenstein

Nov. 1, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reed Said:

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

What Did They Do in the Off-Season to Improve

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

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

Reed and Murphy's Leadership Styles:

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

How Murphy Would Describe Reed:

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

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

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

How did Murphy Feel About His 2015-16 Season?

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

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

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

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

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

Miami Hurricanes Hoops Picked 9th In ACC Poll

FanSided

Alan Rubenstein

Nov. 1, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Miami gets commitment from four-star forward Deng Gak

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Oct. 29, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now, Larrañaga is adding to that haul.

Sheldon McClellan Sees Childhood Dreams Come True

FanSided
Ben Mehic
Oct. 29, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

While together on the team, both players were competing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Somehow, they did it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hurricanes Add PF Deng Gak to 2017 Recruiting Class

FanSided

Alan Rubenstein

Oct. 29, 2106

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Deng Gak to join Vasiljevic at Miami

Pick and Roll Hoops Australia

Liam Ellison

Oct. 26, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

due to his extremely high release point.

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

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

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Oct. 26, 2016

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

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

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

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

Let's unwrap this, here.

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

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

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

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

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

Or two.

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

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

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

Hurricanes picked to finish ninth in the ACC

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Oct. 26, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NCAA Men: 2016 Top 5 Australian Freshmen

Pick and Roll Hoops Australia

Luke Sicari

Oct. 26, 2016

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

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

2 | Dejan Vasiljevic | Miami

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

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

The Miami Hurricane
Isaiah Kim-Martinez
Oct. 26, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ESPN.com

Adam Finklestein

Oct. 25, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

develop with each passing year.

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

Reading High senior still undecided on basketball choice

Reading Eagle

Mike Drago

Oct. 25, 2016

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

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

Walker laughs when he hears or reads such things.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8 things to know heading into the Miami season

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Oct. 24, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Erik Swoope follows Jimmy Graham from Hurricanes basketball to NFL

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
Nov. 21, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

expected to be called upon again this Sunday against Tennessee.

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

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

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

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

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

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

A scout from the Denver Broncos saw

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hurricanes Basketball: 3 Key Questions for 2016

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Oct. 12, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That's a lot of firepower.

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

Not everyone can be the Alpha Dog.

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

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

Two Units:

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

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

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

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

Reed too, will start.

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

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

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

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

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

That's a lot of talent on the bench.

The only player who I think may redshirt is Miller.

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

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

Stay tuned 'Canes fans.

Coaches Larrañaga and Meier prep for season's start

Miami Herald
Linda Robertson
Oct. 11, 2016

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We're more like the Delano, that boutique place, a small private school, great location, different from a big state university that has all the bells and whistles," he said. "We give you a lot of personal attention. But it's far more challenging to build a house when you have fewer dollars to work with. You have to be creative."

Larrañaga said he's proud of UM alum Sheldon McClellan, the undrafted rookie who is playing for a starting spot with the Washington Wizards. "We've been texting," he said. "Sheldon is definitely an NBA talent."

Undrafted rookie Sheldon McClellan on track to earning Wizards roster spot

Washington Post
Candace Buckner
Oct. 8, 2016

Sheldon McClellan can laugh about it now.

When McClellan thinks about this past spring and how he was the leading scorer for a Sweet 16 team but did not initially receive an invitation to the NBA draft combine, the creases around his eyes bunch up and his mouth curls into a grin. On this Saturday afternoon — while McClellan wears a Washington Wizards practice jersey — the snub just seems funny. And so he laughs, though the disappointment still stings.

“I felt like I had a great year to get invited initially to the combine,” said McClellan, who played his first two college seasons at Texas and his final two at Miami, “and when I didn’t, I kind of felt disrespected.”

McClellan, 23, was only summoned to the combine after another player had dropped out. Then in June, every NBA team with a draft pick passed on him.

If he continues impressing the Wizards in what has been a promising preseason, however, he will likely fill one of three open roster spots.

McClellan scored 20 points in 32 minutes of action in the Wizards’ double-overtime win over the Philadelphia 76ers on Thursday. Besides that performance, he has shown potential behind closed doors in practices.

“Like every player that comes into this league, he has a lot to learn about what we do and [how to] be able to do it consistently, but he’s had a good start to his pro career,” Wizards Coach Scott Brooks said. “He’s had a lot of good practices and a couple of good moments, or good games, and he’s played well, but it’s a long training camp. He still has to focus on being consistent with his habits, practice and game. But he’s played well.”

The match of the Wizards and McClellan, a versatile 6-foot-6 guard, has been brewing

for a while. The team scouted McClellan in college and from the time the draft process began, keeping a careful eye on his stock. Since the Wizards did not have a draft pick, they would either have had to make a deal to get into the second round to take McClellan or wait it out.

“I do think there were draft-and-stash opportunities for him, but the Wizards had always expressed a high level of interest in him,” said Chris Caputo, Miami’s associate head coach. “We were in contact a good bit about him.

“It was like, if he went undrafted, then he was coming to Washington,” Caputo continued. “They made it clear they liked him.”

As expected, immediately after the name of the 60th and final pick of the draft was called, McClellan received a text from his representation at Octagon.

“The Wizards are done!” McClellan said, recalling the message. “I didn’t even talk to other teams, because we already knew that this was the right place for me and we already talked about that going in.”

Even so, after agreeing to a two-year, partially guaranteed deal, McClellan had to hold up his end. During his first professional experience, at the Las Vegas Summer League, he looked overwhelmed. In five games, he averaged just 2.6 points, 1.4 rebounds and 0.6 assists. McClellan knew he had played like a guy who had gone undrafted.

“Aw, man. Summer league, it was rough for me,” McClellan said. “My first time being away from college and playing with different guys, so it just took me a longer time to get adjusted, honestly. I know a lot of people didn’t see what they [saw in me] in college.”

McClellan decided to stay in Las Vegas to attend Tim Grgurich’s highly respected skills camp. Inside that gymnasium, McClellan and fellow Wizards rookie Danuel House took the challenge against several up-and-coming NBA players, including Kristaps Porzingis

and Jordan Clarkson. McClellan also worked out some of his frustrations against the rookies who had been drafted over him earlier in the summer.

“We kind of took it personal that we didn’t get drafted and all those other guys did,” McClellan said of himself and House. “That really helped my confidence and helped me grow as a player.”

Then, in August, McClellan swung by Los Angeles for the team’s mini-training camp. Again, he wanted to prove himself. So every time he saw John Wall handling the ball, McClellan dropped into a defensive stance. He did the same with Bradley Beal. McClellan continued this approach into his first NBA training camp, taking on his veteran teammates whenever possible.

“He’s not scared of anybody,” Wall said of McClellan. “He’s got a lot of heart. Anytime [we] play a one-on-one drill ... he always calls out, like, me or Brad. He always wants to take on the challenge of guarding the best player. That’s something you don’t see too often from a rookie, not worrying about the scoring the ball but worrying about trying to guard the best player and that’s how you get yourself established in this league.”

McClellan recognizes that nothing is certain — NBA teams have until Oct. 24 to set their rosters and contracts are not guaranteed until Jan. 10. He knows he has to keep learning and growing; he points, for instance, to his attempt at a game-winner in Philadelphia, when he followed a strong blow-by move with a weak up-and-under layup that was blocked.

Still, McClellan said, “I feel like if I keep doing what I’m doing, I’ll be fine.”

With veteran leadership gone, Hurricanes still set to compete

FanSided

Kyler Proffitt

Sept. 28, 2016

Miami is coming off a solid season in which they finished up at 27-8 overall and made a Sweet 16 appearance. The Hurricanes had a strong roster led by multiple key pieces who have now departed from the program due to graduation.

They lost starting guards Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan, who combined to average just under 29 points per contest. Another notable loss includes Tonye Jekiri, who was a rim protector for Miami. Those three guys were the foundation of the 2015-16 roster and were go-to players in crunch time.

But have faith Miami fans, head coach Jim Larrañaga built up a formidable recruiting class.

It includes two 5-star prospects in guard Bruce Brown and forward Dewan Huell. Both of these guys will be huge contributors this upcoming season and will help fill the holes left by McClellan and Jekiri.

The 'Canes also add 4-star center Rodney Miller, who stands in at 7-foot.

The final piece to round the recruiting class is guard Dejan Vasiljevic. Now most fans have not heard of him because he's a recruit out of Australia, but nonetheless he can help this team immediately.

Despite the losses, Miami returns some quality players. The player who will likely take over the reins at point guard is Ja'Quan Newton. He was a 4-star recruit out of high school and is sure to step in with Rodriguez out of the picture. Davon Reed and Rashad Muhammad will round out the backcourt at the two-position.

The front court returnees include Anthony Lawrence Jr. and Kamari Murphy. Lawrence came in as a 4-star recruit and didn't show much production last year, but he has an opportunity to prove something. Murphy was used in the rotation pretty heavily in 2015-16, so his experience and defense will be an asset to this roster.

Miami has a nice core, one that includes a number of experienced players mixed with youth. But the biggest problem for the Hurricanes is consistency. They had games last year where they beat Virginia and Duke but then they went on the road and lost to North Carolina State. Larrañaga has to figure out a system in which his team can develop some consistency to make it deeper into the tournament.

With the loss of so many key assets, there is probably a question as to who will be where this year. Luckily, I've broken down the roster and determined a possible rotation.

PF Murphy Sharpening Tools to Be More Involved on Offense

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Sept. 21, 2016

Kamari Murphy was pleased with his first season playing at Miami.

The 6-foot-8 power forward averaged 5.6 points and 6.0 rebounds in 32 games, making 28 starts, for the Hurricanes, who advanced to the Sweet 16 finishing with a 27-8 record

“I think it was pretty good,” Murphy said. “I could have done a few things a little better, but overall with our team success I think I played my role to the ‘T’ and that’s what teams need--guys to play their role and nothing extra. We just hit a team that was on fire so I’m still happy with the season.”

This season, which begins with preseason practice on Oct. 2 and the regular season opener on Nov. 11, Murphy will be looking to make more of an impact on offense in his senior year.

“I’m looking to be a low-post presence this year and definitely get the ball a lot more, making things happen,” Murphy said. “I definitely have to rebound more than I did and I’m looking to be the leading rebounder now that Tonye (Jekiri) is not here and just be that vocal leader on the court, helping other guys out.”

To make more of an impact on offense Murphy has been working on picking his spots more, establishing go-to moves, and improving his touch around the rim.

“Everybody knows I can catch lobs and stuff like that, but I’m working on stuff on the ground where I can finish myself,” Murphy said. “I’ve been working on my touch, my handle, and more with my shot—just sharpening all of my tools.”

Murphy takes the honor of being the Hurricanes’ strongest player on the team according to teammates and coaches.

“I probably don’t look like it, but I am,” said

Murphy, who can bench press 185 pounds 22 times.

The Hurricanes return five players from a year ago and will have five newcomers eligible to play this season as they look for back-to-back NCAA tournament appearances for the first time since making it to three straight from 1998-2000.

“We have a change in personnel,” Murphy said. “Other guys last year that didn’t have to do certain things have to do it this year. The new guys coming in have got to be more ready than the new guys that came last year because we don’t have that depth that we had from the year before. I think it’s coming along well. We’re still working with the new guys. The guys that have been here have been doing our job to help them as well. It’s a process like with any freshman, but I think we’ll be good by the time we have our first scrimmage and first exhibition game. We’ll have major improvements.”

Murphy has been one of the vocal leaders on the team and he has made sure to help the young players understand the importance of working on their games in the offseason.

“Definitely making sure they stay in the gym and make sure they’ve got the right mindset because playing pick-up and stuff like that I kind of can enforce what the season is going to be like as far as physicality, rotations, and stuff like that,” Murphy said. “That’s why we play open gym a lot. I think the older guys like myself are guiding the young guys the ropes and showing them what it’s going to be like every game. Some have adjusted quicker than others, some still have time to go, but there’s nobody out there that is a lost cause. Everybody is contributing in some way.”

Four freshmen—Dewan Huell, Bruce Brown, Rodney Miller, and Dejan Vasiljevic—have been on the same team during pick-up games against the returners.

“They’re not intimidated by the next level,” Murphy said. “I don’t know if they’re

comfortable with us or it’s just their mentality, but from the get you could tell when we score on them they come right back at us. They’re very competitive in that nature, but we just have to see as practice goes on and learn defensive assignments, defensive lingo, and stuff like that is all stuff they have to learn, but initially they have the competitive spirit.”

Huell and Miller are two frontcourt players Murphy will be helping along the way.

“Rodney is good around the rim,” Murphy said. “He definitely has to work on a few things with defense. Dewan offensively is better than Rodney, but he has to work on defense as well as get stronger. I think those two things with them will come along as the seasons go on and the year goes. With those two guys I’m confident we’ll play with them.”

Michael Gilmore is a 6-foot-9 forward transfer from VCU who will have to sit out this year due to NCAA transfer rules. Murphy will look to give him guidance as someone who also transferred to Miami and sat out a year when he came from Oklahoma State in 2014.

“I can tell from the workouts that we’ve had that he’s one of the more mature transfers and he understands what he has to go through,” Murphy said. “He’s already a vocal leader out there for the upperclassmen. When I sit down and talk to him I will explain to him that it’s a long process and you feel like you’re not even on the team because you’re not in the game playing, but it’s what you do behind the scenes and with what people don’t see and that next year you get to perform. If he puts in the work, he’ll be just fine.”

Where's the pancake mix? Former UM star Angel Rodriguez adjusts to life in the French league

Miami Herald
Angel Rodriguez
Sept. 20, 2016

For the second time in his young life, Angel Rodriguez has packed his bags and ventured off to begin a new life in a foreign land, where finding pancake mix is much harder than he expected.

Rodriguez, the Puerto Rican who moved to Miami on his own at age 15 to pursue his hoop dreams, became a star point guard at the University of Miami and earned a spot on the San Antonio Spurs Summer League team. But he didn't make the cut, so he signed a 10-month contract to play in the French first division, with a team called Cholet Basket in a town of 55,000 best known for its red linen handkerchiefs.

It was definitely culture shock, starting with his first trip to the grocery store.

"The products look completely different, I can't read the labels, and I couldn't find Alfredo sauce or pancake mix," Rodriguez said by phone on Tuesday. "I looked all over for pancake mix, and they don't have it. I asked the other American guys on the team and they told me about a grocery an hour away that has a small section with American products, so I drove there and I found pancake mix."

He does love the bread there ("I can't stop eating it," he said) and is getting used to smaller portions and organic vegetables. He enrolled in a French class.

Rodriguez has also had to adjust to a French style of basketball, which means less dribbling, more quick passes and longer runs rather than sprints at practice. He is one of five U.S. players on the team, along with Isaiah Swann (Florida State), David Noel (North Carolina), Graham

Brown (Michigan), and Benjamin Dewar (Lake Superior State).

All the other Americans are older and have played in France, so they have been helping Rodriguez get acclimated.

"I couldn't be more thankful for those guys because I am the only rookie, so they've made me feel more comfortable," Rodriguez said.

He says it can get lonely living alone in a town 4,400 miles from Miami. His wife, Jesenia, will be visiting in 10 days, and she'll be back over Christmas for a vacation to Paris, London and Milan, but she is finishing her college degree so can't move to France. Rodriguez passes the time watching Netflix, reading, streaming college football games and talking on the phone through What's App and FaceTime, sometimes as late as 4 a.m. when there is no morning practice.

"One morning I was making breakfast at 11 a.m. and my cellphone rang, and I was like, 'Who would be up in the U.S. at 5 in the morning to call me, and it turned out it was Coach L (Jim Larrañaga) FaceTiming me,'" Rodriguez said, laughing. "That tells you what kind of coach he is, that he'd FaceTime me at 5 in the morning just to see how I'm doing."

One month in Europe has made Rodriguez appreciate U.S. college facilities. "Americans can be spoiled," he said. "I would tell college kids now, 'Don't take what you have for granted.' Not everyone goes to the NBA, many of us end up in Europe and South America, and trust me, the facilities are not the same."

Although he still dreams of making the NBA, Rodriguez embraces his opportunity with Cholet.

"You can't convince me that I can't play in the NBA, but I understood that I was against the odds. Chances of me making a team now [are] not very high, realistically. That only motivated me. I've got to take a different path. But economically how I grew up in Puerto Rico, I never imagined I'd be in position to give my kids, my family a lifestyle that I didn't have. I am thankful for every opportunity, because you live and you learn through everything."

Colts Q & A: Meet Erik Swoope, Shaq's biggest fan

Indianapolis Star
Stephen Holder
Sept. 17, 2016

IndyStar Colts Insider Stephen Holder will talk with a member of the team each week for a wide-ranging, offbeat conversation that sheds light on their personality, background and interests.

This week: Tight end Erik Swoope.

Question: You played basketball at the University of Miami, so let's talk hoops. Who was your favorite player as a kid?

Answer: Shaquille O'Neal. I had jerseys and everything. I had his Magic jersey when I was real little. And I remember on my brother's eighth birthday, we surprised him and went to a (Lakers) game. I had the poster. I knew his movies. I've watched every one of them a million times.

Q: Wait, his movies were terrible. You were that big of a fan?

A: Oh, yeah. "Kazaam" was my movie growing up. I would rewind it and watch it again. I loved Shaq and his personality. He was hard to hate because, despite his tough times on the free-throw line, he was an animal. I just respected him. As a kid, when you see somebody that dominant, it's like, you're amazed.

Q: Do you remember your first dunk?

A: Yes. It was a week before my 13th birthday. I was playing in Moreno Valley, Calif., and I was playing in a regional to get to (AAU) nationals. This was in seventh grade. I remember it all. I remember the shoes I was wearing. I remember the jersey. I remember the gym, the basket – everything.

Q: That's a pretty seminal moment for a young basketball player, isn't it?

A: Oh, yeah. So, I had a goal. I had heard that Shaq dunked at 14 and Kobe (Bryant) dunked at 14 and Vince Carter dunked at 14. So, I was like, 'All right, I've got to dunk before 13.' And I dunked a week before I turned 13.

Q: How tall were you then?

A: I was about 6-1. I had a little bounce for a 12-year-old.

Q: Do you remember your best high school game?

A: Yes. (Practice squad safety) Lee Hightower will hate me for this, because he went to Loyola High School. That was Harvard-Westlake's big rival. My senior season – and this is the most storied rivalry in our conference – I had 35 (points) and 15 (rebounds) at home, and we won. Then we went down there and I had 37 and 20. We ran through them. We really beat them down. Those two games were huge. Because at our school, the only thing that mattered was beating Loyola. If we didn't beat them, it was a wasted season.

Q: So, what's the bigger thrill: dunking on someone or catching a touchdown pass?

A: See, I haven't caught a touchdown yet. So I'm not sure. I did get a tackle the other day to get the team going on special teams. I have to say, hearing 60,000 people roar, you don't see 60,000 people at a basketball game. So, it brought me back to some big (basketball) moments. I'll have to get back to you on that one.

Q: Are there any other really good basketball players on the team?

A: I haven't played against any of these guys. But I've heard rumors that Darius Butler is supposed to be really, really talented. I've heard that on many, many occasions. Of course, Joe Reitz is a player.

He played in college. I've shot around with Donte Moncrief and he has a pretty decent shot.

Q: Finally, if you weren't playing football, what do you think you'd be doing?

A: That's something I've been trying to figure out. I was an economics major at the University of Miami. But something I've always been passionate about is medicine. I might be trying to find a way to get into medicine. I spend most of my day with the trainers here, and I'm not hurt. I'm just asking questions. I just like to inquire. I just didn't get a chance to pursue it while I was in school.

Q: What sparked that interest?

A: I think it was just me being hurt as a kid. I had a couple of injuries and I got to learn some things and I was just blown away by how the body works. If you have an ankle injury, it could actually be your back or something else. It just really sparked my interest.

A Closer Look at Miami's 2016-17 Schedule

State of the U
Jerry Steinberg
Sept. 13, 2016

Miami Basketball released its 2016-17 schedule yesterday.

And it has no shortages of challenges.

Fortunately for 'Canes fans, almost all of them will be watchable on major networks, and Coach L and squad return a team that should be able to handle them.

UM gets a National Championship quality Duke team twice this season (1/21 & 2/25), a quality Stanford club OOC, a GW team who beat UVA last season, and also has trips to Louisville and Syracuse in a gauntlet of a schedule.

The Hurricanes will learn early how good freshmen Top 30 prospects Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell are as they take on the Cardinal in the AdvoCare Invitational 11/24.

Potential match-ups with talented clubs like Iowa, Seton Hall, and Florida also loom, should the 'Canes advance.

Down the stretch veterans like Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy will be asked to provide leadership as they finish their schedule with road contests in 3/4 including at UVA and at FSU.

Overall it's a schedule worthy of a team with aspirations of returning to the Sweet 16 or going further.

With a mix of veterans, incoming stars, and proven returning talent like PG Ja'Quan Newton, UM should still be a factor in the ACC and Nationally.

Coach L knows though, they have their work cut out for them:

"The ACC, from top to bottom, is the best basketball conference in the country and will provide our players a tough test every night against the most talented teams in the nation," Whether we are at home or on the road, we will need to play at our best because nearly every night we are playing against nationally-ranked opponents." - Jim Larrañaga

Analyzing the 2016-17 ACC schedule

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Sept. 12, 2016

Conference play for the Hurricanes begins in 2016, not 2017.

Miami, which reached the Sweet 16 last year, hosts its first ACC opponent when North Carolina State comes to town on Dec. 31. That game tips at 4:30 p.m., so everyone will be out in time to party.

This is after a non-conference schedule where Miami won't have to travel much, but looms as super-important for Jim Larrañaga to figure out how to utilize his new group of players. Miami two starters (senior swingman Davon Reed and forward Kamari Murphy) and sixth man Ja'Quan Newton, who is taking over at point guard. UM will need greater contributions from sophomore forward Anthony Lawrence Jr. and center Ebuka Izundu. Larrañaga will also spend the early part of the year figuring out what he has in transfer shooting guard Rashad Muhammad and five-star freshmen Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell and Australian guard Dejan Vasiljevic.

Miami has a tough stretch in January, hitting the road to face Syracuse to open a run of four road games in five outings. The last of those four roadies is Duke on Jan. 21. Miami's first national telecast of the year is North Carolina at home Jan. 28. Miami also plays Duke on CBS Feb. 25, five days after visiting Virginia.

The Hurricanes should have a very good idea of their standing by then.

Reed Ready to Lead Hurricanes in 2016-17 Season

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Sept. 6, 2016

Davon Reed is Miami's leading returning scorer and 3-point shooter.

Reed enters his senior season as the primary leader of the team and someone who carries himself in a professional manner on and off the court.

"The guy who has probably impressed me the most was Davon Reed," said VCU transfer Michael Gilmore. "He seems really professional and sharp. He's very punctual about everything he does. He has a set schedule and time he does things. He acts a certain way and carries himself with a certain class. That was one of the biggest things I've seen out of everybody. It's really giving me a pretty good feel."

Reed, a 6-foot-6 shooting guard from Ewing, N.J., averaged 11.1 points, 4.1 rebounds, and 1.2 assists a game last season while shooting 46.9 percent from the field and knocking down 46 3-pointers starting all 35 games for the 27-8 Hurricanes.

"I think one of the greatest attributes any player can have at any level is consistency of effort and performance of skill and Davon has been very, very consistent throughout his career," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "We hope that he can not only be consistent, but actually elevate his game where he can be an all-conference-caliber player. We think he's capable of that. The challenge for him is can he do it when he has young players around him who are not quite as ready as his teammates were last year."

He is one of five returners from last season and will be counted on to provide more scoring and leadership to a cast of newcomers expected to make an immediate impact.

"I am one of the returning leaders and leading scorers so there's obviously that expectation and we are missing a great deal with Sheldon

(McClellan), Angel (Rodriguez), and Tonye (Jekiri) and even Ivan (Cruz Uceda) being gone so I have to step in that role," Reed said. "I'm not really feeling any pressure with that. It's just my time to step in and be that leader in all angles."

He has always been known as a tireless worker and this offseason is no different.

"It's his senior year, he has to keep trying to get it," sophomore forward Anthony Lawrence said. "He's doing all of the little extra stuff—stuff that the normal person is not doing."

Putting in extra work is something Reed has taken pride in and something that has been instilled within the Hurricanes program in recent years.

"Since I've been here the culture has been to be in the gym on your own time and not just when we practice, but to work on your game outside of team-oriented stuff and perfect your craft," Reed said. "That's been something I've been embracing, not just this summer, but every summer since I've been here. Each summer I've just tried to work harder and harder and add more to game. It's especially important this year because I'm the leader of the team in so many ways and I've got to set that precedent for everybody else and continue to work on my game."

Reed is a solid two-way play who has been working on continuing to be an all-around player.

"Just continuing to sharpen everything whether it be ballhandling, shooting, working on touch around the rim, finishes, everything so I can be a more complete player," Reed said.

The team has resumed workouts after a three-week layoff in August and Reed has liked what he has seen from the team during the offseason.

"Everybody has been getting better," Reed said. "Kamari (Murphy) has been hitting the

jump shot more consistently and been more of a threat offensively. Ja'Quan (Newton) has been looking great. He has been in the gym working with his mid-range game You can see him getting more control with the feel of the game. A lot of people have been working. Rashad (Muhammad) has been looking good. Everybody's been working. I'm feeling really confident with us."

Pick-up games have been competitive between the returners and newcomers.

"Pick-up has been great," Reed said. "High level and high intensity and workouts with Coach L have been good. We've been learning with Coach L there. The biggest thing that I have been happy about is the guys have been competing, even the young guys. There's really no fall-off when it comes to the competition, but we still have got a lot to learn and a lot of things to work on before the season gets here. But we're doing well so far."

Miami is scheduled to begin preseason practices on Oct. 2 in preparation for their Nov. 11 regular season opener.

"My senior year is here and I'm just trying to make it back to the NCAA Tournament," Reed said. "I've already said I don't want to go backwards so that's the goal. Whatever my team needs me to do to help get there, I'm willing to do whether it be score or whatever."

Erik Swoope on verge of being next basketball player-turned-NFL tight end for Colts

ESPN.com
Mike Wells
Sept. 1, 2016

INDIANAPOLIS – Erik Swoope arrived to the Indianapolis Colts in May 2014 as a giant lump of clay that had to be molded into a football player.

Swoope spent the first 22 years of his life playing every sport but football. He had never played at any level, not even Pop Warner football. He attended the University of Miami on a basketball scholarship.

Now, two years later, Swoope is headed into the Colts' final preseason game not worried about doing enough to show the coaching staff he's worthy of being on the practice squad, but rather focused on further locking in his spot as the team's third tight end and becoming the latest basketball-player-turned-NFLer.

"He's gotten better every single week," coach Chuck Pagano said of Swoope ahead of Thursday's preseason finale at Cincinnati. "He gets better every day at practice. He's producing in games. If you look at that position and you look who's there, he's making a case for himself. Not only as a tight end but in special teams, he's doing a nice job."

There was concern over who would be the Colts' third tight end behind Dwayne Allen and Jack Doyle after they decided not to re-sign Coby Fleener in the offseason.

Swoope, who has been active for only one game in his two seasons with the Colts, embraced the challenge and has left little doubt that he belongs on the active roster on weekly basis during the regular season. He has five receptions for 56 yards in the preseason.

"He is a big-body guy, he has a big catch radius, he can run, he can get open and he can separate," Pagano said. "Now it will come down to the heavy-lifting stuff, the running game and being consistent with blocking. He is a determined guy and for never playing football until, I think, this is his third year doing it, he is doing a heck of a job. He just needs to keep getting better."

Swoope didn't take part in organized football growing up because he only wanted to play if he could be on the same team as his friends. But he weighed 50 to 60 pounds more than they did, which meant he could not play in the same league.

Offensive coordinator Rob Chudzinski played a pivotal role in recruiting Swoope to sign with the Colts as an undrafted free agent. Chudzinski played and coached at Miami, and he's also a former tight end. The Colts took a chance on Swoope as a tight end because that position translates from basketball most easily.

Catching the ball, a skill required to play tight end, was something Swoope struggled with early, because he was more worried about doing everything necessary leading up to the moment where the ball was thrown his way, such as getting off the line of scrimmage and running routes.

The 24-year-old has developed in that area and he's added muscle. Swoope's size and athletic ability makes him a nice target in the red zone for quarterback Andrew Luck. He can go up and get the ball in a fashion similar to the way he used to go up and snatch down rebounds on the basketball court. Swoope needs to improve his blocking skills, but he'll also be a key player on special teams this season.

"I'm just out here focusing on getting better because nothing is ever guaranteed," Swoope said. "I knew the opportunity was there. There's still work to be done."

Being on the active roster on a game-to-game basis is the next step in Swoope becoming the latest college basketball player-turned-NFL tight end. San Diego's Antonio Gates and Seattle's Jimmy Graham followed that path. Graham used his fifth year at the University of Miami to play football after playing basketball his first four years at the school.

Former Colts tight end Marcus Pollard played basketball at Bradley University before Indianapolis signed him as an undrafted free agent in 1995, just as they did with Swoope.

"You see the football understanding start to come around where he's doing things that aren't necessarily drawn up the way it is on the play," Chudzinski said of Swoope earlier in training camp. "He's making adjustments that you'd expect from somebody who has played the game quite a bit. I'm really pleased with him in all aspects. He's not just been a pass-catcher, he's blocked, he's pass blocked, he's run blocked and he's improved in all areas so I'm excited about him."

Larrañaga, Staff Wrap Up Busy Recruiting Period

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Aug. 16, 2016

The month of July is a grind for college basketball coaches.

Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga and his staff worked 21 consecutive days between two days a week at UM working with the current players and the other five on the road recruiting over a three-week span.

“With that kind of schedule there is no rest,” Larrañaga said.

Each staff member watched about 30 games over each of the three five-day recruiting evaluation periods.

The full slate of games are combined with a busy travel schedule including multiple flights and rental cars used to get from one tournament to another.

For example Larrañaga spent the first week traveling to Atlanta, driving to Augusta, Ga., flying to Charlotte, N.C. and then driving to Spartanburg, S.C. seeing players participate in all three of the major shoe company (Nike, Under Armour, and adidas) events.

His assistants had a similar schedule.

The second week had his staff in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and Richmond, Va.

Larrañaga spent the final evaluation week in Las Vegas driving to multiple tournaments.

“With those trips you’re constantly on the move and we try to stay in contact with our players so I’m texting them, texting parents, on the phone calling people, and it’s non-stop for 21 consecutive days,” Larrañaga said.

After the evaluation period ended, his staff began the process of trying to get recruits on campus.

“Then the real fun begins now you’ve got to find out of the recruits you looked at and evaluated them to see which ones can help your program, now you have to convince them to come take a visit,” Larrañaga said.

Overall it was a positive month for Miami.

“From our perspective all is well,” associated head coach Chris Caputo said. “It’s difficult. We feel like you’re lucky if you can get someone early and that’s good and then be prepared to go into September, October, and November like we did this year with an understanding of trying to get the best fit which doesn’t always mean getting someone early.

“Also don’t panic if you miss on a couple guys because I think history here has shown you can get a Sheldon (McClellan) or Angel (Rodriguez) in the spring and some different things play out. We got Shane Larkin in August. In some ways a traditional recruiting calendar July is a heavy month of chasing guys around, but when it comes to actually signing those guys things take a lot of twists and turns.”

2017 RECRUITING CLASS

Washington, D.C. Gonzaga four-star point guard Chris Lykes verbally committed to Miami in June. UM was at a number of Lykes’ games following his commitment to have their presence there.

Miami has three more spots open in the 2017 class.

“We have two seniors, one scholarship that we haven’t used, and we get back one scholarship from the NCAA sanctions so we have four scholarships available,” Larrañaga said. “And you have to figure there are over 700 kids transferring every year in all likelihood we could lose one player so we could end up with five more scholarships this season after signing five guys last year.”

Schools are allowed to host 12 players for official visits and players are only allowed to visit five schools.

“To be one of the select five for a high-level recruit is not easy when there’s 40 other schools he’s looking at,” Larrañaga said.

Norcross (Ga.) power forward Lance Thomas is scheduled to visit on Sept. 17. Bishop O’Connell (Va.) center Nate Watson will visit Oct. 8.

Boca Raton St. Andrew’s School three-star shooting guard Anthony Polite and Vermont (Vt.) Academy four-star shooting guard Christian David have announced Miami is in their final five.

Fort Lauderdale Calvary Christian four-star center Victor Uyaelunmo has Miami in his final eight.

Westtown School (Pa.) four-star Brandon Randolph has Miami in his top 12, but Miami is a long shot as Crystal Ball has him pegged for North Carolina.

EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation period, which is not limited to only July, is a lengthy process that begins as soon as possible for prospective recruits.

“It begins really at an early stage of high school basketball player’s career and even in elementary or junior high,” Larrañaga said. “Players are identified at an early age now because there are scouting services with guys making a living off selling scouting service reports to college teams and they will go to the AAU events for kids that are 12 and under. Even before they get to high school they are being rated. Once you get that scouting report you start communicating—not with the individual himself—but maybe the AAU coach and you get numbers and information on them as to where they’re going to be playing. You build that into your recruiting schedule.”

Larrañaga continued:

“For very college basketball program they have their own philosophy as to when you should begin the process, but for most ACC coaches it’s as soon as you hear about them.”

SOUTH FLORIDA FEATURES TALENTED 2019 DUO

Larrañaga and his staff have made local University School 2019 standouts Balsa Koprivica and Vernon

Carey Jr. a top priority. Both players were recently ranked in the top five in their class (Koprivica No.1 and Carey 4) by 247Sports.

Larrañaga watched Koprivica and Carey at a tournament in April in Indianapolis. He was the only head coach in the country that was there watching them at 8 a.m. on a Saturday morning.

Miami was one of the first to offer both players and they are hoping their early interest and strong following throughout the summer seeing nearly all of their games will pay dividends when they make their decisions.

PROGRAM PERCEPTION IMPROVING

The perception of the Miami basketball program has improved in recent years with the success the Hurricanes have had over the last five years under Larrañaga including an ACC regular season and tournament title, two NCAA tournament appearances advancing to the Sweet 16 both times, and averaging 24 wins a season.

“I think the one thing is if you have a body work to some degree of success of style of play, branding of your head coach, your program, and playing on television a lot—those things are a little bit more tangible when you’re having these discussions with people,” Caputo said. “I think that’s where the great programs throughout the years have been able to create a vision that’s very tangible to recruits like, ‘This is what it would like for you to be a player here. This is how we play. This is where we play. This is what our head coach is about. This is the history of what we’ve done.’”

“I think early on in our tenure although we had a history at George Mason and coach had a history prior to that at Bowling Green and as a successful assistant coach, I think every time you take over it’s sort of a new way to look at particularly with guys who don’t have a lot of a long-term memory. It’s more short-term memory. For a guy who might have seen Shane and Angel they might look at that and say, ‘OK I really know what it would be like to a point guard in that system’ and it becomes more tangible.

“Whether you’re getting more reception from guys that are higher ranked and things like that, I think sometimes that might have to do with location, geography, and timing and things like that. But I think our blue print tries to remain the same, but every year is a little different.”

Despite an increase in interest, the challenges remain the same.

“I think we’ve gotten more interest, but it becomes more challenging because we’re limited to having only 12 players visiting the campus,” Larrañaga said. “If you only have 12 players and have five scholarships like we did this year, it’s hard as heck to go 5 for 12. That’s almost one of every two that visits and when your competition is Duke, North Carolina, Michigan State, Indiana, Kentucky, Florida, Florida State—those are a lot of really good basketball programs and you’re just one of five, six, or seven schools that are really wanting the kid.”

Just a Kid from Miami Gardens: Five-Star Miami Signee Dewan Huell's Path to a McDonald's All-American

RMF Magazine
Jesse Nadelman
Aug. 4, 2016

DEWAN HUELL wasn't always the best player on the court. In fact, at one point Dewan Huell's career didn't involve a court, or a basketball. Long before a trip to Chicago for the McDonald's All-American game, a five-star recruiting rating, and a signed letter of intent to the University of Miami (FL), Huell was a seventh grade football player.

"After I broke my collarbone, my Mom said I never could play football anymore," Huell said. "I didn't want to sit home and do nothing because I knew it would lead to nothing good, so I started playing basketball."

That decision to hang up the cleats for Jordan's would be a decision that would change Huell's life. But the sport transition started off rough.

"I started playing basketball in seventh grade," Huell said. "I wasn't really coordinated and couldn't dunk a basketball. I didn't really have any confidence because I wasn't good enough."

Huell soon went from not dunking to throwing down slams at the United Center in Chicago. But it was a process, to say the least. He needed to be developed and complete the transformation from football to basketball with the help from his personal basketball trainer, Coach Perez.

As time went on, Dewan's game got stronger.

"When I started working with Coach Perez, I started to believe I could be good," Huell said. "When eighth grade year came, I was the best in town. I had a good jump shot, could dribble enough to get around people, could block shots and rebound. It was the first year I dunked in a game."

"Dewan's struggles earlier in his basketball career was his inability to use his size to his advantage," Coach and mentor Jean-Camille Dubuisson said. "When I saw him in seventh grade, I thought he was horrible. He would let 5'3" guys up his chest, grab rebounds over him, and even at times block his shots. But to his credit, every year he has gotten better. The kid is a gym rat."

By the time Dewan Huell reached high school, he was already a starter for legendary head coach Lawton Williams and Miami Norland as just a freshman. But the start at Norland would open a new opportunity, a new challenge, and a new chapter his life.

TALENT you have naturally, but skill is only developed by hours and hours of working on your craft. The storied quote is quite depictive of Dewan Huell. He was born with the height, always one of the tallest players on the court, and from football to basketball he always has had major athleticism.

But the skill that Huell has developed, the skill that made him a five-star recruit with offers from almost every top program—Kansas, North Carolina, FSU, Florida, Louisville, etc. before eventually committing to Jim Larrañaga and Miami—was acquired solely from hours of dedication he put into the game.

"I had to sacrifice a lot of things for basketball," Huell said. "I had to stay focused and not let my surroundings put me in a bad situation. I gave up going out to parties, staying up all night, and clowning off in class. I had to focus in."

During the summer following sophomore year—after he had just won his second state title for

Norland—Huell had just finished a Saturday morning workout with head coach Lawton Williams. A three-hour work out that Dubuisson says, "is grueling. From 7 AM to 10:15 AM."

Most players had left the gym, induced with pain after such a taxing workout.

Dewan Huell isn't like most players.

When Dubuisson showed up to the gym—close to noon—for a workout with his team, Huell was still at gym, nearly two hours after his tough workout with Miami Norland. He then went up to Dubuisson.

"Hey Coach, can I workout with you guys?" Huell asked him.

Dubuisson couldn't believe it. Huell had just gone through a tough workout for three hours, and was still at gym nearly five hours after he had arrived at 7 AM.

"Dewan, you just went through a serious workout with Coach Williams, you're not going to make it through my workout," Dubuisson had answered him.

But once the clock struck noon, Huell was out there with the rest of Dubuisson's players, stretching out along with them. As if he were fresh as walk-on seeing his first action of the year. Because Huell was that fresh, he was always fresh and ready to play, burying the fatigue that most players would let emerge.

The workout went from 12 PM to 3 PM, and Huell didn't let up once. As Dubuisson says, "it's like he had another gear."

But even after another gruesome workout concluded, Huell tuned the gear up one more level. There was an open gym with top high school, college, and professional players from 5 PM until dusk and Huell was still there, as just a rising junior, running the floor even after all of tear his body and taken on in workouts that day.

"The kid impressed me that day. That's when I knew he was special," Dubuisson said.

Because that's what All-American's do. They impress people, they sacrifice, and they work until they can't work no more.

HANDS covering his face, body feeling achy, emotions frozen in shock, Dewan Huell sat down on the bench at Dillard High School. It would be the last time he ever stepped on the court with 'Norland' or 'Vikings' across his chest. His next school basketball game he will be wearing, 'Hurricanes' across his chest. He will be playing in front of thousands of people, and the game will likely be televised on ESPN or FOX Sports Florida.

After capturing the state championship for Miami Norland in his freshman, sophomore, and junior years, Huell's high school career had come to a close in the 7A regional finals against a younger, Dillard team.

"Nobody likes losing," Huell said. "That was the first time my whole high school career where my season ended before a state title. It hurt but Coach Williams told me that night that I had nothing to be ashamed of. I had a great high school career, and accomplished things that most kids never get to accomplish."

But one game doesn't define a career, and such is the case for Huell as a Viking. Right from the start in his freshman year he was a major part in helping Lawton Williams capture three of the legendary coach's six state titles. Even in the final loss to Dillard, Huell had done his part, dropping 18 points on six of thirteen shooting.

"I would say once he gets going he gets going,"

Miami Norland 6'5" guard—Chattanooga commit—David Jean-Baptiste, and a great friend of Huell's said about his dominant play for the Vikings. "He gets his buckets inside early, and then the rest of the game will flow and he'll have a big game."

Over the course of their careers at Norland, Jean-Baptiste and Huell have concreted a close bond, both on and off the court.

"Growing up, I didn't really have a big brother and I didn't know anyone coming into Norland from middle school," Jean-Baptiste said. "These past two years Dewan has been really big on my confidence and believing in me. Even more than myself."

Huell's connection with the program at Norland began back in eighth grade, when Huell met head coach Lawton Williams for the first time. After all, Norland happened to be the school Huell was zoned for, and was a defending state champion and already established as one of the best programs in Dade County history.

The first time the two met would be the start of a forever lasting relationship. A bond between a coach and a player, for the ages.

"He just kept me focused," Huell said on his relationship with Williams. "He helped me out. Not just as a coach, but as a father figure. He always helped me out. Our relationship is great. I call him if I have any type of problems, he tells me what I need to do to correct it basketball wise and off the court."

When Huell first walked through the Miami Norland doors as just a freshman, there was already much expected. He had played phenomenal in his eighth grade season. And besides, anytime there's a 6'8" freshman basketball player, people are going to turn heads.

"[Expectations] were high when he walked in," Lawton Williams said. "But he came here at a time when we had two veteran big men so he could just learn. He grew a lot strength wise and just the knowledge of the game."

Huell's role was secondary his first two years, although still a major one. He played alongside current Florida Gulf Coast point guard Zach Johnson as the two brought home two straight state championships, and top schools like Miami were already showing interest in 6'9" underclassman forward.

"He was getting college interest even just as a freshman," Christina Pierre, Huell's mother, said. "One thing I always let Dewan know when he was young was that there's no 'I' in team so don't let get out of your head just because everyone is looking at you as far as recruiting and college. It's always a team effort. And he just remained focused."

But after his sophomore year, Norland had lost seven players from the previous team—including four starters—which put the pressure on Huell to become the main anchor for the Vikings' program his junior season.

And contrary to previous seasons, the expectations for Norland weren't as high, many stating the loss of too many players as a factor that would yield Norland from capturing their fourth straight title. But what they didn't know, is that Dewan Huell was still there. And Huell would prove those skeptics wrong in a monster eleventh grade season.

"He looked to score more," Williams said of how Huell's game changed into junior year. "We needed

Just a Kid from Miami Gardens: Dewan Huell's Path

(Cont.)

him to, and he was more vocal.”

Huell averaged 19.2 PPG and 9.1 RPG as he led Miami Norland to the school's fourth straight state championship, capturing the Miami Herald's 6A-8A Player of the year award, and was named to the All-Dade first team for R.M.F. Magazine and the Miami Herald.

“We were hungry that year because a lot of people slept on us,” Huell said. “We wanted it more.

“I knew I had to score more that season, pick up slack myself. So in the off-season before junior year I worked really hard to become more of a leader that season.”

He would cap off his phenomenal junior campaign by playing in the Under Armor elite circuit and traveling across the country for travel basketball events in front of college scouts and NBA GMs.

His stock jolted, as Huell was ranked the number 23 prospect in the class of 2016 by ESPN, and deemed a five-star, ranked number 25 by Scout.

“There were a lot of good kids out there that summer and a lot of college coaches and NBA GMs watching,” Huell said. “They were valuable experiences that taught me to be a stronger player. I worked a lot in the off-season to get stronger.”

Before the loss to Dillard in regionals, Huell had led Norland to the top of the R.M.F. Magazine Respect 25 rankings for most of the season, with wins over Wellington in the Hoop Hall Classic, Chaminade-Madonna, Westminster Academy, Miami Central, and other top teams.

Huell also captured his fourth district title his senior season; he won one in each of his high school years.

It may have been the last result of his high school career, but the loss to Dillard won't be what people remember of Dewan Huell's memorable career at Miami Norland. A legendary one, and as Lawton Williams said, “I've never coached a player more dominant.”

* * *

SINCE freshman year, the Miami Hurricanes had been in hot pursuit of the local 6'10" star Huell. Jim Larrañaga and his staff could see he was special, and he was right in their backyard.

Capturing the prized five-star, however, would be challenging. Bill Self (Kansas), Leonard Hamilton (Florida State), Roy Williams (North Carolina), and other top programs and coaches were all in on the Miami Norland product.

But, the Hurricanes were active. Lawton Williams says Miami would come to the school, call Dewan regularly, and they worked hard at getting him.

That persistence paid off.

On Wednesday November 18th 2015, Huell committed to Miami.

“I'm most looking forward to playing in the ACC,” Huell said. “It's the best conference there is in college basketball right now. I want to go in there and win immediately.”

“When we did go and visit they did show a lot of the opportunities he will have to further his career,” Pierre said on her son's choice to go to Miami. “We really enjoyed the program they did offer and the things that they did show us, but at the end it was Dewan's decision and that's where he wanted to go.”

For the Hurricanes, the decision echoed a message Jim Larrañaga stressed at his introductory press

conference back in 2011, about the importance of recruiting in Florida. He had struck gold in his own backyard.

For Huell, it was about not only staying home and continuing his legacy in the 305, but it was about the chance for the Hurricanes' coaching staff to develop him, and help him reach his goal of playing in the NBA.

“Miami is my hometown team,” Huell said. “They've got a lot of good recruits coming in at different positions and I'd like the chance to be apart of a great, young team. They fit my style of play, it's just a perfect match.”

Huell's journey won't come to a halt just getting to Coral Gables. Huell marks the first five-star recruit Miami—still managing to reach the Sweet 16 in two of the last four years—has landed since 2008. Huell looks to take the Hurricanes to the next level, and the Miami staff couldn't be more excited for his arrival.

“I like everything about his game,” Hurricanes coach Jim Larrañaga told USA Today High School Sports. “What separates [Huell] from other big guys is that he's terrific defensively. Most high school players who are highly recruited are offensive-minded and have a lot to learn defensively when they get to college. That's not true with Huell.”

And at Miami, maybe Huell will finally earn some respect, something he and many close to him feel he is still yearning to receive.

“My hardest moments in basketball are living up to the hype of my name,” Huell said. “I will always have doubters, but it's just that much better to prove them wrong.”

Those doubters have been there since he walked through the Norland doors as a 6'8" ninth grader, and they will follow him to Coral Gables as a 6'10" five-star All-American.

“The only struggle I see for [Dewan] now is that people don't give him the proper respect,” Dubuisson said. “Even with him being a McDonald's All-American people still question his abilities. Why? I don't know.

“He's been a four-year starter at a powerhouse in Miami Norland, he's won a state championship three out of four years in high school, he's played for Team USA, he's been a first team all-county selection, he's been coached by Lawton Williams—arguable the best coach in Dade County history—what else do you want from the kid? Oh, did I forget to add he's going to the University of Miami for free?”

Huell will hear these doubts the rest of his career. LeBron James still hears them, there's even still doubts about Michael Jordan. But it is those doubters that will fuel him as he continues his path, the next stop Coral Gables.

From the day he will step on the University of Miami campus—as he did at Miami Norland—Huell's legacy will continue as the next hometown hero in the 305.

* * *

FOOTBALL ended for Dewan Huell from an injury, and one night it seemed like Huell's promising basketball career would vanish the same way.

In eighth grade—Huell's first full-year playing basketball—Christina Pierre got a call one night from Lawton Williams, saying that Dewan had broken his finger. Pierre rushed to the gym, picked up Huell, and immediately drove him to the emergency room.

“That's it, you're done playing basketball,” Pierre had said to him, recalling in the moment the broken

collarbone injury that forced Dewan to give up football. “I'm not letting you get injured anymore.”

But unlike how the collarbone injury went down, Huell wouldn't give in to his mother's wishes this time. Pierre remembers him telling her about his NBA dream, and how this was just the start.

“I'm going to make it pro, Mom,” Huell had told her. “I can't give up now. If LeBron James and Dwyane Wade can do it, so can I.”

This time, Pierre gave in, and allowed him to continue playing.

“It was certainly close,” Pierre said. “I was close to making him quit in that moment.”

Nearly five years later, Huell was still playing basketball. And he was sitting on the couch with Pierre watching ESPN, waiting for the participants in the 2016 McDonald's All-American game to be announced.

And then there it was. Huell's name was announced.

The same kid that had just started playing the game in seventh grade, and called himself ‘uncoordinated’ at that age, was playing in a game with the 24 best high school basketball players in the nation.

“It was a great feeling,” Huell said. “Not too many top players in Miami have ever gotten elected in the McDonald's All-American game. That was a great feeling, I mean to be apart of the 1% that got elected, that's a blessing right there.”

Just getting his name announced, would give his mother chills.

“It was amazing,” Pierre said. “Only 1% of players do get elected for the game, and Dewan has worked really hard throughout his high school career to get there. It was just a thrill for me, even just watching him get nominated.”

As great as Huell and Pierre's memory of Dewan getting elected was, the experience at the All-American game would be even better.

For Huell, meeting the other top players in nation, playing on the court at the United Center on ESPN, was surreal.

“The game was amazing,” Huell said. “Playing on national T.V. with all the great players and those activities they had us doing, it was great. Having us going to the Ronald McDonald house to give back to the kids was cool. It was a great feeling just to be there. There was a great vibe, and everybody had a lot of fun.”

As for Pierre, just watching her son throughout the events were moments she will never forget.

“Just sitting in the stands was a thrill,” Pierre said. “Throughout the whole process, I mean it was stressful because there were different scouts coming at me and calling me so it was kind of stressful, but I remained humble, just enjoyed the experience that doesn't happen often, and had fun.”

And so as the McDonald's All-American game concluded, Huell's high school career did too. A remarkable one, to say the least, had concluded.

It's a good thing Huell hung up his football cleats in seventh grade for Jordan's. The first time Huell stepped on the court would be the start. The start of a Miami Garden products' stupendous basketball path.

A path, and a career, that is just getting started.

After summer workouts, still plenty of questions for 'Canes hoops team

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

Aug. 1, 2016

Like most college basketball coaches, Jim Larrañaga is ready for a little bit of a breather.

For him, there hasn't been much time to catch a breath since the Hurricanes' season ended in March with a Sweet 16 loss to eventual national champion Villanova. There have been off-season conditioning programs, recruiting trips and summer workouts to keep him busy -- and help him begin to gauge where his Hurricanes will be come next season.

Miami will find itself in some kind of rebuilding mode with three of its top players and two of its leading scorers -- Sheldon McClellan, Angel Rodriguez, and Tonye Jekiri -- graduated. So this summer, much of Larrañaga's efforts have centered on working to continue putting together a team he thinks will be able to compete in the ACC.

Back for the Hurricanes this year will be Kamari Murphy, who was, at times, one of the strongest defenders Miami had on the floor. Guard Ja'Quan Newton, who earned praise as one of the better "Sixth Man" players in the country, returns and is ready to take on a bigger role as point guard. Davon Reed, who started all 35 games last season, is back too. And incoming freshmen Dewan Huell, Bruce Brown and Dejan "DJ" Vasiljevic helped give the Hurricanes one of their best recruiting classes in program history.

So while Larrañaga isn't quite ready to name a starting five yet (and who could blame him?), he feels like the Hurricanes -- who will run a new offense this season -- will still be competitive. And before he went off to a well-earned vacation, he sat down with local reporters and shared some of his thoughts on where the Hurricanes stand now. Here they are, in his own words:

On what the team has done since the season ended: "I think we've had a productive summer with our veterans being here almost the entire summer and then the freshmen joining them in the month of July. I think, from the progress that I see in the weight room, we're heading in the right direction. The weight room is very, very significant to us. How strong you are really determines how well you're able to battle for position on the floor, especially near the basket where the game is won.

We have a lot of young guys. I just looked at their numbers for the NBA bench press test and that was something that we did when they first got here, for the freshmen, that we've been doing for years for all of our players. I like the improvement I see. Are we where we need to be at this early stage? The answer is no. We've got to get stronger, we've got to be able to battle for position on the floor, especially to rebound the basketball at a high level. We've also worked diligently on ball skills, some very, very simple things. Fundamentals that we expect all of our players to know, some of them know and some of them don't know. And to teach them what is correct and what is expected is easy. What is difficult is to learn it. That takes time. So while they're working on getting stronger, they're working on becoming more skilled athletes. I like the work ethic in the weight room, on the court, I like that they're working hard in the classroom while they're here. I like that they're engaging with the community. We have our Jim Larrañaga summer basketball camp and the players are in there, working with those young kids and getting to know them. Those kids are the fans of the future for our Hurricanes basketball program, so

it's been a good summer."

On whether veterans Davon Reed, Kamari Murphy and Ja'Quan Newton have met expectations:

"Our success in the last several years has been based on our ability to put experienced players out on the court who have learned what it takes to win at this level. Ja'Quan Newton, Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy are our most experienced players. You can add Anthony Lawrence to that group as another player who we feel we can definitely count on.

"I also have high expectations for Ebuka Izundu, who I see has a great deal of potential, but he hasn't realized that potential under game conditions yet. We also have a player, Rashad Muhammad, who came here at 157 pounds and as of Friday, weighed 180. We see the improvement in his maturity. Hopefully, with the addition of our freshmen, we'll be able to eventually put together a talented, experienced team, a well-balanced team of perimeter and frontcourt play on the court."

Comparing this summer to others:

"One of the things about this summer that is similar to the first summer I came is a lot of new faces. When I first came, I didn't know any of the players and neither did any of my coaches, except what we saw on video and what we saw on video was what things needed to be changed, what things needed to be emphasized, what would be our priorities going forward. With having only 10 scholarship players available right now to play the season and half of them have never worn a Miami uniform before, the challenge is to get the guys that have never played for Miami before up to speed with the guys who have competed at a very high level and reached the Sweet 16 last year. We've got a ways to go."

On Ja'Quan Newton's development:

"I think Ja'Quan has done a good job. I don't think we'll know how good until actually November rolls around. One of the challenges for him is to take on much more of a leadership role. It's not that it's easy, but it's easier when you're the sixth man, you come in and play as hard as you can and play as well as you can, which he did very, very well. That's different than being the guy. You're totally in charge as the point guard and you've got to be directing traffic from the start of the game to the end of the game and you've got to be doing it every day in practice so when the games occur, you've prepared your team very well. He has to be like a coach on the floor. He's the floor general."

Is that maturity coming through? That leadership?

"I would say I'm seeing it at times. Not as often, not as consistent as we'd like it, but he is making a transition, really from being a scoring guard to being a point guard. Now, as a point guard, you still score -- Angel Rodriguez was our second-leading scorer, Shane Larkin was our leading scorer -- but there's another category for them to be very aware of and that is that leadership of distributing the ball and getting others involved in the game. The better you do that, the better you'll be playing."

Is anyone pushing him in practice?

"The guy that I think has made his presence known, almost from day one, is DJ Vasiljevic. He can play the 1 or 2, he's matched up with Ja'Quan, he's played with Ja'Quan and I very much like the way they've supported each other. I texted with Ja'Quan one day and asked him how the games were and who he played with and he raved about DJ and how much he felt like he was helping him. I texted DJ an entirely different question and he texted me back, 'I think I'm doing

better. Ja'Quan is really helping me.' When you see players complimenting each other during the summer time, that's a very good sign."

On Anthony Lawrence:

Amp probably has as challenging a role as Ja'Quan does because the way I see Amp is he's a versatile guy and he has to have the ability to play both the 3 and the 4 for us. As a 3 man, he becomes much more of a guard, almost like a point guard. As a 4 man, he's got to be able to guard bigger guards and rebound the ball, so, in a sense, he's got to be able to play all five positions on the court. He's capable of doing it physically, but it's a major challenge for any player mentally. For him, he's working at that. I think it was one of the reasons why, as a freshman, he was a little inconsistent. We asked him to do too much by learning so many positions on the court.

On Ebuka Izundu, Rodney Miller and Dewan Huell -- and what he wants to see emerge at the center position:

"First of all, matchups are so important, the 4 and 5 are identical positions and we'll be making our decisions for those guys on who they should guard. Last year, for example, we used Anthony Lawrence to guard [Villanova's Daniel Ochefu] in the NCAA Tournament. We asked him to guard the 5 man on several occasions because he's very strong and he's very crafty as a defender. He's actually better guarding post players than he is perimeter players. Dewan, on the other hand, is not as strong as Anthony is right now, but working toward that. We have to figure out when those two are in the game together, who guards the 4 and who guards the 5? We're going to be constantly quizzing ourselves as to how do we match up properly defensively and how do we utilize their skills offensively. And from an offensive standpoint, we've already planned on using an offense we've not used before."

On whether the mindset is different when you have a young team vs. a veteran team:

"Whether you're a veteran team like the Shane Larkin team, when Shane Larkin and Tonye Jekiri were the only freshman and sophomores on the team and everybody else was a junior or senior, it's how you blend those two guys in. They were obviously two key components in our run to the ACC championship, regular-season and tournament championship. This year, we have five veteran players and five newcomers that are eligible to play in games. And they've got to blend themselves. We don't know quite frankly at this early stage who'll be the starting five or the guys off the bench who rotate in. It takes a team effort to really have great results and great success. So whether a guy is starting and playing 30 minutes a game or coming off the bench and playing 8 or 10, his role is important. Our job as coaches is to find the right role for them. Some guys might be ideal for starting jobs, other guys might be ideal for coming off the bench. Finding out which those are is the real challenge."

Larrañaga encouraged by Hurricanes' summer progress

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

Aug. 1, 2016

Asked for a summer "State of the Union address," Jim Larrañaga opened with this:

"I think we've had a productive summer with our veterans being here almost the entire summer, and the freshmen joining them in the month July. I think the progress I've seen in the weight room, we're heading in the right direction."

He's encouraged by how they're playing in front of the basket, "where the game is won." They're working on ball skills. If he was rolling out a starting lineup tomorrow ... well, he's glad he doesn't have to answer that question.

Larrañaga gave reporters an update on his team, with summer workouts in full swing and the start of the season more than three months away:

* Replacing guards Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan and center Tonye Jekiri won't be easy, but Larrañaga will lean on veterans Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy, and hope Ja'Quan Newton continues to develop into a point guard. "Our success in the last several years has been based on our ability to put experienced players out on the court who have learned what it takes to win at this level," Larrañaga said. "Ja'Quan, Davon and Kamari are our most experienced players and you can add Anthony Lawrence as another player to that group we feel we can definitely count on."

* Newton, who shined as a sixth man last year, has a full plate. He needs to improve his outside shooting, cut down on his turnovers, and involve his teammates. The leadership is perhaps

his biggest challenge. "I'm seeing it at times," Larrañaga said. "Not as often, not as consistent as we'd like it. ... It's easier when you're the sixth man. You just come in and play as hard as you can, as well as you can, which he did very, very well."

* With regard to pushing Newton's development, Larrañaga said freshman Dejan "D.J." Vasiljevic "has made his presence known, almost from day one. ... I very much like the way they've supported each other." Vasiljevic can play on or off the ball, but profiles as a point guard. There's a good chance he could be Newton's backup.

* He wasn't asked about him Monday, but Larrañaga has been laudatory of freshman Bruce Brown, who has been a tough competitor in practices. Expect Brown to have a major role as an aggressive 2-man.

* The versatile Lawrence will play the 3, where he will be a large, ball-handling guard, and the 4, where he will guard post players and rebound. "In a sense, he's got to be able to play all five positions," Larrañaga said, praising him for being strong and crafty enough to guard bigger men. "He's capable of doing it physically, but it's a major challenge for any player mentally." Larrañaga said some of Lawrence's freshman inconsistency to being asked to train at multiple positions.

* Larrañaga has "high expectations" for center Ebuka Izundu, who "has a great deal of potential, but he hasn't realized that potential under game conditions yet." Larrañaga has raved about the 6-10 lefty's athleticism and offensive gifts.

* Without an experienced center like Jekiri, Larrañaga will use a variety of players depending on matchups. Izundu, Murphy, Lawrence, plus freshmen Dewan

Huell and Rodney Miller can play there. "Dewan is not as strong as Anthony is right now, but is working toward that," Larrañaga said. "We have to figure out when those two guys are in the game together, who guards the 4 and who guards the 5. We're going to constantly be quizzing ourselves as to how do we match up properly defensively and how do we utilize their skills offensively"

* Larrañaga mentioned that UM will use "an offense we have not used before." No details, of course.

* Guard Rashad Muhammad is now (6-foot-6 and) 180 pounds, Larrañaga said, after arriving from San Jose State two years ago at 157 pounds. Larrañaga said Muhammad "can shoot" (37.8 percent on threes at SJSU, but consistently sinking deep threes in practice), but cautioned that games are different than practices. It seems that at worst, Muhammad will be a shooter coming off the bench.

* A key for Murphy, a skilled defender and rebounder, is foul shooting. Improving his 55.8 percent clip at the line will help keep him on the court at the end of games.

* With the July recruiting period over, Larrañaga and his wife, Liz, will try to get a vacation to Sarasota, where they have a home (Dick Vitale is a neighbor). He swims, he rides his bike – and watches "a lot of video there," he said. "It's been my type of vacation for 45 years."

Freshman G Vasiljevic Impressing During Summer Workouts

Inside the U
Chris Stock
Aug. 1, 2016

Dejan Vasiljevic went toe-to-toe with some of the best high school prospects in the country.

Vasiljevic dropped a game-high 29 points with six 3-pointers for Australia at the FIBA U17 World Championships two years ago in the championship game falling to the United States featuring Kansas' Josh Jackson and Malik Newman, and Duke's Jayson Tatum and Harry Giles.

Playing at the international level has given Miami's 6-foot-2 freshman guard confidence he can continue to be successful against some of the nation's best.

"It's been surreal to represent your country," Vasiljevic said. "It just gives you different types of games and you have to prove how you can be better than those guys in the world."

Since Vasiljevic arrived at Miami in May he has impressed his teammates and coaches with his shooting ability and work ethic as he works towards a spot in the rotation this season.

"He is a very skilled basketball player," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "D.J., I don't know for sure, but I'm guess he's been at his height and weight for two or three years so he's kind of mature physically and he's also mature in terms of basketball skill and IQ, which means he's going to be able to contribute right away."

"How much actually depends on two things—one, what position he plays best and where we need him the most; and the second is who does he play well with. What we've seen so far I think he's a good combination with everybody. That gives me the flexibility of playing a number of different combinations. We've got flexibility at the one and two."

Senior guard Davon Reed likes what he sees from Vasiljevic:

"D.J. has been impressive more and more each time he steps on the court. He's a worker. I've been in the gym with him a lot this summer. He's been working on his game and he can shoot the heck out of the ball. He'll definitely be able to help us."

Fellow freshman Rodney Miller was surprised with Vasiljevic's ability.

"I didn't know much about him coming from Australia and we clicked automatically—a great dude and a heck of a shooter," Miller said. "Just a really cool guy to be around."

BACKGROUND

Vasiljevic's parents are from the former Yugoslavia and moved to Canada where Vasiljevic was born in Calgary.

The family moved to Australia when Vasiljevic was six years old.

"I'm a bit multi-cultural," said Vasiljevic, who is 19 years old.

Growing up he watched a lot of basketball—both NBA and college—after a brief stint with soccer. He's a fan of Kobe Bryant and the late Drazen Petrovic, a European star who played five seasons in the NBA.

"Just the way he was a natural scorer," Vasiljevic said of Petrovic, who also hailed from Yugoslavia. "He has that feel for the game with ease and how hard he had to work to get to where he was. Unfortunately he passed away young, but he's probably one of the best shooters ever. Growing up my dad showed me a lot of film of him and said if you want to be as good as him you have to work hard. He showed me tapes of how hard he worked and how many shots he put up in the gym. He was a gym rat."

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

Vasiljevic has been adjusting to being in a different part of the world in search of furthering his basketball career.

"It's been good," Vasiljevic said. "I'm just adapting to the culture and the lifestyle and being away from home. I'm further away than the rest of these other guys, but I've adapted well. Homesickness kicked in a little bit the past couple weeks, but that's just natural when you've been away from home. But I feel I've done well and the coaches have helped."

It took some time getting used to a new location, but he has been adapting.

"The first couple of weeks were a bit of a maze to find my classroom and where I was supposed to go, but the team is unbelievable and my teammates take good care of me," Vasiljevic said. "I'm enjoying the atmosphere and I love it."

He visited Miami during the recruiting process and was happy with the atmosphere the school and program provided.

"They just talked about what they can offer to me both educationally and as a basketball player as well," Vasiljevic said. "When I came on visit I felt very comfortable as well. It was a family environment and they took good care of me. Everyone was looking out for me and I felt it was the right choice even though it is further away from home."

He appreciated the UM coaches' approach when recruiting him.

"During the recruiting process the coaches weren't nagging me and weren't talking about other colleges and how I wouldn't fit there," Vasiljevic said.

SUMMER WORKOUTS

Vasiljevic has been participating in the offseason program for nearly three months and has been making strides in his game.

"I feel I am doing well," he said. "Coaches and my teammates are happy with the way I am progressing. I feel I have done a good job of taking care of my body and getting into the weight room and practicing hard."

The team has been having two hours of practice a week during the summer in addition to work outside of the allotted time period.

"Everyone competes here," Vasiljevic said. "It doesn't matter if you're playing pick-up or an actual game, everybody wants to win. Athletes are different here—they're more athletic and quicker than you and if you're a little smaller you have to beat them at your own game. I'm not the quickest or the most athletic so I have to use my smarts and my IQ to try to do the best I can to beat them."

Teammates have praised Vasiljevic's work ethic and the extra time he has been putting in on his own.

"I try to get in the gym even if we have practice and in the weight room," Vasiljevic said. "On the weekends I try to get extra work done. You have to earn these guys' respect so I just try to be a professional. This is my job now and I'm trying to get where I want to get which is the NBA or play somewhere professionally in Europe so I'm looking to impress everyone."

Vasiljevic has primarily been a shooting guard throughout his basketball career, but has been playing some point guard since his arrival at Miami to help spell Ja'Quan Newton.

"I'm trying to adapt to being more of a point guard and leading a team. I'm trying to learn from Ja'Quan and Davon (Reed) who has been here the longest and they have experienced everything. I'm working on my ballhandling and the IQ of the game."

BREAK

The team will have a break from offseason workouts from Aug. 5-22 before resuming their two hours a week.

Talented Freshman Huell Working Towards a Big Year

Inside the U
Chris Stock
July 25, 2016

Dewan Huell walked into a gym over the weekend and slapped hands with a number of high school players, who were happy to see him.

Huell, a Norland High product, is a big deal in the community.

He is also a big deal at the University of Miami.

Huell, a four-star recruit and 29th overall prospect according to the 247Composite, is the first McDonald's All-American to attend Miami since Darius Rice in 2000.

"Being a McDonald's All-American everyone is going to look to you to having a big freshman year," Huell said. "Behind that is a bunch of work—work you have to put in."

Huell enrolled at Miami last month and is looking to put the high school All-American label behind him.

"It's the college level now so that don't matter," he said. "That was just a high school achievement. It doesn't matter now."

Huell, who stands 6-foot-10, is a skilled big man who can knock down shots in addition to finishing around the basket. He has been concentrating on improving his ballhandling ability during summer workouts.

"I think Dewan has a lot of physical talent," head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He can run. He can jump. He's quick laterally. Dewan is someone who has won a lot so he's really competitive and wants to win.

"The difference between high school and college is the physicality of the game and the guys you're going against are not only as tall as you are, which is different than high school where he was normally the tallest guy on the court every night, but not only are they as tall as you some of them are taller and almost all of them are stronger so his biggest advancement has got to be in strength and conditioning—I don't mean conditioning running he's going to be able to do that. I mean in fighting for low-post position in conditioning yourself when someone is trying to push you out and not letting them. It's very, very hard that's 6-10, weighs 215-220 pounds and if he pushed that hard in high school it would have been a foul every time."

Huell has also been adding strength and is up to 221 pounds—seven pounds heavier than he arrived—with a goal of being 230-235 for the season.

"We're working on a lot on our body and I've been adjusting," Huell said. "I've got to get in condition. I'm getting real tired easy."

Summer workouts and pick-up games have been an adjustment for the talented freshman.

"It's a big change from the high school level point blank period," Huell said. "All the guys are stronger, faster, well-coached and well-skilled. I've just got to get conditioned well in the weight room."

Huell is part of a four-man freshman class that ranked 14th nationally.

"As a group we're pretty good," Heull said. "We've got a lot of work to put in so we can be one of the best freshman classes. We all want to go out there and

perform good to help the team out."

Four-star shooting guard Bruce Brown (Boston, Mass.), three-star center Rodney Miller (New York, N.Y.), and three-star guard Dejan Vasiljevic (Australia) round out the freshman class.

"I like D.J. a lot," Huell said. "He's a real good shooter and a real good passer. Bruce is real physical. Rodney is big and physical too and takes up a lot of space. I'm pretty cool with all of them. They're good guys."

Huell believes the Miami program is a "a top school and on the rise."

The Hurricanes will be looking for a big year this year according to Huell:

"We're an ACC championship team and a Final Four team. We all want to win and we all want to do that by any means necessary."

Ranking the Top 25 Freshmen of the 2016-17 Season

Bleacher Report

Kerry Miller

July 5, 2016

Bruce Brown, Miami

Even with the loss of Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan, Miami still has quality backcourt options in Ja'Quan Newton, Davon Reed and San Jose State transfer Rashad Muhammad. Brown (a combo guard) will be a welcome addition and may well be handed a starting job, but he isn't nearly the "must have" addition to this roster that the majority of the players in the top 25 are on their respective teams.

Freshman Huell Not Shy About NBA Aspirations

Inside the U
Chris Stock
July 29, 2016

Dewan Huell is working towards reaching the NBA.

Miami's 6-foot-10 athletic freshman has been working towards that goal since he arrived on campus last month and does not plan on being in college for the duration.

"I'm not going to rush it, but I'm trying to get out of here as soon as possible," Huell said.

Huell knows reaching his goal won't be easy and he must improve.

"It's going to take work, determination, and dedication," he said.

One of the areas he needs to improve is his strength, which has been a point of emphasis. He arrived at UM at 214 pounds and is already up to 221 with the goal of being 230-235 for the season.

"That's going to be the difference between how long I'm here--the quicker I get stronger," Huell said.

Huell pays close attention to his improvements in the weight room.

"I look at myself every day," he laughed.

Huell has also been working on his game—two hours a week with the team and more time on his own—during the summer.

"I'm doing a lot of individual things like spending a lot of extra time in the weight room and gym workouts working on my ballhandling and shooting," he said.

He's hoping to develop his game like his two favorite NBA players.

"I like watching Anthony Davis play and Lamarcus Aldridge," Huell said. "I like their games. They're patient. Real good inside and outside scorers and mid-range."

Huell is a local South Florida product who starred at Norland High School winning three state titles and was named a McDonald's All-American—the Hurricanes' first in 16 years.

Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga wants Huell to focus on being successful at the college level.

"What he has to learn and all of our freshmen have to learn is how I develop the skills you need to play in college," Larrañaga said. "And if you get good at that, then how do you develop the skills to even play at the next level? We always start out with those very basic things."

Teaching fundamentals is something the UM staff focuses on with the freshmen.

"With Dewan we're starting, like we do with all of our freshmen, with basic fundamentals," Larrañaga said. "Things that you might assume all players should know and be able to do, but there's a huge difference in doing it at the high school level and doing it at the college level."

Two fundamental skills the staff will be looking for Huell to improve on is his dribbling and passing.

"Dewan at his size one of the things we will be working with him on is his dribbling and passing skills because we don't want him turning the ball over," Larrañaga said. "We don't want any of

our players turning the ball over, but it's more common for a freshman to turn it over because when he gets bumped and pushed he thinks it's a foul because it was a foul in high school and in college it's just play on."

Huell was a four-star recruit according to the 247Composite. He picked Miami over offers from a number of schools including Florida State and Mississippi State.

"Comfortability," Huell said as a deciding factor. "Coach L develops players and I trusted him to do that with me."

How Jim Larrañaga turned Miami on to Hurricanes basketball

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

June 7, 2016

Like the Richts, Jim Larrañaga and his wife, Liz, were empty nesters when they came to Miami. And the coach was taking over a program with a bit of an attendance issue.

When he took over in 2011, he read an interview with outgoing coach Frank Haith. One thing Haith mentioned sticks with Larrañaga today.

“He said no one knew him, not even the people in his own building, meaning the BankUnited Center,” Larrañaga said. “They didn’t recognize him. He thought people didn’t care about basketball, that no one knew he was the basketball coach. I interpreted that as, well, he must not be out in the community much. Everywhere I’ve been, people recognize me.”

That’s not an accident, and it didn’t happen overnight.

As he detailed in a conversation with the Post last month at the ACC spring meetings in Amelia Island, Larrañaga set out to speak to board of trustee meetings, faculty functions, corporate events, chamber of commerce meetings, basketball clinics, community centers. His fantasy camp for adults, his youth camps for young players, serving food in the dorms and greeting students waiting in line for a game — everything is an opportunity to connect, to “make them feel a part of your program,” he said.

Grabbing people’s attention in Miami, getting them to come to games, is more than winning.

It’s talking shop with high school coaches, including those who may never produce

a Miami-caliber player. It’s taking a few minutes to chat in the hallway when noticing a familiar face (or 90 minutes over two days when an inquiring reporter shows up). It’s doing lunch, as Larrañaga recently did, with a friend of a friend, a local builder worth “in the neighborhood of \$3-4 billion,” sharing stories with him, inviting him to a game.

“That’s work,” said Larrañaga, 66. “It’s fun for me – I enjoy getting to know people – but I also see it as part of my responsibility as head coach of the University of Miami to cultivate people to support the program.

“Some schools look at it very differently. Some coaches don’t feel like it’s their responsibility to generate enthusiasm for their home games because they’ve got a built-in fanbase that’s been there for decades. There are teams in our league that have been selling out since the ‘60s. Not us.”

Last year, they did. Season tickets sold out for the first time in UM’s history – any sport, not just basketball.

Support from the athletics department — UM has upgraded the BUC and greatly improved the technology as well as the recruiting and operating budgets available to the basketball team — is a major part of that. Winning of course, is another. The Hurricanes have been to the Sweet 16 twice in the last four seasons. But part of it is Larrañaga allowing national TV’s cameras into his locker room, and having no problem hamming it up if the setting allows, showing his personality.

“I get emails,” he said, smiling as he recalled one received after UM lost to Villanova in the Sweet 16. “I got one from a fan who has hamsters as his pets. He

names them after his favorite sports figures.” One of them hamsters, light brown in color, is named Coach L.

The Larrañagas don’t have any pets themselves (their Schnauzer/Poodle mix, Simon, died 20 years ago at age 14). They live in a gated Coral Gables community, and when they moved there they felt at home “immediately.” That wasn’t the case when Larrañaga took his first head coaching job at Bowling Green in 1986.

“We were Yankees,” he said. “We were outsiders. We weren’t from the Midwest. It took us a long while before I felt like we were accepted. I felt like when we left, there were still a lot of people who didn’t accept us.”

He found acceptance — and success — at George Mason, where he integrated into the community long before he became a national figure during their 2006 Final Four run. Like Richt, who was beloved in Athens, Ga., Larrañaga was wary of leaving it behind. “I didn’t want to give that up. The people were so nice,” he said.

But “even in the first months” at Miami, “everyone was so friendly and nice we felt like we belonged.”

Larrañaga remembers Muhammad Ali, recalls locker room shuffle

Sun Sentinel

Christy Cabrera Chirinos

June 4, 2016

One of the most enduring images of the 2013 NCAA Tournament – the one in which the Hurricanes made their first Sweet 16 appearance under men’s basketball coach Jim Larrañaga – was the post-game locker room celebration after Miami beat Illinois to earn that coveted berth.

As he walked off the court after that intense 63-59 win, Larrañaga, who is rarely at a loss for words, struggled with the message he’d deliver to his players in the locker room.

Then, inspiration struck, and Larrañaga invoked the name of Muhammad Ali, who died late Friday.

“Every timeout, I kept repeating the same words, ‘You have to fight. We’re in a fight. You have to fight like a champion,’” Larrañaga recalled Saturday. “As I headed to the locker room, I asked myself, ‘What do I say to the team? What’s the message? And as I walked through the locker room door, I started to say to myself, ‘Of course! Muhammad Ali, the greatest fighter of all time.’ That’s when I said to them, ‘I asked you guys to fight and who did I see out there but Muhammad Ali’ and I did my version of the Ali Shuffle.”

That celebratory moment was shown far and wide throughout coverage of the 2013 tournament and on the day after Ali’s death, Miami’s basketball program paid tribute to Ali, sharing that video one more time on Twitter with a brief message of condolence.

And like so many in sports and beyond on Saturday, Larrañaga paid tribute

not just to Ali’s accomplishments in the ring, but his societal impact during a turbulent time, a time during which the boxer refused to be inducted into the U.S. Army and was convicted of draft evasion, stripped of his heavyweight title and was banned from boxing for three years.

“He believed in his faith he couldn’t go against his beliefs. He believed that what he was doing was right and it was amazing,” Larrañaga said. “He lost the better part of his career, he lost millions and millions of dollars and he challenged the establishment. He challenged the boxing world. He challenged the political world. He challenged the civil rights world. And after years of battling, I think he earned the respect of so many people not only in this country, but around the world for fighting for his beliefs. ... His conviction and commitment to those beliefs, I think, is the greatest example of anyone in my lifetime.”

Larrañaga shared Saturday that he had the opportunity to be at a Best Buddies charity event with one of his heroes in recent years, but the normally outgoing coach was in too much awe to introduce himself to the legendary boxer – a fact that would probably surprise those who know Larrañaga well.

“When I saw him, I couldn’t believe it. I was in awe of him as an icon. I couldn’t speak. I didn’t even have the courage to go up to him and say hello or shake his hand,” Larrañaga said. “That’s the only time our paths crossed and it was briefly.”

That moment aside, Larrañaga knows his one little tribute to Ali – captured on film and shared during one of the most significant moments in his tenure at Miami – will live on, particularly for college basketball fans in Coral Gables

and beyond.

And the coach is perfectly fine with that, considering what Ali meant to boxing and the world beyond.

“I think he’s the greatest underdog to ever achieve the success and respect that he would eventually earn because of the kind of man he was,” Larrañaga said. “He was the underdog against the United States justice system. You know how they say you can’t fight city hall? That expression? Well, this wasn’t city hall. This was the national government, the national justice system and they put all their strength and influence behind prosecuting a man basically for his beliefs. ... And his ability to create interests in the boxing profession is beyond marketing. I mean, he just talked about how great he was and how pretty he was and you couldn’t take your eyes off of him. Then when he converted to Islam, he really created a tremendous political and professional obstacle for himself to overcome. And he never wavered in his beliefs. I was really just in awe of that.”

Cavs' Jones on Six Straight Finals, Leadership, Miami Roots

NBPA
Jared Zwerling
June 2, 2016

James Jones, six straight Finals. He and longtime teammate LeBron James accomplished that amazing feat when they recently defeated the Raptors, becoming the first players to do so since Bill Russell and the Celtics in 1966. And on Thursday, the duo tips off their Finals rematch against the Dubs.

Jones, a 13-year NBA veteran, has a lot more value than being a two-time NBA champion (2012 and '13) and the 2011 All-Star three-point winner. James calls the 35-year-old "the greatest teammate I've ever had," he's a go-to advisor for Cavaliers players, holds the title of NBPA Secretary-Treasurer and serves as a life-changing youth influencer in his hometown of Miami.

Speaking with the NBPA this week, "J Hoops" discussed what making history means to him, his unique friendship with James, impacting unprivileged youth in Miami, becoming a leader on and off the court, and much more. His conversation with the NBPA is presented below in a first-person perspective and edited for clarity and length.

As a kid, I would've never envisioned six straight Finals.

You dream as a kid of just hoping to make it to the NBA, and then to play in the NBA and to win a championship. But to be able to say that I've been a part of six of those runs, I take a lot of pride in that. My role has been different with every single team, but at the end of the day, the goal has always been the same, which is to win it. And I look back on the sacrifices I've had to make as a player throughout my career and I don't regret a moment of it, because ultimately I consistently end up where I want to be, which is playing meaningful basketball at the end of June.

I've sacrificed playing time. I've been a great shooter my entire career and my roles have always thrived. But there's definitely been opportunities for me to go elsewhere and play a bigger role and have a bigger impact, but the end result wouldn't be about winning; it would've been about numbers, stats. So I don't have a problem ever sacrificing numbers and stats for experiencing winning in the Finals. Experiencing competing to the end of June makes my career worthwhile where I have no regrets.

What's overlooked about making consecutive Finals is the mental discipline and physical discipline, the maturity. Every year, you have to embrace change. So a lot of times you have to exceed expectations, and a lot of times you just have to bounce back and remain motivated and driven after you've been able to do it consistently. That requires you to give more and more time to the game. You have to sacrifice family time.

The older you get, it takes a lot longer to get your body back to the place where it needs to be. You have to spend more time invested in your body, more time invested in recovery. And you just have to give more to the game. It's just a constant grind where you're basically living it 24/7, 365 a year.

My diet has been critical, but my philosophy is to never lose an edge, never get overweight, never get tired. I just prided myself on making sure that regardless if I'm playing a game or not, for the rest of my life I always want to be at my peak. And that comes before everything else. So I try to make sure that even through the challenges, the trials, the ups and downs, you just want to make sure the one tool in my toolbox, which is my body, is always in tip-top shape.

LeBron James and Bill Russell

Making the Finals again with LeBron is special because he's chasing something exceptional. I'm chasing the same thing, but just coming at a different angle. At the end of the day, it's about maximizing potential and opportunities—and that's his focus. That's why he's been able to continually improve and find ways to impact the game and change. It's a similarity that we share that makes our relationship special because rarely do you have guys on different spectrums—one elite superstar and one elite reserve—on the exact same page.

I look at LeBron more like a stepbrother. It's one of those things where the relationship isn't built on

your youth growing up. It's sharing the exact same experiences, the exact same situations. The context is different; it's kind of like a late merger. You respect each other's independence, but at the same time, enjoy each other's common bond.

As much as you want to be similar, you also want to be different because your identities are different, your upbringing is different, your background, your concepts, your context of what you're experiencing. But at the end of the day, he understands that when I say the only thing I care about is winning, it's not just lip service.

It's demonstrated in everything I do from decisions I've made, as far as how I play and who I play with from a professional standpoint—contracts, playing time. But also privately—the time I invest in my teammates, the time I invest in the game, the time I invest behind the scenes even when I'm not playing or when I'm playing.

I actually have met Bill Russell—just total respect. It was a very straightforward conversation, just talking about work, leadership and winning. He said, "You can't win unless your best players are willing to sacrifice for winning, and if your bottom players aren't willing to do the same, it has to be one common goal. You'll always have different agendas, but the goal must always be the same, and if that's winning, special things happen." I have an amazing amount of respect for those kind of guys because they were the elite guys making the sacrifice.

Miami Roots and Cleveland Leadership

My dream growing up as a kid, I just wanted to play in the NBA. Then when I had a chance to see that it could become a reality, I said, "I want to play 10 years." And then after that, it was, "I want to win a championship—just one championship. That will be a dream come true." It was never, "I want to make X amount of dollars or I want to be in an All-Star Game, or I want to do this or that individually."

For me, it was always from a team perspective. Being in the NBA would mean that I'd be on an NBA team. Winning a championship would mean that I would have to be on a very good NBA team. So I've exceeded expectations because I've won multiple championships, been to the Finals six straight times, played with Hall of Famers—some of the best players this game will ever see—and I'm still rolling.

The longer I've been playing, the more my expectations have increased to the point where I feel like I still have a lot further to go. And when it's all said and done, I'll look back and say, "I enjoyed it and I got the most out of my career."

I will always have a special connection to Miami. That was a big part of why I craved a desire to get back to Miami and play for the Heat in 2008, and win at home for the kids and for the city. My desire and my dream was to be an inspiration, and still is that way to be an inspiration because growing up, I didn't attend my first NBA game until I was in college.

Jones at his Crew Camp last year. (Photo courtesy of James Jones)

Jones at his Crew 22 Training Camp for underprivileged kids last year in Miami. (Photo courtesy of James Jones)

The more I played, the better I became, and the more I saw that the NBA was a possibility. So to be able to give the city someone as a blueprint and say, "It's possible to do it because James has done it," it's great. But more importantly, it just shows local kids in Miami, which is a melting pot and a diversity community, that anything is possible. In my life, I try to help kids decipher what the recipe for success is. It's consistency, a desire and a relentless effort to be a pro.

This summer, I'll be hosting my sixth annual Crew 22 Training Camp at Florida International University for one week in mid-July. I'll be working with around 100 kids, boys and girls from 11 to 14 years old, who are homeless and from foster and group homes—just those kids that want an opportunity to see their dreams come true.

The event is not just about basketball. We have empowerment sessions, marine biology classes, field trips to go bowling, courses for rope climbing 30 feet in the air—different things to foster team building. We also have swim safety demonstrations because drowning accounts for many youth deaths in South

Florida.

Also, the kids go on a tour of FIU, which is special because they have the opportunity to be the first generation in their family to go to college. During the week, I'm also going to have a fitness day with former boxer Evander Holyfield.

When I'm done playing, my goal is to expand my Legacy Foundation into a year-round program. I'm also starting to explore an interest in consulting with my wife, Destiny.

Looking back, it actually never was an inspiration to be a leader. I always had a thirst for knowledge to understand everything about the things I was involved in. For me, knowledge is power. With the game, my view in order to be a great basketball player, to be a great teammate, you have to understand everyone's role, you have to understand all the components of everything—the schemes, the adjustments, the perspectives from coaches, from players—because that's the only way you can help everyone in every situation.

As I did that, I found myself becoming a resource in the NBA. People start to come to you and ask you questions, and start to take your lead or follow your advice. Then before you know it, you're a leader and you're not even trying.

My message to players is while we're becoming more visible and more popular, at the end of the day, it's still what you do behind closed doors that drives the visibility and popularity. I think our guys are doing a better job of showing that side—being a parent, being a brother, being a community leader, the amount of power that you put into your craft, the late-night gym sessions. So my message to our guys is always show a little bit more of the input and not so much the output.

Now in Cleveland, it's getting to the point where I can just watch the guys figure it out on their own. I've enjoyed that with this team because Year 2 is where a lot of young guys make leaps and bounds in terms of growth. So I get a chance to sit back and look that we're talented enough as a team, both mentally and physically, and a lot of times I don't need to say anything.

#TheLand is really just about buying in completely to this family and this goal, which is winning a championship for Cleveland. We're very close as a team. We're a group that prefers to just lounge and talk. We're a dinner or lunch type team. We're very casual, sit back and talk basketball, talk life, reminisce, low energy, because we look at how much energy we expend away from the game. We're trying to make sure that all of our energy goes to the game.

We're better prepared to face the Warriors because we're healthy and we're playing with our primary guys. Last year, we were playing with a lot of contingencies throughout the season, throughout the postseason, so this year our guys have had a full year of experience. That makes a difference when you're talking about split-second decisions in the biggest moments of the year.

Winning a title always gets better because the longer you play, the closer you come to the end of the road. And the longer you play, the harder it becomes. So it'll be special just like one was better than none, two was better than one, and three will be better than two.

Post NBA Draft Deadline - ACC Power Rankings

Courier-Journal
Jeff Greer
May 28, 2016

The NBA Draft entry deadline has come and gone, and it's now a lot easier to judge the 2016-17 rosters for college basketball teams.

In the ACC, it's Duke and then everyone else. But while Duke is loaded with talent and the clear frontrunner, there are a bunch of teams with the potential to challenge the Blue Devils.

* UNC, even after losing Marcus Paige and Brice Johnson, has a solid core coming back from its run to the national title game, plus five-star big man Tony Bradley and two four-star guards in Brandon Robinson and Seventh Woods.

* Virginia loses Anthony Gill and Malcolm Brogdon, the Cavaliers' two best players, but London Perrantes is back with a bunch of intriguing returning players and a nice recruiting class - and Memphis transfer Austin Nichols is ready to go.

* Louisville lost Damion Lee, Trey Lewis and Chinanu Onuaku, but the Cards have reliable point man Quentin Snider and a trio of sophomores - Donovan Mitchell, Deng Adel and Ray Spalding - who appear primed for breakout seasons.

Clemson, Florida State, Miami, NC State, Notre Dame, Pittsburgh, Syracuse and Virginia Tech all have talent, too, which makes what I'm about to do feel really dumb. I am going to take a stab at some early offseason ACC power rankings, because it's always basketball season and I love it when people insult me.

Here goes nothing ...

1. Duke

The Blue Devils can go at least 10-deep next season. They have the nation's top recruiting class coming in, with PG Frank Jackson, SF Jayson Tatum, PF Harry Giles and C Marques Bolden all five-star prospects who could start. Oh, yeah, and they have that Grayson Allen kid back, too. He's pretty good. Amile Jefferson, Luke Kennard, Matt Jones and Chase Jeter give Duke some experience. Coach K's team will be the clear-cut preseason No. 1 and a favorite to win its second national title in three years. No pressure or anything.

2. North Carolina

Roy Williams may have lost his two best players, but there's a lot coming back to Chapel Hill. Theo Pinson and Justin Jackson form a nice wing pair, with Joel Berry at the point and Isaiah Hicks and Kennedy Meeks occupying the post. The key for UNC will be finding some outside shooting, which was the Heels' biggest weakness last season. Perhaps Robinson, Woods and sophomore Kenny Williams can help.

3. Virginia

A lot rides on Nichols filling the void left by Gill, and there's plenty of reason to think he can do that. Perrantes is one of the best point guards in the country, and I loved watching Kyle Guy on the AAU circuit. Ty Jerome is a nice point guard coming in, though he'll play behind Perrantes. Then there's a bunch of Cavaliers to pick from - Marial Shayok, Devon Hall, Isaiah Wilkins, Darius Thompson, Jarred Reuter - for breakout options. And it's Tony Bennett, who has become one of the best coaches in the country.

4. Louisville

To me, Rick Pitino's team would have leapfrogged Virginia and maybe UNC if Onuaku came back, but instead the Cards are a team with one proven commodity in Snider, a veteran role player in Mangok Mathiang and a bunch of players with potential to become very good, starting with Adel, Mitchell and Spalding. Incoming freshman VJ King is a smooth scorer, and Penn transfer Tony Hicks is an intriguing talent at combo guard. U of L needs one of Jaylen Johnson, Anas Mahmoud and Matz Stockman to step up in the frontcourt rotation.

5. Syracuse

I really struggled picking someone fifth here, but Syracuse is Syracuse, and the Orange frontcourt is going to be pretty solid. There's Tyler Lydon, Tyler Roberson and Dajuan Coleman back, plus transfer Pascal Chukwu, who is 7-2 and can fill space in the paint. The backcourt will include Franklin Howard and Colorado State transfer John Gillon at point and Tyus Battle and Matthew Moyer coming in as the wings tasked with replacing Trevor Cooney, Malachi Richardson and Michael Gbinije. I am happy to concede here that attempting to rank Nos. 5-12 is a total crapshoot and will come back to haunt me.

6. Virginia Tech

Buzz Williams and his group of returning players have generated quite a bit of ... buzz ... this offseason (sorry*), and for good reason. Five of Tech's top six scorers from last season will be back, and the Hokies won 10 ACC games last season with that core. Given the expected improvement over the offseason, and my belief that Buzz is a really good coach, Virginia Tech should get to double-digit league wins again this season. (*I'm actually not that sorry.)

7. Miami

The Hurricanes lost a lot after this season, with Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri all moving on, plus a few transfers. But Jim Larrañaga has Ja'Quan Newton, Davon Reed, Anthony Lawrence and Kamari Murphy back, plus a quality group of newcomers. Bruce Brown and Dewan Huell are blue-chip prospects who should play right away, and Rashad Muhammad will be eligible this coming season to give Miami another wing scorer.

8. Pittsburgh

The hiring of Kevin Stallings wasn't exactly received well in Pittsburgh. It seemed like such

an odd choice after the school appeared to let its winningest coach, Jamie Dixon, walk without much of a fight. Things had plateaued at Pitt and then started to drop off, sure, but the situation looked like the perfect scenario for a young, up-and-coming coach to come in and pump some zest into the program. That said, there's talent there - Mike Young, Jamel Artis, Chris Jones and Cam Johnson form a solid nucleus, with guys like Sheldon Jeter and Ryan Luther back to help. Damon Wilson has big shoes to fill following James Robinson, and the incoming freshmen can contribute.

9. Notre Dame

Losing Zach Auguste and Demetrius Jackson hurts, obviously, but I like Bonzie Colson, VJ Beachem and Steve Vasturia - and Mike Brey - enough to consider the Irish as an NCAA Tournament team. The point guard spot is a question, with TJ Gibbs and Matt Farrell expected to share that duty. Then Brey has a stable of bigs who can help Colson with the rebounding haul. He seems especially high on Martin Geben, a rising junior, to carry some of Auguste's big-man responsibilities.

10. NC State

The Wolfpack needs three things: A fully healthy Dennis Smith Jr. who plays the way he did on the AAU circuit last summer; Terry Henderson living up to the hype; and five-star big man Omer Yurtseven being the stud recruiting analysts say he is. If Yurtseven is that good, and he is paired with BeeJay Anya and Abdul-Malik Abu, NC State should have a solid top six (with Maverick Rowan in there, too). Depth is a little concerning, but the potential for Smith and Yurtseven is awfully high.

11. Florida State

A lot of people are bullish on the Seminoles, and I get it. Xavier Rathan-Mayes is a good player, and Dwayne Bacon is super talented. Jonathan Isaac can be a stud as a freshman, and Trent Forrest and CJ Walker will help in the backcourt. The potential, like NC State, is through the roof. But I just don't trust FSU to live up to the hype. Bacon was paired with XRM and Malik Beasley, a projected first-round pick, last season, and FSU went 8-10 in the league and lost 14 games overall.

12. Clemson

The funny thing about putting Clemson 12th is that I really like the Tigers. Jaron Blossomgame coming back is huge, and so is having a solid group of returning players - and a few quality transfers - around him. Brad Brownell's team was one of the surprises in the ACC last season, winning 10 games, but the sledding may be a bit tougher this campaign. Clemson has the talent to make the NCAA Tournament, but somebody has to finish 12th in a league with 12 tournament-quality rosters.

13. Wake Forest

14. Boston College

15. Georgia Tech

Colts Notebook: Swoope eyes step up to active roster

The Herald Bulletin

George Bremer

May 25, 2016

INDIANAPOLIS — There wasn't one particular moment when it hit Erik Swoope he'd become a football player.

Rather, it was a series of observations and small revelations that led the way.

"My first year, I was trying to make a lot of comparisons," the former University of Miami basketball standout said Tuesday as the Indianapolis Colts continued OTAs. "OK, this is like what I used to do. This is like what I used to do.' As I began to study and see different guys play, I was like, 'Basketball and football have nothing in common.' And once I really understood that in my heart, then the plays and everything we're doing started making more sense."

Swoope is fully aware of his surroundings this spring, and the timing couldn't be better.

With the free agent departure of Coby Fleener to New Orleans, there's an opening for an athletic tight end to join the mix with versatile Dwayne Allen and sledgehammer Jack Doyle.

Swoope has made his candidacy to fill the vacancy clear.

"He's made tremendous strides basically every day since he's been here," Colts head coach Chuck Pagano said. "Obviously, that piece of clay and that body that we saw early on is much different now. Again, we're in shorts. We're running around in just helmets is all. The heavy lifting that has to come from that position that they have to do as an in-line blocker — some of that stuff where you do it whether it's out of the

backfield or on the line of scrimmage, move tight end stuff — we're going to find out a lot more obviously going into this training camp once we get the pads on.

"He's doing a good job. He doesn't look like a guy that's never played and a basketballer that's playing football for the first time."

Swoope is trying to follow in the footsteps of such hardwood-to-gridiron stars as San Diego's Antonio Gates and Seattle's Jimmy Graham, the latter of whom also played for the Hurricanes.

But he understands time is running short.

Swoope turned down offers to play professional basketball overseas when he signed with the Colts in 2014. He's spent an apprenticeship of sorts ever since, being cut at the end of training camp and spending the regular season on the practice squad.

Now he feels it's time to show what he's learned.

"And that's mainly me challenging myself," Swoope said. "Two years of studying is more than enough."

C Izundu Aiming to Be Better Defender in Offseason

Inside the U
Chris Stock
July 24, 2016

An injured ankle has slowed Ebuka Izundu 's offseason, but he's working to be a key player after playing limited minutes as a freshman.

"I'm very excited," Izundu said. "I'm trying to get some extended minutes. I can't wait."

Izundu, a 6-foot-10 center, and fellow sophomore Anthony Lawrence could round out the starting lineup to go along with penciled in starters Ja'Quan Newton, Davon Reed, and Kamari Murphy.

"(Ebuka and Anthony) have some experience, but their roles are going to be expanded this year and we need them to play really, really well for us to be good because those five guys could actually be a starting five," head coach Jim Larrañaga said.

For Izundu to hold down a starter's role he will have to make immense improvements on the defensive end of the court.

"I just need to stop fouling," he said. "That's what I really need to work on this year. Getting in foul trouble is going to put me right on the bench."

Limiting fouls is something former UM center Tonye Jekiri had to work on throughout his career at Miami and he showed improvements as an upperclassman. Jekiri recorded a foul every 6.7 minutes as a freshman and 8.1 as a sophomore to every 9.8 minutes as a junior and 9.3 as a senior.

Izundu only played 79 minutes last season, but committed 17 fouls at a rate

of one foul every 4.6 minutes.

Jekiri has given advice to Izundu to help him be a better defender and cut down on fouls.

"He gave me some advice on how to guard the screen because I would hedge a lot and get back late to my man so he told me to flatten my hedge and move my feet as fast as I can to hold him off because the point guard is going to catch up with him eventually," Izundu said.

Jekiri also gave Izundu constant messages during last season:

"You have to do things better, go harder every time, and don't let anyone push you around."

In addition to better positioning, Izundu is hoping added strength in the offseason will help him be a better defender. He weighed 200 pounds when he first arrived at UM last summer, but is up to 214 pounds with a goal of reaching 230-235 for the season.

Izundu has been limited this summer with a high ankle sprain early at the beginning of offseason workouts, but resumed action last week.

"My jump shot is getting better and I'm getting stronger," Izundu said.

Miami has been holding practices two hours a week during the summer and will continue until a three-week break begins on Aug. 5.

"I think we're going to be very good, but we just have a little work to do," Izundu said. "

Gunma's Hamilton happy to help others shine

**Japan Times
Ed Odeven
May 18, 2016**

The Japan Times has featured periodic interviews with players in the bj-league since 2006 in this long-running series. Gary Hamilton of the Gunma Crane Thunders is the subject of this week's profile. Because the league's final game was held on Sunday, this article wraps up the series in its current format.

Position: Power forward
Hometown: Los Angeles
College: University of Miami (Florida)

Noteworthy: Hamilton is one of the elite rebounders in bj-league history. He won rebounding titles in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 seasons while playing for the Shiga Lakestars, averaging 14.3 and 15.2 rebounds a game, respectively. In the 2011-12 campaign, Hamilton was No. 2 in boards (11.4 a game) while suiting up for the Rising Fukuoka. For the 2014-15 season, his rebounding average (9.7) was No. 9 overall. He's also finished in the top 10 in the league in assists and steals on multiple occasions, telling stats that underline his versatility and all-around skills. ... This season, Hamilton, one of the most gifted passing forwards in the league's 11-season history, joined Gunma in February and appeared in 22 games. He averaged 8.9 points, 10.8 rebounds and 3.8 assists. The Crane Thunders finished ninth in the 12-team Eastern Conference, falling short of earning one of the conference's eight coveted playoff spots. ... He's also played pro ball in Poland, Germany, Uruguay and Slovakia.

Hamilton has three younger brothers who have also played NCAA Division I college basketball. Jordan, a 25-year-old guard/forward, went to the University of Texas (2009-11) and has played in the NBA for the Denver Nuggets, Houston Rockets, Los Angeles Clippers and New Orleans Pelicans, as well as in the NBA Development League, Russia and Venezuela. Guard Isaac, 22, has been enrolled at UCLA since 2013. The youngest, 20-year-old Daniel, an athletic swingman who starred for the University of Connecticut for two seasons, then declared for the 2016 NBA Draft in April.

You played a little less than half the 52-game season for the Gunma Crane Thunders, making your season debut on Feb. 6. Would you say you had a solid season in the 22 games you played for Gunma?

I feel like I could've played a little bit better, but with the rule changes (due to the reduction in imports this season to two per team on the court from three), and coach (Hirokazu Nema) was trying to divide minutes, it was a little difficult to get a (solid) rotation.

From your perspective, what were the biggest changes that have taken place in the bj-league since you made your debut here with the Shiga Lakestars in 2009?

The biggest change I would say is the import rule, from five (per team) to now three imports, who just want to be competitive and want to compete. Not only are you competing in practice, but you are competing in the gym and trying to get that rhythm is a little bit difficult. I know everybody wants to play a certain amount of minutes, so you can clash or it can turn out to be a good thing. ... But the teams that win and have a winning record, they have managed it and figured it out. I think that's the biggest (change).

The problem on our team was there was just a lot of disagreement ... because everybody wanted to play. ... I just watched everything unfold, and it unfolded in a bad way I would say, in not making the playoffs. So it really didn't work out for the better.

The Crane Thunders just missed out on the eighth and final playoff spot for the Eastern Conference. If the team had another two to three weeks in the regular season, do you believe Gunma would've squeezed into the playoffs and overtaken the Aomori Wat's for the final spot? And how disappointing was it for you that the team missed out on the playoffs?

It was too inconsistent. ... And once we shot past a couple teams, we got a little too comfortable.

I couldn't help as I wanted to and what happened happened.

Are you interested in returning to Gunma for the 2016-17 season? Is that something you've discussed with the team?

No, I haven't. I haven't talked to anybody about returning or anything like that. I'm not sure if it would be a possibility if I would go back to that team. I'm not sure what direction they want to go in.

I was in South America (Uruguay) previously and our season ended early, so so I just came down from the word of Wara (Gunma guard Takamichi Fujiwara) and coach (Hirokazu Nema, former Shiga assistant). It was friendship-based, and they figured I could come in and help them out, and I came in and did what I did. It just fell short.

With the bj-league becoming a part of the new B. League (including the NBL and NBDL) under the restructured Japan Basketball Association, the sport's governing body here, it will cease to exist as a separate entity. That said, in the bj-league's 11 years there have been a handful of rebounders for many years at the top of the list, including yourself, Chris Holm, Wendell White and Reggie Warren, among others. Beside rebounding excellence, what do you think your legacy is as a bj-league player?

I think my legacy has been what my dad would describe myself as I would be like a "go-through player," not so much a go-to player. I play a lot of team basketball. I think three out of the five years that I played in this league I led my team in assists and rebounding, which is really unusual for a guy at my position.

Definitely rebounding, but aside from that just a playmaker and getting my teammates involved in the game, because I felt like I could get my teammates going and then I could get going a little bit better. I know coming to Gunma after my arrival I was able to help Thomas Kennedy's points per game (24.6 final scoring average, No. 3 in the league) go up a little bit. He was able to thank me for that success, and that made me feel good as a teammate, knowing that you've come in and just helped somebody.

Any additional thoughts on your legacy?

A playmaker, team player-type of guy. And I pride myself on that, distributing the ball and helping guys get better looks. ... A go-through player, not a go-to player.

Who are five or so of the toughest players you've competed against at both ends of the floor during your years in the bj-league? Who's been the hardest guy(s) to score on? To defend?

(Hamamatsu's) Reggie Warren's a good competitor. He competes. He's real chatty. He's a fun guy to play against.

(Sendai's) Wendell White, definitely, is smart, he can set up anything. He got the MVP honors for a reason.

I would say just going back that (facing retired Ryukyuu legend) Jeff Newton was a tough task. He would quietly give you that 25 points, not knowing where it came from. But he was just knocking down every opportunity; he wasn't missing any open shots for sure.

Playing with and against (Toyama's) Masashi Joho, he's just a tough, scrappy, athletic scorer. He can compete on the defensive end also. ... To play against him, he's always going to give you the dagger; when you think you are going to win this game, he'll definitely knock you out.

(Former Shiga teammate) Mike Marshall was a "silent assassin," with big baskets at key moments.

(Retired Osaka Evessa legend) Lynn Washington was just a competitor that was strong, had a strong will. Just strong is how I would describe that guy. He was just like a general. He led his team to a lot of success and you've got to tip your hat off to him for what he's done on the basketball court, for sure, you can't take that away from him.

In your own words, what descriptive words do you think best sum up how you play on the court?

Definitely, a hard-hat, blue-collar player. Tough and in some sense just a leader, vocal.

Think back to growing up, at what age do you have idea or dream to pursue career as a pro player? What gave you the self confidence that this would happen?

Well, growing up I was dreaming to be a professional something, and it started out playing American football, actually, and I didn't make the transition over to playing basketball even until I was 16. (Before that), I didn't play organized basketball at all, I was playing it in the streets in Los Angeles. I was just playing for fun and I always had a hoop in my backyard.

That transition going from 6-4 (193 cm) to 6-8 (203 cm) in one summer between my freshman and sophomore year in high school just gave me the confidence to want to go out and pursue basketball in general, and then just the raw skill set that I had in the three years in high school, going up against a lot of major schools going into college gave me the confidence to know ... that I could go to the next level, whichever it was knowing that it was basketball outside of the NBA, and playing abroad was definitely going to be my next move after the University of Miami.

Just being 6-8 gave that confidence alone. There's a lot of guys that say, "If I had that height, if I had that height," and if they were over 6-5 what they would do with it from the athletics point of view. I didn't want to disappoint those guys that were dreaming to be my height, so I had to do something and that confidence came from just height alone actually.

During your four seasons at Miami you appeared in 119 games and made 37 starts. Did you develop a stronger all-around basketball IQ by having that chance to come off the bench and watch the game a bit more than if you were starting all of those games?

I think coming off the bench did help me a great deal. Competing well in practice and playing well against starters lets you know that you do belong out there so when you get your opportunities, you have to make the best of it.

When I was sitting there and watching the games unfold, what I can do was just help us in any kind of way. It was definitely a plus that I was able to pick my spots about how I maneuver around the court, and just know that I can get in the game coming off the bench ... and if a guy (on the other team) was a little bit winded while I'm fresh, that is an advantage.

We practice all week, so you know what your teammates are going to do. You know what your teammates are capable of, so just being able to get that feel of the opponent was an advantage in my eyes.

What was your biggest thrill or most memorable performance/game as a college player? What made it special?

I remember being on the court versus UConn my sophomore year, in 2003. We were playing the University of Connecticut at home, and we were down two (points). ... I was guarding the inbounds, and I was able to get a deflection and have the opponent fumble the ball in the corner, and our best shooter was guarding the corner, and Darius Rice was able to retrieve the ball and hit a 3-point shot at the buzzer to win the game playing against a top team in the country like that.

It was amazing. It was unbelievable. ... I was just glad to be a part of it.

(Reporter's note: UConn reached the Sweet 16 at the NCAA Tournament that year, then won the title in 2004.)

You don't hear a lot about deflections, isn't that true?

Yeah, that's not even a statistic. It probably should be, you know?

How did your father, Gregory, make a positive impact on your life? How did he influence you and help you in your growth and maturation as a student and young man?

My father, just being around when I was growing up in South Central Los Angeles. Just to even have a father was huge looking back at it as an adult now. I didn't really pay attention much when I was younger, but a lot of guys that I grew up with didn't have their fathers present or in their lives at all. So just the fact that my father was able to be a father to me and a mentor to a lot of my friends was just a blessing in itself.

Outside of sports, just life advice and everything like that was huge for me and just a huge impact for my father to be there for me, all four of my brothers and my sister, just giving you life gems and everything like that, was huge for me.

As far as athletically, he didn't really like football at all. He was a big baseball and basketball fan and he grew up playing (both). He really, really wanted me to play basketball, because I went to the same high school as him, so for three years I went to Crenshaw High School, that's the high school that he went to. His coach, Willie West (a Los Angeles

High School Sports Hall of Fame inductee), was still there coaching the basketball team, so I was trying to do everything I can. Coach was still in contact with my father just from a friendship standpoint...

With my dad just being focal and sharing his opinion on how I should try out for the team, and like I said, growing those 4 inches over that summer definitely made me want to give it a shot because I was just tired of getting hit in my legs playing football. ... So I just gave it a shot, and if it wasn't for him I probably wouldn't ever think I was good enough to play basketball because that was our primary sport at the high school. They were pretty good; they had a pretty good team.

The tryout was at Crenshaw, over 300 students tried out. It was ridiculous. Only about 15, 16 guys made the varsity (team). Actually, when I made the team, I didn't expect to make varsity at all. I was thinking I had zero chance. I was going to be like a JV-type player, and so after practice in the first month I had got moved up to varsity before the season even started and they brought a junior down to JV and moved me up to varsity.

I didn't get much time but it was a heck of an experience for me, and that was another confidence booster that just helped me want to play the game more and want to be better.

After three years at Crenshaw, when you transferred to rival Susan Miller Dorsey High School as a senior, was it a difficult move?

Going into my senior year, there was a real competitive team at Crenshaw. (Dorsey) was a rival school. There was a lot of controversy with that because there were also rival gangs, too. That transition going there and having to deal with off-court issues. ...

Not being a gangster or anything, but just being associated with that school, they just suspect anything like that just because of the gang culture.

So I had a rough time making a transition and it was actually a tough time making a decision. It was something that I had to pray about with my family, just prayed that I could go there and be safe, most importantly, and not worry about basketball, because that was going to take care of itself. But everything actually ended up working out. A couple of guys that I went to junior high with, so they were able to help me out and vouch for me.

In high school, college, and at the pro level overseas in the various places you've played, who are some of the better-known guys you've competed against on opposing teams?

(Reporter's note: As a freshman, Hamilton had a season-high 12 rebounds, against Providence College, while battling inside against the Friars' Ryan Gomes, a future NBA player. He recalled that encounter during our phone interview.)

To be able to get (12 rebounds) against a guy that was eventually an NBA player, that was another confidence booster for me. Gomes was a little-bit undersized guy that made it to the next level and had a solid career in the NBA (2005-12, Boston Celtics, Minnesota Timberwolves and Los Angeles Clippers; 2013-14, Oklahoma City Thunder). So that was real big for me, and that was a real memorable game for myself.

I would say at university one of the better guys at my position was Mike Sweetney (Georgetown), he was a pretty good guy. He ran the floor like a deer and probably weighed 280 (127 kg). Just real strong and could do so much with that size. He was so versatile at that size. It was just ridiculous.

In those UConn battles, playing against Charlie Villanueva, Ben Gordon, Emeka Okafor, those guys were always a powerhouse over at UConn.

Transferring over to the ACC (when Miami left the Big East for the 2004-05 academic year), I think about playing at Cameron Indoor and playing (Duke standouts) J.J. Reddick, Shelden Williams and Shavlik Randolph.

At Wake Forest, probably one of the biggest competitors I've ever played against and ever seen a guy that wanted to win more was Chris Paul. He was just a vocal leader and sportsman, who would do anything to get the job done. And just looking back at that time and watching a young guy as a freshman lead seniors and juniors, upperclassmen, the way he talked to them was like a point guard should talk to them. He'd get your attention. Maybe you wouldn't like what he said and you were going to talk to him later, but those words that he was using were choice words — and he got your attention, for sure.

In the pros, playing over in Germany, I played with a guy named Brandon Jenkins from the University of Louisville. He was telling me stories about playing for Rick Pitino. He's an athletic point guard and he's still playing, he's playing over in (Slovakia) right now. He's a great competitive guy.

What were the many backyard basketball games like for the Hamilton boys? Were they super competitive, spirited battles? Did you mostly play in the backyard or in local parks and gyms as well?

We did a little bit of both. We had a lot of two-on-two battles. ... I would never ever not let them play if they were able to compete. I would let them get on the floor just to get a sweat in the backyard, just to have fun competing and turning it into a fight nightly, so we all had that drive and that competitive edge, which started playing backyard basketball for sure.

It would be me and the youngest versus the two that were in the middle, so they wouldn't take it easy on the youngest one.

Have you heard of other families that have had four siblings, brothers and sisters, play D-I basketball?

Crazy story, a guy I played high school with ... Onye Ibekwe, he was my age and we played over on the same team at Crenshaw, and he had a younger brother Ekene Ibekwe that went to the University of Maryland, and he had a younger sister (Chinyere) who went to UCLA, and their youngest sister (Ify) to University of Arizona. That is exciting to see that success through our families.

Are you proud setting the bar for your brothers in basketball, being a role model for them?

Most definitely ... but at the same time being that pioneer for them, setting that bar so high, is also a great thing, too. Just being the first one, like the guy putting together the blueprint, so I'm definitely proud to start a little basketball team .. and hopefully those guys will be as successful as possible.

Big opportunity awaits freshman Dejan “DJ” Vasiljevic

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

May 16, 2016

Between trips to Coral Gables and China, Dejan “D.J.” Vasiljevic has a busy summer ahead.

The Australian freshman arrived at UM on Saturday, having traveled approximately 9,700 miles from his home in Melbourne. He’ll take classes and train for a little less than a month, then travel more than 15,000 miles round trip to China to participate in what he and UM coach Jim Larrañaga called an Australian national team development camp. Then it’s back on campus for more summer classes and more training until the school year begins in August.

“It’s an amazing honor to have a chance to represent my country, showcase my talents with the national group and be able to perform at the highest level,” he said Sunday via phone, as he was moving into his dorm room.

Vasiljevic, a 6-foot-2, 195-pound combo guard who describes his game as “versatile,” is one of the top junior players in Australia. He shined at both the under-17 and under-19 international tournaments. However, he will be a rookie at the camp, which he said will be held at two locations in China from June 23-July 2. The 19-year-old expects to be tested by veterans like Chicago Bulls forward Cameron Bairstow, 25, Brisbane Bullets (Australian NBL) guard Adam Gibson, 29, and Illawarra Hawks (NBL) guard Mitch Norton, 23.

“It’ll be a lot tougher,” Vasiljevic said. “They’re older than me and far more experienced. They’ll treat me like a rookie. I’m going to embrace the challenge.”

Basketball Australia spokeswoman Lisa Hasker said Vasiljevic will be part of “an ‘emerging’ Boomers team with a couple of Olympic squad members and a couple of Aussie college stars” like himself. They will play a tournament in China. The tournament is in its “final planning stages,” Hasker said.

Larrañaga, who signed Vasiljevic as part of the first top-10 recruiting class in program history, said the camp will be a spectacular opportunity for the freshman. He won’t be a part of the “Boomers” squad that plays in Rio from Aug. 5-21, but he could be in line for future Olympic duty.

“It would be like one of our college players being included in USA Basketball’s preparation for the Olympics,” Larrañaga said. “He’s not an NBA player, but we want to include him in the trials because we think when LeBron James and Dwyane Wade and these guys are done, he’ll have graduated in the program. We’re not intending on them being with the Olympics this year, but in four years, we think in all likelihood, they’ll be considered.”

Since the camp runs between UM’s Summer A and B sessions, Vasiljevic, who is studying business and economics at UM, will have to convince his professors to let him take “A” finals early and get ahead of “B” coursework.

Larrañaga was impressed with the email Vasiljevic sent him this spring, asking how he could both attend the national camp and also do what’s best for the Hurricanes. “It was so well-written and so thoughtful and so understanding,” Larrañaga said. “This is a sharp individual. This kid knows what it’s all about.”

Will he be able to fit everything in?

“I’m not the decision-maker. That’s up to faculty members, but they’re going to love the kid,” Larrañaga said. “Who wouldn’t want a young man to experience being with their national team? What an honor that is – and what an educational experience to go to China.”

Larrañaga reflects on receiving George Mason's highest honor

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

May 13, 2016

Jim Larrañaga didn't go home after a long week at the ACC spring meetings north of Jacksonville. He spoke along with Mark Richt at a Hurricane Club event Thursday in Atlanta, then flew north for a special celebration.

Larrañaga will receive George Mason's highest honor, the Mason Medal, at the school's commencement ceremony on Saturday.

"I see the award as being won by a host of people," Larrañaga said. "It's about so many people who helped us. I might be the one who is being honored, but it's about the team effort we got from the time we arrived."

Larrañaga, who will be joined by his wife, Liz, his two sons Jay and Jon, and daughter-in-law Elyssa at the ceremony, deflected credit to his assistant coaches and players. Most importantly, he said, then-school president Alan Merten supported his program and "included me in ways basketball coaches usually aren't." For that reason Larrañaga — who said he receives plenty of support at Miami — was nervous about leaving George Mason in 2011.

Reflecting on the honor while sitting on a deck at the Amelia Island Ritz-Carlton, he also spoke of "The Insiders," a group of dedicated basketball boosters who helped raise money for amenities the Patriots had never had: charter flights, a golf cart to shuttle recruits around campus, a renovated locker room.

"We were busing to a lot of games," Larrañaga said. "When we went from Northern Virginia to UNC-Wilmington,

that was an eight-hour bus trip. It became a one-hour flight, so we weren't fatigued. The first year we did it was the first year we beat Wilmington at Wilmington."

Larrañaga went 273-164 in 14 seasons in Fairfax, winning more games than any coach in Colonial Athletic Conference history. His time included five NCAA tournament appearances and, of course, the 2006 Final Four run, the first time a mid-major advanced that far in 27 years. Before he arrived in 1997, the Patriots had seven consecutive losing seasons.

The George Mason Medal is designated by the George Mason University Board of Visitors to be the university's highest honorary award. This medal is for those with "a record of service to their community, state, or nation consistent with the level and quality of George Mason's public service in his own time," according to a UM release.

Though not a Revolutionary War figure like Mason, Larrañaga led enough progress in his area of expertise to be worthy of the honor. Before 2006, much of the country didn't think about George Mason much. Now they're the shining example of the Mid-Major That Could.

Transfers Turning into NCAA's Free Agent Market

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
May 8, 2016

We live in an age of instant gratification. We get annoyed if a website takes more than a few seconds to load. We pay extra for same-day delivery. We do our banking online because drive-through isn't fast enough anymore.

We want our news now. Our photos now. Our TV shows on demand.

It should come as little surprise, then, that college basketball players raised in this generation are more impatient than ever, unwilling to wait for playing time, itching to bolt if their expectations aren't met.

They are transferring at such an alarming rate that the trend is being termed "an epidemic" and was one of the hottest topics at the national coaches meeting during the recent Final Four.

More than 700 players are transferring this spring from the 351 Division I men's programs around the country. That's an average of two per team. Roughly 40 percent of them are switching schools in their first two years. Seventy-five of them have graduated and are changing schools for their final year of eligibility, a growing movement that has decimated some mid-major rosters.

Ten years ago, only 250 players transferred. Three years ago, it was around 450.

"Transferring 25 years ago was really frowned upon, was like there was something wrong with your basketball program if someone wanted to transfer to another school," said University of Miami coach Jim Larrañaga, who has had six players transfer in and out over the past three years.

"Now, transferring is so commonplace that last year I heard a statistic that only seven Division I schools did not have someone transferring. That means 344 schools had at least one transfer, and two was normal."

ESPN analyst Dick Vitale is deeply troubled by the trend, calling it "sickening." He puts some of the blame on high school coaches and AAU coaches for inflating players' egos with unrealistic expectations and on college coaches for raiding other programs when they get a whiff of an impatient player.

"I think it's a scenario where coaches have to start looking in the mirror, too, because I think coaches are involved, runners are involved, AAU and high school coaches are involved," Vitale said. "If they sense a kid is unhappy, they make sure and get the word out real quick to the player that, 'Hey, School X would be interested in you.'"

"So right away the thought process is there: 'Maybe if I transfer, wow, it will be a whole different scenario.' Coaches will deny that, but there's no doubt in my mind that coaches look at rosters, see kids who were big-time recruits sitting the bench, not getting any PT [playing time] and they get the word out, not through them, but through somebody, that 'if you leave, we'd be interested.' I really believe that's happening and it's created this unbelievable epidemic."

The college revolving door is not exclusive to student athletes. A July 2015 study published by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center found that 37.2 percent of college students who started in 2008 transferred at least once. Of those who transferred, 45 percent switched schools more than once.

"We're not a very patient society," Larrañaga said. "In today's day and age, kids are influenced by so many different factors; and they all have the goal of playing in the NBA; and they're looking for immediate satisfaction, and if it's not there, they'll go search for it someplace else."

Although Larrañaga prefers to develop players over four years, he recognizes that the abundance of transfers opens up a giant pool of talent that can help his program. Three of the key players on the Hurricanes' 2016 Sweet 16 team were transfers — Angel Rodriguez (from Kansas State), Sheldon McClellan (from Texas), and Kamari Murphy (from Oklahoma State). The Canes' 2013 Sweet 16 team was also led by transfers Shane Larkin (from DePaul) and Kenny Kadji (from Florida).

All around the state, players are coming and going to and from the University of Florida, Florida State, FIU

and FAU.

The college transfer market has become like the NBA free agent market, with AAU coaches and other hangers-on often acting as de facto agents. It means college coaches are keeping up with the lists and wooing prospects just as they do high school athletes.

The Hurricanes lost 62 percent of their scoring with the graduation of Rodriguez, McClellan and Tonye Jekiri, so Larrañaga and his staff have been scouring the transfer market in recent weeks and putting on the hard sell with two scholarships available.

They are particularly interested in graduate transfers who might be able to help the team immediately.

Canyon Barry, youngest son of the UM and NBA legend Rick Barry, is due to graduate from the College of Charleston this summer and is looking to transfer for his final year of eligibility. Barry has a 4.0 GPA, is a two-time Academic All-American and is pursuing a master's degree in nuclear engineering.

Larrañaga had lunch with Barry in Charleston a few weeks ago, and Barry visited the UM campus on Monday and Tuesday. He visited Florida a few weeks ago and is also being courted by Northwestern, California, Kansas, Louisville and Ole Miss.

Another transfer Larrañaga has been in touch with is Duke's Derryck Thornton, but he is an underclassman and would have to sit out next season.

Ben Carter, a 6-9 graduate of UNLV, is said to be looking at Miami and would be able to play immediately for his final year of eligibility. In all, there are 75 graduate transfers on the market seeking to play their final season with a new team. Those players are highly coveted because they proved they can compete at the college level, are likely to be more mature than 18-year-olds, and they don't have to sit out a year so they can "help your team get over the hump if you're a little young," Larrañaga said.

The graduate-transfer rule states that if a student-athlete completes his or her undergraduate degree in fewer than four years of athletic eligibility, they can go to another school that offers a graduate program not offered at his/her current school without the penalty of having to sit out a season.

What started as a well-meaning rule for athletes who excelled in the classroom has instead become a way for mid-major players to bolt to higher-profile schools for their final year of eligibility.

Gary Waters, the coach at Cleveland State, is a victim of the transfer craze. Over the past two years, he lost three standout players — Bryn Forbes went to Michigan State, and fifth-year graduates Anton Grady (Wichita State) and Trey Lewis (Louisville) opted for more exposure their final season.

"I understand why the kids do it," Waters said. "It's hard to say no to a high-major team that wants you, and everyone around them is telling them to leave. What bothers me more is that some schools are poaching players from other schools, to the point that they have a War Room and assistant coaches are assigned to track players at other schools who are on schedule to graduate with eligibility remaining. They make lists of players to raid, and then get the word to the kid, through a contact, that they're interested in signing him for the final year."

"Those coaches don't have to put in the work, and they get a finished product, a ready-made player. It's not right. I am penalized because I coached a kid up and got him to graduate early. I know of six or seven mid-major coaches who had multiple players transfer and then lost their jobs the next season because the team didn't perform. I don't know if people realize how severe a problem this has become."

Waters also said the suggestion that players are seeking specialized masters programs is "a farce." Most of these moves are "strictly about basketball."

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said he is more concerned about the flood of graduate transfers than the one-and-done incoming freshmen.

"I would tell you this: The one-and-done from high school is not the story of college basketball," Krzyzewski said in March during the NCAA Tournament. "The one-and-done with the fifth-year graduate player is what is the main story for college basketball. There are many, many more of those. And that's hurt a lot of our mid-major programs when these kids leave and go. Many, many more. Very few one-and-done from

high school, very few compared to that."

Said Vitale: The initial purpose of that rule was very positive. But you can't convince me that the majority of these graduates are transferring for academics. It's about basketball. You're a coach who gives a kid your heart and soul for four years and then all of a sudden the fifth year he runs on you? That's just not right. Abuse, abuse and abuse."

ESPN college basketball writer Jeff Goodman has kept a comprehensive college transfer list for the past eight years and follows the issue closely. He said there are lists of potential transfers that circulate among college coaches, schools get the word out through intermediaries as to who they are pursuing, and when April rolls around, they swarm.

"More often than not, it's not the actual kid [with the idea to transfer]," Goodman said. "I think it's the people around him that are telling him, 'Hey, you should get out of there. You could play somewhere else right away. You're not getting a fair shake. You should be getting more touches, a bigger role.' Social media doesn't help matters, either. People can get to these kids easily and tell them they should leave."

In many cases, the fifth-year graduate players are being more sought after than McDonald's All-Americans.

Larrañaga tells the story of his visit to the home of Los Angeles Lakers power forward Tarik Black in spring 2013. Black, 6-9, was about to graduate from Memphis and was looking for a new challenge for his final year of college basketball. The Hurricanes coaching staff was very interested in him.

"I thought the meeting went very well, though maybe we had a shot, but when I asked him what were the other schools he was considering, he named nine of the best basketball programs in the country, including Duke, Georgetown, Kansas and Texas," Larrañaga said. "He had everybody recruiting him and he ended up going to Kansas."

"It's not like, 'Oh, this kid's transferring, there must be some baggage.' No, these kids are prime prospects, 21, 22, 23 years old, only one year left, they can come in and get you over the hump."

It doesn't appear the trend will cool anytime soon. The NCAA has taken note, although there doesn't seem to be any quick solution.

"The issue of transfer rules, whether it's for undergraduates or graduates, is one of the most hotly debated and discussed, I think, in sport right now, whether it's football or basketball," Mark Emmert, the NCAA president, said at the Final Four. "The challenge is, it's really hard to figure out a right way to resolve this issue."

THE REVOLVING DOOR

Every year, more and more college basketball players are choosing to transfer in the hopes of more playing time and other reasons. Ten years ago, there were 200 transfers nationwide. The past two seasons, more than 700 have transferred — an average of two per school. Here is a look at who transferred in and out at the University of Miami, University of Florida, Florida State, Florida International and Florida Atlantic over the past few years:

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

Transferred IN

2013: Donnavan Kirk, Jr., (grad student) from DePaul; Angel Rodriguez, Soph., from Kansas State; Sheldon McClellan, Soph., from Texas.

2014: Joe Thomas, Jr., (grad student) from Niagara; Kamari Murphy, Soph., from Oklahoma St.

2015: Rashad Muhammad, Soph., from San Jose State.

Transferred OUT

2013: Bishop Daniels, Fr., to Rutgers

2014: James Kelly, Jr., to Marshall.

2015: Manu Lecomte, Soph., to Baylor; Deandre Burnett, Fr., to Ole Miss; Omar Sherman, Soph., to Paris (Texas) Junior College.

2016: James Palmer, Soph., to Nebraska.

Looking ahead: Miami won't stop the party in 2016-17

ESPN.com
Myron Medcalf
April 14, 2016

It's never too early to look at what's to come. Over the next few weeks, we will give you a peek at what is ahead for teams in the Power 5 conferences and some other teams expected to be players on the national scene. Next up: Miami.

When Jim Larrañaga left George Mason for Miami in 2011, his new hub featured one of the most appealing backdrops for any young man, athlete or not, in America: South Beach.

The sun sells, man. And if Larrañaga could use it to fire up a program that reached the NCAA tournament just six times prior to his arrival, perhaps he could build something. That was the idea. And after last season's Sweet 16 run -- the second of his tenure -- it seemed more tangible.

But the test comes in 2016-17. Is Miami just another squad riding the ACC's wave or a team that's positioned to do more than make a Sweet 16 run every three years? The latter seems feasible based on the top-15 recruiting class that will reduce the deficit created by the departure of Larrañaga's most important contributors and leaders.

Miami lost Angel Rodriguez (12.6 PPG, 4.5 APG), Sheldon McClellan (16.3 PPG) and Tonye Jekiri (7.6 PPG, 8.6 RPG, 1.0 BPG). That's the collection of upperclassmen who anchored last season's success.

The great Miami rapper and philosopher Pitbull once said, however, "Don't stop the party." And the party won't stop in Miami in 2016-17, although the Hurricanes will reassemble their roster in bullish times for the ACC. Duke should enter the preseason as the No. 1 team in

every reputable poll now that Grayson Allen will return to join Harry Giles and Jayson Tatum, the top two recruits in the 2016 class per RecruitingNation. North Carolina, Louisville and Virginia could all compete for the national title, too.

Miami shouldn't end -- or enter -- the year as an afterthought, though.

Incoming shooting guard Bruce Brown, ranked 31st in the 2016 class by RecruitingNation, and power forward Dewan Huell, ranked 23rd nationally, should crack the starting rotation for a Miami team that might compete for a spot in the ACC's top tier. Rodney Miller, a 6-11 center who played at Oak Hill Academy, could develop into a reliable reserve during his first season, too.

Larrañaga had recruited two ESPN 100 recruits prior to this year's class, which features two. Brown and Huell will launch their collegiate careers with the buffer of a strong returning group.

Davon Reed (11.1 PPG), the top returning scorer from last season, will snatch a greater share of the team's shots in 2016-17. The 6-6 wing who made 40 percent of his 3-pointers last season could blossom next season. Kamari Murphy steps into the starting center role vacated by Jekiri after averaging 5.6 PPG and 6.0 RPG last season. Plus, Rashad Muhammad, the brother of NBA wing Shabazz Muhammad, will regain his eligibility after sitting out last season following his transfer from San Jose State. He averaged 13.9 PPG in 2014-15.

Yet, the final returnee demands both praise and scrutiny. This is Ja'Quan Newton's squad now. The guard averaged 10.5 PPG and 2.5 APG last season. With Rodriguez gone, he'll probably play point guard for a team that lost one of the

nation's best.

That's the major concern with this Miami team.

"He can score and he can pass, but his assist-to-turnover ratio is 1-to-1," Larrañaga told the Miami Herald last week. "If he's really going to be the kind of point guard that can lead our team, he needs to improve to 2-to-1 or 3-to-1."

In 2015-16, both Newton (20.6) and Rodriguez (20.5) ended the year with equally subpar turnover rates. But Rodriguez was the only player on the roster with a top-100 assist rate.

So Larrañaga is right. Newton (2.5 APG, 2.1 TPG) finished the NCAA tournament with five assists and seven turnovers. If he assumes primary ballhandling duties for Miami next season, limiting turnovers will be pivotal. Still, Rodriguez committed turnovers on nearly one-fifth of his possessions, too, and Miami still reached the Sweet 16. That's likely the high mark for next year's team.

The young talent and returning players comprise a solid crew with the potential to get back to the NCAA tournament and build for the future. Larrañaga gained enough to thrive in 2016-17.

Most teams would tumble in the standings after the losses of Rodriguez and McClellan. Miami could slip, too.

But the crew that's coming to Coral Gables and the talent coming back probably won't let that happen.

Thoughts from CanesHoops' Signee, Dejan Vasiljevic

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
April 14, 2016

Nearly three months after his visit and commitment, it is now official - Dejan Vasiljevic is a Miami Hurricane. The dynamic guard signed his Letter of Intent from Australia on Thursday, and it arrived in Coral Gables in time for the start of Spring Signing Period on Wednesday (time zones are pretty grand). We've already spoken with DJ twice, both before and after his January visit, but he was once again gracious enough to answer a few questions. Our questions and his answers are below, lightly edited for clarity and conciseness.

SOTU: Lots of American recruits have commitment or signing ceremonies to celebrate their college choices. Did (or will) you have any sort of celebration, or was it simply signing your name on the line and sending it to the university?

DV: As a family, we discussed this a while back and decided that it should be celebrated due to this being a new chapter of my life. We have planned to host a family gathering to celebrate this achievement but also a going-away party.

SOTU: You went through the recruitment process in a very deliberate way, and committing in January was obviously a major relief for you. What did it feel like to make it official, and knowing that now your future coaches can now speak freely about your impact on the team?

DV: Yes, the recruitment process was an intense and long process. Having many offers from Division 1 schools didn't help, it just made the process even tougher. Committing in January was always the plan, and once I did it, was the right

decision to make and yet today, other coaches keep asking whether I am still committed to the Canes program and I can tell you I'm 100 percent a Miami Hurricanes player. As a person, I don't show much emotion off the court but committing to Coach Larrañaga's program, I knew it was the best fit for me. Coach Larrañaga has called me everyday alongside Coach Fisher to check in on me and how I can impact the team coming into my freshman year.

SOTU: You told us that your plan was to develop as a point guard, and to do your best to fill Angel Rodriguez's shoes from the moment you set foot on campus. How has your game developed in the last few months across your efforts with Perth, the U20s tournament, and the BigV league?

DV: My game keeps improving day by day. I've had many opportunities the last 4 months training with the Perth Wildcats, but also playing one of the post leagues in Australia, the Big V competition. Many scouts and spectators see me as a shooting guard, but these teams have played me at the point position and has improved my point guard skills dramatically.

SOTU: Is the plan still for you to arrive for the first summer session in mid-May? Any other changes to your plans, or other updates you want us to know?

DV: Yes, the plan is the same. I arrive in Miami on the 14th of May and begin to get to work on the 16th. I'm excited and I can't wait to begin my college career at the University of Miami.

Thanks as always to SOTU's CanesHoops Consigliere Josh Frank @JoshDaCane for his work on this piece.

Larrañaga's early look at the 2016-17 season

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
April 13, 2016

Jim Larrañaga didn't rest for very long after taking his team to the Sweet 16 for the second time in four seasons. He had a lot of work to do.

"We're not done recruiting," he said last Thursday, before the Dejan Vasiljevic signing was made official. "We have 10 scholarship players and three open spots [two, after Wednesday]. That's a third of our team."

Looking to avoid roster imbalance and pleased with a top-10 recruiting class that includes McDonald's All-American forward Dewan Huell, top-50 guard Bruce Brown and top-100 center Rodney Miller, Larrañaga said UM is looking at transfers – there were reportedly about 700 available – and doesn't want to bring in another freshman "unless he's a superstar.

"We only have two seniors, two juniors and two sophomores returning. We have a lot of openings. And to project us right now is impossible."

Backcourt

– Asked who will take over for graduating point guard Angel Rodriguez, Larrañaga cracked, "Are you available?"

As of now, the plan is to turn it over to Ja'Quan Newton, but Larrañaga said he needs to improve his assist-to-turnover ratio. Newton averaged 10.5 points per game, but had a 1:1 ratio. "He needs to improve that to 2:1 or 3:1," Larrañaga said. Other candidates: Vasiljevic, Brown and 6-7 forward Anthony Lawrence Jr., who handled the ball in high school (and put up a 2:1 ratio in 12 minutes per game as a freshman last year).

– Shooting guard Rashad Muhammad is a bit of a mystery. The former San Jose State leading scorer arrived at Miami rail-thin and with questionable defensive ability.

Larrañaga: "He's a terrific three-point shooter. He also has some terrific layups. But he came in here weighing 157 pounds. He's now up to 170. We're hoping we can get him up to 180 or 185 by next season."

Asked if Muhammad is ready to take over for Sheldon McClellan as Miami's top option, Larrañaga said "he can really shoot the ball" but needs to improve his defense and rebounding:

"When [McClellan] became a defender is when we became a much better basketball team."

– Larrañaga – and many recruiting analysts – are high on freshman combo guard Bruce Brown, who will arrive at UM after a year of prep at Vermont Academy. He's 19, has a college-ready frame (6-4, 200) and plays a physical style.

Larrañaga described Brown as "a combination of [former Hurricane] Durand Scott, Sheldon McClellan and [Villanova leading scorer] Josh Hart. That's the type of body type, athlete. You see how high Sheldon McClellan can jump. I don't know if Bruce can jump quite that high, but it's close. He's in the ballpark. Durand Scott was great at driving to the basket and making some very creative layups. I would say Bruce Brown has that same skillset. Josh Hart can guard multiple positions – he can guard a two, a three, a four, and I think Bruce Brown will be able to do the same thing.

"Will he be able to do it as a freshman? We hope so. We think so. But you don't know that until you actually get him in a college environment" where the game is more nuanced and highly scouted (not to mention faster and much more skilled).

– Was Larrañaga surprised that James Palmer transferred?

"No," he said.

Larrañaga said most transfers – "and in James' case" in particular – "they come into college expecting a lot. ... He's a good kid. He was a very nice contributor for two years and I'm sure he'll be a very good player at his next stop." Palmer, from Washington, D.C., told CBS Sports he will visit Nebraska, Temple, Washington, California and Cincinnati.

– Rodriguez and Tonye Jekiri will compete in the Portsmouth Invitational Tournament, which begins Wednesday. McClellan has been invited to the NBA Combine, May 11-15 in Chicago.

Frontcourt

– Huell suggested in recent interviews he considers himself a one-and-done candidate. That doesn't worry Larrañaga.

"I really like senior leadership. But more than that, I like really good players," he said. "Dewan is a very talented young man."

As a Virginia assistant in the early 1980s, Larrañaga coached 7-4 Ralph Sampson, whom he said could have been the first player chosen after his freshman, sophomore or junior seasons. He went No. 1 overall after his senior year. "This is a different generation now," Larrañaga said.

"If Dewan wants to be one-and-done, what he has to understand – what everybody has to understand – it's about your development."

Larrañaga wouldn't reveal much of what he thinks about Huell, who is pegged by recruiting analysts as a spring-loaded 6-9 four-man who brings high-energy defense and a developing offensive game. "We haven't put him through a practice yet," Larrañaga said.

– What does Larrañaga want to see from forwards Kamari Murphy and Ebuka Izundu, who will play the 4 and 5?

"I want them to gain 15 pounds," he said. "Buka, 20."

Murphy (6-8, 218) may not get there – and is strong, anyway – but Izundu (6-10, 210) might. Since Miami doesn't have much bulk in the middle, both will need both to be more stout to make up for the loss of Jekiri (7-0, 250). Izundu, who arrived at 201 pounds, is on a similar curve as Jekiri. "He could be 230 next year. If he is, he will be a major factor," Larrañaga said.

– Miller, whom Larrañaga said is 7-foot and 250 pounds, though recruiting websites list him an inch shorter and between 10 and 20 pounds lighter, will be the largest player on the roster. Asked if he'll be relied on earlier, Larrañaga said he couldn't answer that, but noted that big men normally lag behind guards in strength and conditioning and skill development.

– Miami's only commit for 2017 is 6-6 three-star D.J. Russell, from Jacksonville-Ribault. He committed in July 2013. UM has some 25 offers out, according to VerbalCommits.

Point guard to be issue for Miami basketball team

Miami Herald
Michelle Kaufman
April 7, 2016

University of Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga wore a pair of brightly colored zigzag socks to his postseason news conference on Thursday afternoon — a gift from assistant coach Adam Fisher.

Larrañaga was in a jovial mood and chatted about everything from Villanova's championship run to the future of his team. The Hurricanes, who reached the Sweet 16, lose senior starters Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri.

"We're not done recruiting; we have two scholarships to give, so to project us now is impossible," he said. "We're very happy with the three kids we signed and hopeful we'll sign another one next Wednesday."

The signees are McDonald's All-American Dewan Huell, Bruce Brown and Rodney Miller. Dejan Vasiljevic, a guard on Australia's youth national team, is expected to sign next week. He picked UM over Stanford and Louisville, among others.

Larrañaga is also scouring the transfer market, where up to 700 players are expected to be available, and looking at fifth-year graduates who could contribute right away.

His biggest concern is at point guard. Asked who will replace Rodriguez, Larrañaga replied: "Are you available?"

He then said "it's going to be a challenge" and explained that the plan is to "turn the reins over" to Ja'Quan Newton, but he said Newton needs to cut down on

turnovers. "He can score and he can pass, but his assist- to-turnover ratio is 1 to 1. If he's really going to be the kind of point guard that can lead our team, he needs to improve to 2 to 1 or 3 to 1."

Other options include Anthony Lawrence, who played the point in high school and had a 2-to-1 assist-to-turnover ratio as a UM freshman, Brown and Vasiljevic.

As to whether he's concerned Huell could leave for the NBA after one season, Larrañaga said: "I really like senior leadership, but more than that, I like really good players."

Dewan is a very talented young man. If you ask me, 'Would you rather have a Dewan Huell or someone who's staying four years for sure 'cause he ain't that good,' I want Dewan."

UM women's coach Katie Meier has also been busy, having player exit meetings after a loss to South Dakota State in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. Although she hoped to go deeper, Meier said her first words to her staff in their postseason meeting were: "Thank you. It was a true, pure, absolute joy working with you every single day."

She showed her team a video montage of male and female players hurting after losses. "We needed to feel the pain," she said.

The Canes lose only one senior, Michelle Woods, and gain FAU transfer Shaneese Bailey. Bailey, a 6-1 combo guard, was FAU's leading scorer as a sophomore and made first-team All-Conference USA. She was a celebrated high jumper in high school and is the cousin of 12-time NFL Pro Bowler Champ Bailey.

"She is a ridiculously talented young lady,

very explosive, a game-changer," Meier said of Bailey, comparing her to former UM star Riquana "Bay Bay" Williams.

The Canes are also expected to sign 6-1 guard Sarah Mortenson of Long Island (New York) Lutheran. She is a native of Denmark.

Dishin' with DJ - "Exciting Times are Ahead"

State of the U
Charlie Strauzer
Feb. 1, 2016

The Miami Hurricanes added to their best ever recruiting class with the commitment of combo guard Dejan Vasiljevic in mid-January. We caught up with the Australian superstar to find out about his visit to the U, how he made his decision, and where things go from here.

Our CanesHoops Consigliere, Josh Frank (@JoshDaCane) was able to get an exclusive interview with Dejan Vasiljevic back in November and we are fortunate once again that Dejan granted him another Q&A for State Of The U!

Many observers point to globalization and the rapid advancement of technology as major shifts in the world in recent decades. On a much smaller scale, this influence is felt on the increasingly competitive world of college basketball recruiting. No longer are a handful of "rich" or resourceful programs looking to find a gem hidden away from their competitors, hoping that a player they've heard about or seen only once is more stud than stiff when he arrives in the States. Now, major competitions are scouted as heavily as domestic AAU and high school tournaments, and streamed worldwide for those who aren't able to attend in person.

Dejan Vasiljevic broke out in a big way at the biggest competitions - leading Australia to a silver medal at the 2014 FIBA 17U World Championships and earning All-Tournament honors, and as the country's leading scorer playing up an age group in the 2015 FIBA 19U World Championships. With his reputation established, the 6'2" guard fielded offers from schools such as LSU, Louisville and Texas, and ultimately visited Stanford and St. Mary's before choosing Miami last month.

The new Hurricanes commit again graciously agreed to an email interview with us - this time from western Australia, where he has temporarily joined the Perth Wildcats, one of Australia's most successful professional basketball franchises, as a developmental player after graduating from high school at the Centre of Excellence in December. Again, his answers were so comprehensive that we've to run the entire exchange, lightly edited and annotated [in bracketed italics] for clarity and context, and any mistakes are ours.

SOTU: First, please tell us about your visit. Who was your host? Besides attending the FSU game and a practice, what else did you do and see as part of the official visit? What were your favorite parts of the trip, from both a basketball and non-basketball perspective?

DV: The overall experience with the visit was just incredible; however, it was extremely busy due to a number of meetings and tour of campus in the space of allowed 48 hours. The entire coaching staff was my host at certain times and they were really approachable considering that was in the middle of their preparation for a very important game. I should mention one of the managers, Viraj Kulhari, who was our host during the game. The real question is what didn't I get to see! I saw the entire campus, was provided with an opportunity to meet the academic advisor, faculty and program advisors and many other people who would assist me during my time at the University. My favorite part from a basketball perspective was the game day routine and what it included in the preparation for every game. From a non-basketball perspective, what really stood out was friendly and encouraging environment which included the players, the coaching and the support staff. Mrs. L [Coach Larranaga's wife, Liz] was really special ensuring first that we were looked after and then second that no breaches of the NCAA rules were committed. An outstanding personality!

SOTU: What was your feeling stepping into the arena for an ACC rivalry game? How did the environment compare to what you'd seen on TV, or any games and tournaments you have played in?

DV: I have attended professional games in the past, including the NBA All-Star [when he was part of the 2015 Basketball Without Borders Global Camp], but I have never experienced such an excitement stepping into the arena against FSU. The coaches were genuinely concerned with the crowd since it was an off-school game [school was in winter break, with classes starting the following Monday]; on the contrary the students turned up in a large number and what they created gave me goose bumps. Dick Vitale was great dancing with cheerleaders, and the atmosphere was simply crazy and it made me want to step on the court and take part in action. I really appreciated the experience, with the players approaching the game with such professionalism and the crowd being so electrifying. I believe the organization should be very proud of ensuring such a support; basically the arena is completely sold out for this season.

SOTU: Could you please tell us what it was like to meet Coach L and the other coaches and players after being recruited from a distance for so long (having only met Coach Fisher,

correct)?

DV: From the first moment, Coach L was there - he greeted us at the airport, made sure he could pronounce our names properly, which can be very challenging, and then every spare moment of his time, he would either spend with me or with my family. He is simply an unbelievable person, such a great coach with a great experience in college basketball. It was really interesting to see how the whole coaching team operated considering that almost everyone was half the age of Coach L. Many wonder about success this program has or has had, but they should meet the coaching staff to understand the way they approach all tasks and their overall intentions, which all has started transferring into a successful recruiting campaign. Their ability to convey their vision and immerse me into their enthusiasm was really great and was one of the reasons for my decision. I will definitely do my best to contribute in achieving overall, team and personal goals.

SOTU: As an international prospect, you took visits together rather than over a series of individual weekends, and you brought your family with you. Who came on your visit with you? During the unofficial downtime - in Miami, in California, or elsewhere, what else did you have a chance to see and visit?

DV: While really draining, taking visits together had its advantages. First, due to the NCAA requirements there is no real downtime so I was able to 'compare notes' easy - I did not have to remind myself all the time and simply asked the same questions. My whole family, mum, dad and my little sister, accompanied me during the visits, which really worked as a charm - if I forgot to ask something, someone would step in to direct me properly - mum was more concerned with the environment (weather, distances, availability of facilities), while my dad was more into academia and basketball. I think my sister was more interested in asking questions that would help her decide on a college than assisting me in my decision, but she was really happy to be part of the experience.

Many people don't realize that actually there is no downtime during these visits. As per the NCAA rules, these visits should be finalized within 48 hours, so a little time could have been allocated for sightseeing. I did not see much in Miami, so I can't really say that the South Beach played any role in my decision. Due to last minute itinerary changes, we visited St. Mary's College unofficially, which allowed me to ask questions relevant to transitioning from high school to college environment. Coaches [Randy] Bennett and [Marty] Clarke were exceptional allocating their time to assist me with my questions. I also had an opportunity to meet my former teammates and current Gaels players [Dane] Pineau, [Kyle] Clark, [Jordan] Hunter and [Tanner] Krebs, and ask them about their experience with transition. It was also great to compare the campuses on these three locations. We did not have much time for anything else since on our way back from Moraga we got stuck in traffic.

SOTU: You returned home for a week before announcing your decision. When did you know that you were going to choose Miami? Ultimately, why did you choose Miami?

DV: I believe my decision surprised some since they may have seen me as part of the Stanford program due to their outstanding academic standing and reputation. But from the start, I was outright open with everyone involved in recruiting me that I was interested in both aspects of this experience - basketball and education. So when I returned home, I had to really assess properly which college would provide me with the best support to achieve my short and long term goals. I had to do additional research on the standing of undergraduate programs and current curricula and made additional inquiry with contacts in the US and Australia to provide me with some additional insights into these basketball programs and the conferences. On top of all this, I had to have a serious discussion with my family and get their impressions of the colleges involved. At the start of the process, which was almost 2 years ago, my dad asked me to be really honest of my intentions and keep everyone informed, which really worked well on most occasions. In the final stage of the decision making this paid off, since I have developed really good relationships with many coaches and scouts, not directly linked to these programs but with a really good understanding where these programs were heading. And they gave me their objective inputs.

So in the end it was Miami that was the best fit to my plans. It certainly provided me with the required balance between basketball and academics to allow me for a proper development in both areas. The business program at UM was broad enough to provide me with a good foundation for the future since I plan on continuing with a graduate school after basketball. I also felt a part of the basketball vision. The coaching staff was really open and outright honest telling me that I was not the only one good at research - they did research on me, basically dissecting me fully to show my strengths and weaknesses. They showed how they could utilize my strengths immediately and what I need to improve

to be a key factor on their future team.

SOTU: Did being part of what many are calling Miami's best recruiting class ever (it is ranked in the top 10 by several analysts, prior to your commitment) mean anything to you? Did you have the opportunity to meet Dewan Huell on your visit or to talk to either of the other commits before you made your decision?

DV: To be honest, I am still puzzled with rankings since personally these mean very little to me. What really matters is the performance on the court. Personally, I like the way current players have been replaced by newcomers, which will ensure that the Canes will remain very competitive in years to come. I hope we all will contribute our best to be successful and hopefully bring that maiden NCAA championship to Coral Gables. I had an opportunity to meet Dewan Huell after the game against FSU and chat with him about his impressions. I can say that I am very excited and looking forward to playing with Dewan and the other commits (Bruce Brown and Rodney Miller).

SOTU: What have the coaches told you about what they perceive your role to be next year, and moving forward, as the current class features four players who could all see the floor at the same time?

DV: With departure of Angel Rodriguez, I am left with huge shoes to fill. As a freshman, I can certainly make an immediate impact with the toughness and scoring ability but also the experience of playing at two World Championships. However, as I mentioned before there are several areas of my game that I need to improve to be able to compete at the next stage. Looking at 2016 commit list with remaining team members, I would say that exciting times are ahead.

SOTU: What is the plan going forward? What do you do to prepare for making that sort of move and adjustment? When do you plan to arrive and do you intend to participate in summer school?

DV: The plan is to join the program early to give me a head start in school and in preparation for the new season, so I will arrive mid-May. Until then my calendar is full of events. At the moment, I am part of the Perth Wildcats squad. The Wildcats are a professional team here in Australia with several imports, including Casey Prather, who was a member of the Gators during their successful NCAA run in 2014, and Jermaine Beal, a former Vanderbilt player and graduate. Matching up against these former college talents is invaluable experience especially with their first-hand knowledge of the collegiate competitions. I am also committed to the State preparations for the upcoming U20 National Championships in Ipswich, and to Diamond Valley BigV Championship Men team with the season starting in March. There is also an opportunity to be invited to the Nike Hoop Summit at the beginning of April, where I would play along with the best athletes from around the world against the best 10-12 US athletes. So the schedule is full on.

SOTU: I saw that we are recruiting your national teammate, Deng Gak, who is now in school in the United States. Do you know of any other Australians or COE teammates who we are recruiting for future classes, in either men's or women's hoops?

DV: One thing is for sure - Deng Gak is a great basketball player and even better guy off the court. Definitely he is a person I would love to play with in the future and hopefully he commits to the Canes next recruiting year! It will be interesting to see how the next generation performs in the Worlds and the State championships since these are the places Australian talents can be fully identified. At the moment I am not aware of any current interests but I will instruct coaches to watch the U17 Worlds, which take place in June/July this year. These games are streamed live and provide an excellent opportunity for everyone to see what is available internationally. One of the names frequently mentioned is younger brother of Harry Froling's, Sam, who appears more versatile than his brother. As for women's prospects, again plenty of talents in Australia and my sister also showed keen interest into the women's program at the U.

SOTU: Thanks again for taking the time - is there anything else you want to Miami fans to know now that you're on board?

DV: No worries, I am a guy that loves to chill and relax, but when it comes to business whether in the gym or school, I am a workhorse giving it all. I'd like to thank you for your keen interest and invite all our fans to come out and support us in future years. Exciting times ahead!

Recruiting Class Could Anchor Miami in ACC Top Tier

ACCSports.com

Craig Handel

March 31, 2016

The University of Miami men's basketball program has accomplished things under coach Jim Larrañaga that never have been done before. Two Sweet 16 trips in four years. Conference regular-season and tournament championships. A winning record against Duke and North Carolina. Larrañaga also has half of the Hurricanes' eight NCAA tournament wins.

Can he sustain the success? After finishing third in the ACC, Miami became one of six schools from the conference to win its first two games in the NCAAs and advance into the Sweet 16. A dominant, hot-shooting night from Villanova ended Miami's season, 92-69. The Hurricanes now will have to rebuild without point guard Angel Rodriguez, guard Sheldon McClellan and center Tonye Jekiri. The last time Miami lost this much talent, it went two years without returning to the NCAAs.

Will that happen again? An answer of either yes or no wouldn't be surprising on either end.

The case for Miami does return versatile guard Davon Reed (11.1 points, 4.1 rebounds per game), and guard Ja'Quan Newton (10.5 points) was considered by many to be one of the best sixth men in the country. The Hurricanes also will welcome back forward Kamari Murphy, a transfer from Oklahoma State who made 28 starts, and guard Anthony Lawrence, who received more minutes later in the season.

Once again, Larrañaga dipped into the transfer ranks to bring in San Jose State

transfer Rashad Muhammad, who led his former school in scoring in two straight seasons as a freshman and sophomore. He sat out this past season but will give Miami five experienced players heading into next season.

Guard James Palmer would've been a sixth, but he'll transfer.

Those players will be pushed by what may be the Hurricanes' best recruiting class ever.

Ja'Quan Newton holds the key to Miami's future

State of the U
David Perez
March 27, 2016

On March 21, 2014 Neumann-Goretti High School hit the floor for the Pennsylvania State Championship Basketball game. Up to this point, the Philadelphia powerhouse had a great year and breezed through the playoffs. But on a Friday night in spring, fans experienced something unforgettable.

The Saints were led by ESPN 100 recruit Ja'Quan Newton, who had dominated throughout his high school career, and was playing in the state championship game again. Fans prepared for a show, and a day after the tragic loss of his mother to cancer, Newton delivered to the tune of 33 points and 8 rebounds. The performance was awe-inspiring to those in attendance, and one of his teammates described him as "probably the best player to ever play for us."

The night clearly demonstrated that Newton was special, and in his first two years at The University of Miami Newton has not disappointed. The 6-2 guard averaged 10 points during his sophomore season, and was referred to as "the best sixth man in the country" by broadcasting legend Dick Vitale. Newton has stepped up in a lot of big moments throughout his Hurricanes career thus far, but now, in the aftermath of a sweet 16 run, Ja'Quan will face his greatest challenge yet; stepping up as a leader.

Newton experienced a learning curve throughout his freshman season, but a stellar sophomore season has those around the program confident in him moving forward.

"I knew the talent was there, but I didn't know when it was going to show," Point guard Angel Rodriguez said to Comcast Sports Net midway through the season. The graduating senior went on to say that "for him it just took a year."

And for the 20 year old sophomore, the time to learn under a veteran's shadow is over. Entering his junior year, Newton is expected to be the starting point guard and should be playing with a young backcourt. Anthony Lawrence Jr. is set to be a sophomore, and ESPN top 40 guard Bruce Brown will enter campus as a freshman this fall. That lineup is a big change from that of 2015-16, which saw two seniors start at point guard and shooting guard.

"We don't have a prototypical point guard," Head Coach Jim Laranaga said in an interview earlier this year. "Even Ja'Quan is not just a pure point guard. He is a scorer as well."

Newton may not be the prototypical point guard Miami has had in a Shane Larkin and Angel Rodriguez, but the 185 pound guard will have to be a versatile player for the 'Canes in 2016-17.

Newton has been a versatile player over the course of his career, and has drilled "daggers" in close games. One of the biggest shots of Newton's career came in a road game against Georgia Tech. With less than two minutes remaining Newton hung a three over his defender to make it a six point game. After that, the Yellow Jackets never got closer than 4 points to Miami. Newton led the way in that game along with guard Sheldon McClellan, but McClellan will not be in Coral Gables any longer. Ja'Quan will still have the help of veterans such as Davon Reed, but moving forward his potential is vital to Miami's future.

This season Oklahoma guard Buddy Hield showed us just how important a superstar can be to a team. While Hield is expected to be a first round pick this summer, his college resume proves the point that with a star guard anything is possible. Moving forward Newton will have to continue his development as that star guard for Miami. Newton isn't the whole team, but his leadership over the next two years may mean the difference between a trip to the Sweet 16 and national championship contention.

Next season's Hurricanes will look lot different than Sweet 16 team

Palm Beach Post

Matt Porter

March 26, 2016

No matter how far the Hurricanes go next year, they will look a lot different getting there.

Four seniors graduate and six players return from the squad that lost Thursday in the Sweet 16, including starting guard Davon Reed, forward Kamari Murphy and key backup Ja'Quan Newton. While Miami has enough talent to remain near the front of the pack in the ACC, Jim Larrañaga's roster comes with plenty of question marks.

Next season's Hurricanes will look lot different than Sweet 16 team photo Miami signees Dewan Huell (left) and Bruce Brown. (247Sports)

After a two-week break, Miami will return to work with those three assuming leadership roles, instead of program bedrocks Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McClellan and Tonye Jekiri. Reed and Murphy showed plenty of maturity as juniors. Newton's case is a little different, given that he was suspended for the final three games of the regular season for a violation of team rules.

"I have a lot of faith in Davon and Kamari," associate head coach Chris Caputo said. "I hope that Ja'Quan can look at his year and feel that he had a very good year, but there are so many things he'll have to do to put himself in a position to be considered one of the good players in the [ACC]. You've got to go perform, and do it not just as the sixth man."

Caputo said Newton is not the only player – or coach – who needs to self-evaluate.

Next season's Hurricanes will look lot different than Sweet 16 team photo

"I think everybody's going to look at themselves now and think about how they can improve," he said. "It's attitudes. It's strength. It's development in their offensive game and defensive abilities. I'm not a big believer in, 'Hey we have these guys back, let's pencil them in for these type of performances' because it's a year later. Everybody's got to look at themselves collectively."

In the year following Miami's last Sweet 16 appearance, Larrañaga was forced to play zone defense and slow down his offense. Despite a lack of size and experience up front, next year's team appears to be more capable than that group, which went 17-16 and missed the postseason.

A large reason for that: Larrañaga will welcome a top-10 recruiting class, the highest-rated group in school history. McDonald's All-American forward Dewan Huell and guard Bruce Brown likely will play key roles right away. Center Rodney Miller may be relied on for backup minutes, but UM can afford to be more patient with Australian guard Dejan Vasiljevic. Additionally, UM has one open scholarship and could use it on a ready-to-play graduate transfer.

Here's a breakdown of the Hurricanes at each position:

Point guard: Newton (6-foot-2, 180 pounds) can get into the lane, distribute the ball and score, but can he raise his teammates' games if he's having an off night? Can he lead them as Rodriguez did? Regardless, he'll play major minutes, and Miami will need him – there's no true point guard backing him up.

Shooting guard: Rail-thin Rashad Muhammad (6-6, 160), who is eligible

this year after transferring, was a two-time leading scorer for San Jose State and will need to make up for some of McClellan's production. James Palmer (6-5, 202) will have to hold off incoming freshmen combo guards Brown (6-4, 200), a rugged defender, and Vasiljevic (6-2, 195), a standout player in international tournaments.

Small forward: Reed (6-6, 205) will be in the starting lineup somewhere, and could handle the ball if Newton's on the bench. Anthony Lawrence Jr. (6-7, 210) could be Miami's Swiss-army knife, able to play and guard 1-through-4. Larrañaga will have flexibility at the 2 and 3.

Power forward: Murphy (6-8, 218) started here last year, but without Jekiri (7-0, 250) patrolling the middle, his role may change. The scouting report on Huell (6-9, 220) is that he's a high-energy rebounder and shot blocker who can drive, has a good feel for post play and can finish at the rim. NBA scouts will be watching him. Larrañaga could play both at the same time, but that lineup wouldn't work against every opponent.

Center: The weight room will be the summer home of sophomore Ebuka Izundu (6-10, 210), who needs to add considerable size and strength in order to contribute regularly. Miller, who is listed at 6-11 and various weights up to 250, is a more traditional big man. ESPN's scouting report criticized him for his lack of conditioning and "motor." However, he's a four-star recruit from a top prep program (Oak Hill Academy in Virginia).

Projecting 2016-17 Miami lineup no easy task

Palm Beach Post
Matt Porter
March 25, 2016

No matter how far the Hurricanes go next year, they will look a lot different in getting there.

Guard Davon Reed and forward Kamari Murphy are the returning starters the squad that lost Thursday in the Sweet 16, and while it appears Ja'Quan Newton will be ready to take over at the point, Miami has question marks up and down a roster that should remain near the front of the pack in the ACC.

About two weeks from now, Miami will be back at work with those three assuming leadership roles, instead of guards Angel Rodriguez and Sheldon McClellan and center Tonye Jekiri as program bedrocks. Reed and Murphy showed plenty of maturity as juniors. Newton's case is a little different, given that he was suspended for the final three games of the regular season for a violation of team rules.

"I have a lot of faith in Davon and Kamari," associate head coach Chris Caputo said. "I hope that Ja'Quan can look at his year and feel that he had a very good year, but there are so many things he'll have to do to put himself in a position to be considered one of the good players in the [ACC]. You've got to go perform, and do it not just as the sixth man."

That will take some introspection on his part, and he won't be alone in that self-analysis. Caputo brought up the example of McClellan, who transferred from Texas and sat out the 2013-14 season. Soon after arriving, he opened up to the coaching staff about his perceived shortcomings as a player. He continued to listen as he worked. He is now considered a potential NBA draft pick.

"I think everybody's going to look at themselves now and think about how they can improve," Caputo said. "It's attitudes. It's strength. It's development in their offensive game and defensive abilities. I'm not a big believer in, 'Hey we have these guys back, let's pencil them in for these type of performances' because it's a year later. Everybody's got to look at themselves collectively."

Miami's opening-night lineup will likely include Newton, a junior-to-be, at point guard and Reed at small forward. Whether Murphy plays power forward or center depends on matchups and the development of other players, but he will start.

Unlike the year following Miami's last Sweet 16 run, when Jim Larrañaga used zone defense and slowed things down on offense, he has

more talent. There is a top-10 recruiting class on the way that includes highly regarded forward Dewan Huell and guard Bruce Brown. For that reason, a drastic a drop-off is unlikely.

"I think that's fair to say," Caputo said. "Hopefully the guys we have coming can have an appreciation for what we're doing and assimilate quickly. Hopefully the returning guys will have learned from their experiences. Some of the success we enjoyed, they know what went into it."

How they'll play will be interesting. Miami's heaviest returning players — before any offseason weight-room work — are about 220 pounds. No one is shorter than 6-foot-2. There is little bulk in the middle and lots of size on the wings.

Also keep in mind: Miami has one open scholarship and could use it on a ready-to-play graduate transfer.

Another thing: what will the ACC look like, with everyone now able to test the NBA Draft waters and return to school if they're too chilly? Fascinating offseason ahead.

Going position-by-position on the Canes, plenty of questions pop up:

Point guard: Newton (6-2, 180) dominates on the ball, gets into the lane and can score, but can he raise his teammates' games if he's having an off night? Can he be a leader? Regardless, he'll play major minutes, and Miami will need him. Who is his backup? UM doesn't have a true point guard. Brown (6-4, 200) is a combo guard and has a college-ready frame, but can he run an offense? Can Dejan Vasiljevic (6-2, 195), who is a scorer and a shooter now but projects as a future point guard? Would Miami run a forward here, like Reed (6-6, 205), who did it as a freshman?

Shooting guard: The rail-thin Rashad Muhammad (6-6, 160) was a two-time leading scorer for San Jose State and is a shooter. Is there more to his game, like defensive ability? James Palmer (6-5, 202) is beloved by his teammates — several say he is the funniest guy on the team — but he wasn't able to earn consistent minutes as a sophomore. He's still young for his class, having arrived on campus as a 17-year-old, and could make a leap. He'll have to hold off Brown, an aggressive defender and scorer, and Vasiljevic, who has been a standout player in international tournaments.

Small forward: Reed seems like the starter here, unless he's playing elsewhere. Anthony Lawrence Jr. (6-7, 210) could be Miami's swiss-army knife, able to play and guard 1-through-4. Palmer can play here, too. The Hurricanes' wings are largely

interchangeable. It would be no surprise to see Muhammad here if Brown is in the game as a rugged 2-guard.

Power forward: Murphy is a natural 4, but there's no Jekiri at the 5. The scouting report on Huell (6-9, 220) is that he's a high-energy rebounder and shot blocker who can drive, has a feel in the post and can finish at the rim. He's talented enough to play early and NBA scouts will be watching him plenty. Can he play here and Murphy plays the five, giving Miami a pair of springy big men? Would Lawrence bulk up and play here? If Miami can't get a ready-made starter at this or another position, is there a big-bodied transfer out there who can provide defense and fouls off the bench?

A thought from Murphy:

"I'm not satisfied. I will say I'm grateful to be on this team, though. We had a great year. Our goal was not to get to the Sweet 16 and lose, so I'm definitely not satisfied with that. We have a lot of guys leaving and a lot of new guys coming in. My job is to preach the same principles to the new guys so we can have the same kind of team next year."

Center: The weight room needs to be the summer home for Ebuka Izundu (6-10, 210). If he puts on about 20 pounds, he appears to be a starter — with a Jekiri-like development curve but much more offensive game. Miami has a more traditional big man in freshman Rodney Miller, who is listed at 6-11 and various weights up to 250, but ESPN's scouting report of him criticized him for his lack of conditioning and "motor." Good news: Miami's coaching staff has proven it can help players improve their physical and mental strength.

Caputo, talking about the importance of strength gains, brought up Izundu as an example. "He can be a very good player in this program," Caputo said. "He's got to get stronger. He can't be the weight he is today and give us the opportunity to beat teams like we played tonight. But he's got some abilities, and he knows physically where he needs to be. Our freshmen will be in that same boat."



**University of Miami
Men's Basketball Clips**

Program Highlights

Larrañaga: Old-school coach with new-world approach

CBS Sports.com
Gary Parrish
Feb. 13, 2013

Less than 24 hours after five players combined to make 15 3-pointers in a blowout win over North Carolina that kept Miami perfect in the ACC, Jim Larrañaga was sitting on the patio of an Italian restaurant called Villagio, enjoying the weather, ordering salmon, discussing where his Hurricanes might land in the Associated Press Poll that would be released the next day.

I told him the top five seemed likely.

"Really?" he said.

At which point, I asked what he thought.

"Honestly, I never think about it," Larrañaga answered. "The only rankings that are important to me are the rankings of the KenPom.com stats in all of the categories that determine success or failure."

This struck me as interesting because, just a day earlier, I'd sat with two dozen other reporters and listened to Larrañaga detail his affection for advanced statistics. Now this 63-year-old supposed old-school coach was doing it again, in a different setting, while his wife, Liz, picked at a bowl of lentil soup. He was bucking stereotypes.

"I value those statistics," Larrañaga said. "I value them for motivation."

Jim Larrañaga has 20 winning seasons as a Division I head coach, a trip to the 2006 Final Four on his resume and the reputation of a highly-skilled tactician. His credibility has long been established. But when he arrived at Miami in April 2011 after 14 seasons at George Mason, this son of a Floridian and grandson of a Cuban immigrant didn't rely on past achievements to grab the attention of his new players. Instead, Larrañaga asked them questions about them, confident the answers would probably come as a surprise.

"When I took the job at Miami, I met with the team and the very first thing I asked is, 'How good do you guys want to be?'" Larrañaga said. "They were like,

'We want to get to the Final Four! We want to win a national championship!' I said, 'OK. Well, here are some categories that are important.'"

Larrañaga mentioned defensive 3-point field goal percentage.

He asked his players where they thought they ranked.

"They said, 'Oh, we're pretty good,'" Larrañaga said. "So I asked, 'What is pretty good? There are 345 Division I teams. One is the best. The worst is 345. Where do you rank?'"

They told him they were in the top 100.

Larrañaga told them they were actually 224th.

"Then I told them, 'OK, turnovers are important,'" Larrañaga said. "'One is the best. The worst is 345. Where do you rank?'"

They told him around 100.

He told them they were actually 218th.

"The first thing I needed them to know is where they needed to improve, and those numbers showed them because they are totally objective numbers," Larrañaga said. "You can't argue with them. They show you what you need to work on. And, as a coach, if you don't know what you need to work on, then you're just practicing ... stuff. Yes, I want to practice what we're good at. But what I really want to practice is what we have to improve on to be really good, and I want my players to understand why we're doing it."

Those numbers forced Larrañaga's players to understand.

So they got to work immediately.

Now the Hurricanes are 37th nationally in defensive 3-point field-goal percentage, 17th nationally in offensive turnover percentage, and those are just two of the reasons why they're 19-3 overall and 10-0 in the ACC heading into Wednesday night's game at Florida State. Larrañaga and his staff took over, used advanced statistics to identify problems and then worked meticulously and relentlessly at solving those problems. That approach, combined with an experienced and talented roster, helped create one of college basketball's best stories and reinforce

one of Larrañaga's favorite expressions.

Think like a gardener; work like a carpenter.

"What does a gardener do? " Larrañaga asked. "He plants seeds. And then he nurtures those seeds, but it takes a while. And a carpenter? He's very precise. If he makes a chair, one leg can't be longer than the other three. He has to be precise. So when we're working with our players, we're constantly planting seeds but each day working on things that are very, very specific. Those things might not come to fruition in a week or a month. It might take years. But when we planted those seeds like gardeners, we knew that, if we worked like carpenters, we could get here."

Here is on top of the ACC at a school that had never been ranked higher than eighth before this week and has advanced in the NCAA tournament just once since the 2001-02 season. Miami has long been considered such a tough job that Missouri hardly cared that Frank Haith never finished better than tied for fifth in seven years in the ACC. Missouri hired Haith anyway because, the administrators figured, who could do better than fifth in the ACC at Miami?

Answer: Jim Larrañaga.

He took Haith's players, added point guard Shane Larkin, planted a bunch of seeds and started working like a carpenter -- on everything, but especially hard on the things that these same players struggled with before his arrival. Now Larrañaga has a team that's pretty good at guarding beyond the arc, really good at taking care of the ball and two games ahead of everybody else in a league 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
Like Winn
March 10, 2013

I want you to do something. Before you put your head to the pillow tonight, I want you to sit on your bed, close your eyes and visualize yourself in tomorrow's game. Visualize it deeply and specifically, so you can feel yourself there. You're running through the plays in the scouting report. You're guarding the man you're going to guard. You're getting back and getting stops.

At Miami, there is practice and then there is mental practice. There is a coach and a stathead and a psychologist, and they are all the same person: 63-year-old Jim Larrañaga, the former orchestrator of mid-major magic at George Mason, gone south for a last hurrah in ACC basketball's tropical outpost. The psychologist in him believes that this is an essential part of preparation. In your mind you are making big plays.

Kenny Kadji, a 6'11" fifth-year senior who is the Hurricanes' starting power forward, is a believer. He has closed his eyes and won the jump ball, run pick-and-pop sets and knocked down threes. Sophomore point guard Shane Larkin uses it too. The 5'11" son of Hall of Fame shortstop Barry Larkin has made big steals and reacted to defensive schemes for stopping him off ball screens. From a hotel bed in Raleigh in early February, he hit a game-winning shot at N.C. State. In real life he missed the last-second jumper and center Reggie Johnson tipped it in before the buzzer, but the scenario was eerily close to coming true. Durand Scott, the 6'5" senior combo guard who is the team's heart and soul, is not too cool for this practice, either. He has visualized the experience of winning, of students' storming the court at BankUnited Center and his surfing atop the crowd.

You could say that Miami has not been here before, and that would be true. The Hurricanes are in the running for a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament, yet no one on their grizzled roster—the average age of their top six rotation players is 22.5—has ever appeared in the Big Dance. They are 14--2 in the ACC and have clinched a share of the school's first-ever ACC title. They routed No. 1 Duke by 27 points in Coral Gables on Jan. 23, after which their students stormed the floor, and they were one shot shy of taking the Blue Devils to overtime last Saturday at Cameron Indoor Stadium in a 79--76 loss. Larrañaga had never beaten a No. 1, or coached a team ranked this high (No. 6 after the loss at Duke), or presided over regular-season games with this much national attention.

But he has been making use of a concept a good friend wrote about in a 1996 book called *Golf Is Not a Game of Perfect*:

A golfer can mentally simulate the experience of reaching his goal.... If he does it vividly enough, he can in effect fool the mind and body into thinking that the experience actually happened. Later, when he actually comes close to that goal on the golf course, he will not experience discomfort or disorientation, he will instead have a sense of déjà vu, a comforting and calming feeling that he has been in this situation before and handled it successfully.

The Hurricanes have not been here before, but they're playing as if they have. You could say that they've fooled themselves into becoming college basketball's most surprising team.

Larrañaga's belief in visualization dates back 23 years to a tennis court at Boar's Head Resort Sports Club in Charlottesville, Va. Then an assistant under Terry Holland at Virginia, Larrañaga was distracted from his match because of what he heard from a kids' lesson on an adjacent court. That coach was telling his charges to picture their strokes—to see their racket in slow motion, catching and throwing a topspin forehand back over the net—and Larrañaga was so fascinated that he walked over and introduced himself.

The coach was Bob Rotella, then an assistant professor of psychology at Virginia. He would soon start helping the Cavaliers' basketball team at Larrañaga's behest, and later gain fame as the author of best-selling golf books and as an adviser to some of the biggest names on the PGA Tour, from Tom Kite to Davis Love III to Rory McIlroy. Rotella is a believer in having goals, which to him are synonymous with dreams. Without dreams, he has written, athletes lack the emotional fuel to thrive.

Rotella witnessed the genesis of George Mason's dream: On Oct. 30, 2005, he stood before the Patriots and told them to close their eyes, bow their heads and imagine what they wanted to happen that season. Senior guard Lamar Butler was encouraged to share his thoughts with the room. "I dreamt that we went to the Final Four," he said. Rotella asked the rest of the players if they could get on board. The answer was affirmative. He then told them that instead of watching powerhouses—the Dukes and Carolinas and UConn—on TV from a fan's perspective, they needed to start sizing them up

as future opponents. Five months later, as a No. 11 seed in the NCAA tournament, the Pats reached the season's final weekend in one of the most inspiring performances in tournament history.

But only an infinitesimal share of sports dreams get George Masoned. The rest go unrealized or are deferred for so long that they risk abandonment. Which is what happened to this one: In the spring of 1986, just after Larrañaga left Virginia to take his first head-coaching job, at Bowling Green, he took out the small leather-bound notebook he always kept in his back pocket, for recording everything from recruiting details to favorite quotes, and wrote: One day, I want to be an ACC coach.

It was a reasonable goal for a charismatic, well-respected former assistant on two ACC Final Four teams. But 11 seasons went by at Bowling Green, then 14 more at George Mason. Had Larrañaga been 46 when he took the Patriots on their dream run, doors would have opened—"Any job he wanted," longtime assistant Chris Caputo figures, but Larrañaga was 56, and after passing on an offer from Providence, his alma mater, in 2008, it looked as if he might remain in Fairfax, Va., until he retired and they put his name on the court. The offer from Miami, which came as a surprise after Frank Haith left for Missouri in April 2011, was likely to be Larrañaga's last chance.

When you realize a dream you need a new one. Or many new ones. Each off-season, Larrañaga makes a long list of goals in neat cursive. He did 20 for 2012--13, and on a late February afternoon in his office, he revisited them with a reporter:

1. Have a great recruiting class. 2. Win the ACC regular season. 3. Win the ACC tournament. 4. Win the NCAA tournament. 5. Develop a stronger defensive team....

Had Larrañaga gone public with those goals last November, he might have elicited eye rolls. His first Miami team, in 2011--12, went to the NIT after coping with injuries, suspensions and the specter of the NCAA's investigation into booster Nevin Shapiro, in which Haith was implicated. Many felt the Canes were a sleeper in '12--13, until they lost a home exhibition to Division II Saint Leo and their second real game to Florida Gulf Coast. But Larrañaga chooses not to reflect on those moments. Recently he called Johnson in for a meeting, the chief purpose of which was to remind him how special it was that he had two game-winners this season (against N.C. State and Virginia). "If I talk about it, he dwells on it, and he starts thinking good thoughts," Larrañaga explains. "That's how you get a guy's mind right."

Before this story goes completely mental, know that the Larrañaga Method is binary. To focus only on his positive psychology would be to ignore his equally important obsession with analytics. "Some people stay in one realm," says longtime assistant Eric Konkol, "but the fascinating thing about Coach is that he uses both the right brain and the left."

Larrañaga was an economics major at Providence, and began the practice of hand-charting points per possession in the 1970s. He cares more about kenpom.com efficiency rankings than poll rankings. Caputo, whom he entrusts with opposition scouting, relies heavily on advanced stats from kenpom and Synergy Sports Technology. "Coach, and all of us, believe that numbers tell a story," Caputo says. "They don't lie."

Larrañaga can tell his own story through numbers. Five was what mattered when he was at Archbishop Molloy High in Queens: He needed to make the starting five to get recruited because he couldn't afford college without a scholarship. Fifty cents is what he had for lunch, and he bought the same thing every day: 10 Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, which somehow helped him grow into a 6'4½" forward. Two is the division that Bob Cousy, the coach of Larrañaga's dream school, Boston College, had suggested he play in after coming to scout him at Molloy as a senior. Thirty-nine and 28 are what he scored for Providence as a freshman and sophomore, respectively, in his first two wins over B.C., prompting Cousy to admit he'd made a mistake. Numbers, Larrañaga says, "were how I evaluated and judged myself."

When he convened what he called a "board meeting" with his players last April in Miami's conference room, he wrote in a column on a whiteboard: 9, 4, 2, 1. They were the adjusted defensive efficiency rankings, respectively, of Kentucky, Kansas, Ohio State and Louisville, the teams that made it to the Final Four. Miami had been 73rd. The message was clear: "You need to be in the top 10 to have a shot at a national championship next year."

Tenth was the Hurricanes' rank at week's end. They have locked down the interior, led by 6'10" sixth-year senior Julian Gamble, who was No. 1 in the ACC in block percentage at 10.0. Larkin, meanwhile, is their master of anticipation on the perimeter, ranking fourth in the conference in steal percentage (3.42). For all this talk of visualization, the one thing even Larkin could not see coming was a reunion with Larrañaga, who had recruited him at George Mason before Larkin signed

with DePaul. But Larkin chose to leave Chicago before his freshman year started, citing a family medical issue. He did a last-minute search for a school closer to his Orlando home. He called up Larrañaga a few days before classes began at Miami in August 2011 and asked two things: "Do you have a scholarship available, and do you need a point guard?" The coach said yes to both. That was how he landed the three-star recruit who through Sunday was averaging 13.8 points and 4.3 assists and will likely be the ACC Player of the Year.

Larrañaga is playing tennis again. Dual hip-replacement surgeries allowed him to pick the game back up after a 10-year hiatus, and he gets in a quick match at Riviera Country Club before meeting his wife, Liz, for a dinner date in the clubhouse. "How'd it go?" Liz says. Jim shrugs. He is not offering up numbers. "I broke a good sweat."

Their route to a table is accompanied by smatterings of applause from club members. The Riviera is a two-minute drive from the Hurricanes' campus, and alumni appreciate that basketball is thriving at the U during a dark time for football. The Canes had beaten Virginia 54--50 in a thriller the previous night, and the NCAA's notice of allegations in the Shapiro scandal dropped this morning. A Miami alum older than Larrañaga compliments the coach for handing out doughnuts to students waiting in line for tickets. When Larrañaga asks how the man is, he replies, "Well, we're both here, and that's the most important thing, right?"

The dinner conversation centers on how, exactly, Larrañaga got here. The Michael Jordan fantasy camps he worked in Las Vegas following Mason's Final Four run created connections. In Vegas his Cuban ancestry had helped him strike up a friendship with Jose and Jorge Mas, two Cuban-American millionaires from Miami who participated in the camp. Jose would later put in pro-Larrañaga calls to members of Miami's board. And at the camp he co-coached a team with Doc Rivers, who vouched for him during the hiring process.

Larrañaga also explains what loosened his ties to George Mason. In March 2011, his friend Alan Merten, the school's long-time president, announced plans to retire, and Larrañaga told his wife that it "might be a sign that we should look around too." He had been petitioning athletic director Tom O'Connor for a better deal—Larrañaga believed his assistants were "grossly underpaid," and Shaka Smart's new, \$1.2 million-per-year deal at league-rival VCU dwarfed Larrañaga's \$525,000 base salary. The Hurricanes interviewed Larrañaga on April 11 and made their offer 10 days later: a contract reported to be worth \$1.3 million per year for five years. Mason didn't formally counter until Larrañaga was in the airport that night, ready to board his flight to Miami. By then, his mind was made up.

I ask what would have happened had Mason offered a better deal, more quickly. He ponders the question and says, "It would have been like, Do I want to stay [at George Mason] with a great contract ... or hope that I might get an offer in a week from Miami? I'm a pretty conservative guy, so...."

Liz stops him there. "That's too hypothetical," she says. "Anyway, it worked out for the best."

This is true. The assistants got paid. Miami is having a dream season. Liz played golf today, and she finally got Jim to Florida. They owned a vacation house in Sarasota, which she loved to use while he was at Mason, but ... "I could never get him down there. He never had the time."

As a kid in the '50s, he had the time. The annual Larrañaga family vacation, as he tells it, was a long-haul drive from the Bronx. They would stop in Kissimmee to visit his mother's sister, then continue on to Key West, where his father, the son of a Cuban immigrant, had been born and raised. They would take the old Route 1 through Miami, and one time, about 18 miles south of the university's campus, they stopped at a strange attraction called the Coral Castle. The legend was that a 5-foot Latvian immigrant, defying laws of physics, had sculpted the structure out of blocks of limestone, many weighing several tons, as a tribute to an unrequited love. He put a hand-carved sign outside that read, YOU WILL BE SEEING UNUSUAL ACCOMPLISHMENT.

This is Jim Larrañaga's return trip. After dinner he and Liz walk out into the twilight, on a path alongside the golf course. Small children are rolling down an embankment near the putting green, letting out small whoops of joy. Near the driving range, grade schoolers play pickup soccer, darting around divots and through pools of lamplight. "Could you imagine," Liz asks, "having this as a kid?" The setting is an idyll, like something they closed their eyes, visualized and tricked 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 Pomoroj, a Salt Lake City meteorologist who compiles a statistical archive that analyzes all 345 Division I teams on a possession-by-possession basis. There isn't a news conference that goes by in which Larrañaga doesn't refer to kenpom.com. He even has the site's mobile app on his iPhone for whenever he gets the urge to check his favorite stat: points per possession.

Larrañaga, 63, also was one of the first college coaches to use Synergy Sports, an Internet-based video-scouting index that logs every possession of every game, allowing coaches to zero in on team and player tendencies. You want to compare a player's spot-up shooting percentage with a dribble and without a dribble? No problem. Percentages going left? Going right? It's all there.

The coach leaves nothing to chance. He writes everything down. His entire life over the past 20 years - every appointment, practice, personal goal - is chronicled in his Franklin-Covey daily planners. His bible is Stephen R. Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Larrañaga's organizational skills, which he also requires from his staff, helped the Hurricanes (24-6, 15-3 Atlantic Coast Conference) go from afterthought to major player this season.

They were No. 2 in The Associated Press poll, the highest ranking in school history. They knocked off then-No. 1 Duke by 27 points, the first time a UM team had beaten a No. 1. They became the first team since the ACC's inception in 1953 to beat Duke and North Carolina by 25 points in the same season. They drew a record five sellout home crowds. And, they are the No. 1 seed in the ACC tournament after winning the regular-season conference title Saturday with a 62-49 win over Clemson.

Larrañaga's staff is atypical. Most teams have an assistant who coaches guards, an assistant who coaches big men, and they rotate the scouting duties. Larrañaga takes a page from football. Eric Konkol is his offensive coordinator. Michael Huger is the defensive coordinator. Chris Caputo is the master scout, fully responsible for the scouting reports for every game.

The idea, according to all three assistants, is uniformity in terminology and message. They have found that players like routine and familiarity. Rather than have every third scouting report written by a different coach, they are all in Caputo's language.

All three coaches followed Larrañaga to Miami

from George Mason. "We moved the store south," Konkol said.

The Miami Herald took a peek at how Larrañaga's staff prepares for a game. Answer: Details, details, details.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

It is Tuesday afternoon, March 5, and the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets are coming to town to play the Hurricanes the next day. The team has gathered at BankUnited Center for a 3 p.m. practice.

In case any of the players are wondering, this is "Practice #82." They can find that out on the upper-right corner of their Daily Practice Plan, a typed down-to-the-minute practice schedule listed in Roman numeral format:

- I. Meet/Video.
- II. Stretch (10).
- III. Thought of the Day (2). "Get low. Stay low on defense."
- IV. Fundamentals. 1. 2-Line Full Court Passing (2), 2. Celtic drill (2), 3. Rebound-war on the boards (5).
- V. Defense. Shell drill. Defend Georgia Tech.
- VI. Offense. Fast ball movement. Man movement. Pass to Post.
- VII. Scrimmage.
- VIII. Shoot 3's (15).
- IX. Stretch.

DeQuan Jones, who played for Miami last season and is now with the Orlando Magic, is in town for a game against the Heat. He shows up at Hurricanes practice with Magic teammates Kyle O'Quinn and Mo Harkless. They watch and remark on the intensity and organization of the workout.

"Coach L and his staff are super organized and strategic," Jones said. "Everything is calculated down to a T and broken down. We'd spend a block of time on each fundamental. They'd break down details like, 'This guy shoots from the right 70 percent of the time,' stuff like that. As a player, that paints a picture of what you're guarding, what to expect. Almost to the point you know what the offensive player's going to do before they even do it. It made the games easy. That's one thing I noticed. Practice was always the hardest thing.

"They slowed the game down and broke down the Xs and Os. This coaching staff made me a better player, made me respect the game."

Larrañaga's practices are spirited. Caputo is crouched on the sideline, yelling instructions to the "Green" scout team. Konkol stands at mid-court, coaching the "White" team starters. Huger, 42 but still a lethal scorer, often plays guard with the scout team. He has experience from his days playing under Coach L at Bowling Green. Larrañaga, wearing a heating pad strapped to his back, whistles, claps a lot and encourages his players.

"Trey, I like how you accelerated past that screen!" "Jules, real good!"

When he has to, Larrañaga gets tough. After Kenny Kadji missed a mid range jumper in a scrimmage, Larrañaga yelled: "You take difficult shots and you don't have to. You don't need to dribble. It doesn't prove anything. You missed the shot. Keep it simple!"

The scrimmage goes to five points. On this day, the scout team beats the starters 5-1 - an omen of

the 71-69 loss to come the next night.

As the practice is wrapping up, Larrañaga says someone has to hit a half-court shot before they can leave. The players laugh and begin heaving shots from mid-court. Durand Scott makes it. Practice over.

After practice, the players receive one of Caputo's famously meticulous full-color, 17-page scouting reports. Players are instructed to study the report before they go to sleep that night. The first two pages are personnel reports.

The scouting report on Duke's Ryan Kelly before he lit up Miami for a career-high 36 points read: "We expect him to play and be excited about it. MUST MATCH HIS INTENSITY! Excellent on offensive boards. Make him a dribbler. Prefers left shoulder in paint."

The report on Michigan State's Keith Appling before their game Nov. 28, 2012: "Left to basket, Right for either pull-up or rim. Gambler on D, MUST BE BALL TOUGH. Push in transition. MUST STOP THE BALL NO HEAD OF STEAM!"

The report then includes summaries of the opposing offense and defense.

BREAKING IT ALL DOWN

On the Spartans' defense: "MSU Defense is #8 in the NCAA in Points Per Possession. They are very much a pack defensive team with the exception of Dawson running through passing lanes for dunks. They do a very good job guarding the ball and beating screens. We must be patient and wait for our screens to be set."

Next is a sheet with team stats, best and worst free-throw shooters, best three-point shooters and best offensive rebounders. There is a list of the team's top 15 to 20 offensive plays. Then, 10 pages of those plays diagrammed.

"The players don't have to know all the stats and information, but we do as coaches," said Caputo, who attended Archbishop Molloy High School in New York, the same school as Larrañaga. "My job is to condense it all. I want to give them an edge, a few hints of what to expect."

The game preparation typically takes two days. Caputo spends 12 hours watching tape of the opponent, and then with the help of the staff videographer Jaime Vathielil, puts together a 20-minute "long edit" for Larrañaga and a 12-minute shorter version for the players.

On March 4, the staff met at 9:30 a.m., watched tape and started to strategize. They could tell from the tape that Georgia Tech's freshmen were playing better now than the last time they played. At 3 p.m., the players got a three-minute "Sneak Peek" video of Georgia Tech. "We just want them to see the team's identity. Are they great offensive rebounders? Do they press? Are they a transition team?" Konkol explained.

"The key," Caputo said, "is making the players feel comfortable and confident. We try to keep the same routine for every game. We set up the chairs the same way, do everything at exactly the same time. The calmer we can make them, the better they will perform when the lights come on."

Larrañaga finds he's still fashionable in Miami

Washington Post
Mark Giannotto
Feb. 28, 2013

The University of Miami basketball team's rise in Coach Jim Larrañaga's second season has been acknowledged in the polls and remarked upon with amazement by national commentators. But to those who know Larrañaga best, it also has had an air of familiarity.

Longwood Coach Mike Gillian, a member of Larrañaga's first staff at George Mason, has watched the Hurricanes' success from the Farmville, Va., campus and has seen echoes of what first put Larrañaga on the national stage seven years ago.

"Go look at the game against U-Conn.," Gillian said, referencing George Mason's victory over the Huskies in the regional final of the 2006 NCAA tournament. "What they ran on offense, they did it over and over again in the second half, and especially in overtime. If you watch Miami right now, primarily on offense is what they did in that game at the Verizon Center.

"But the guys that succeed at different places, for extended periods of time, there's a reason why they did that. If they could, they would bottle it up and sell that."

Larrañaga, 63, is ditching the Cinderella role this time around. The fifth-ranked Hurricanes (23-4 overall, 14-1 ACC) are in line to earn a No. 1 seed in next month's tournament, especially if they beat No. 3 Duke for the second time this season in a nationally televised rematch Saturday.

His approach, though, hasn't changed much from his 14 seasons at George Mason, right down to the plays he used to lead an unheralded group from the Washington area to the Final Four.

"This is the way we've done it, and we're gonna continue to do it a certain way," Larrañaga said. "But I wondered if this would work at the highest level."

Challenging transition

The transition to Coral Gables, Fla., has been anything but smooth. Four months after leaving Fairfax, Larrañaga found himself embroiled in an NCAA investigation he and his staff had nothing to do with. Before his second season began, Larrañaga watched the athletic director who hired him, Shawn Eichorst, jump ship and leave for Nebraska.

He also discovered a budget that, aside from recruiting expenses, was actually smaller than the one he managed at George Mason.

The off-court turmoil has hurt recruiting, Larrañaga acknowledged, and it forced several players to sit out games last season, when Miami finished with the most conference wins in school history (nine) but fell just short of earning an at-large berth to the NCAA tournament.

"A lot of coaches would've let that destroy their attitude," said Bob Rotella, a sports psychologist who works with Miami and one of Larrañaga's longtime confidantes.

Rotella remembers home games last season when the Hurricanes attracted no more than 1,500 fans. Each time, Larrañaga would assure him, "Well, it's not gonna be that way long."

To manufacture excitement at Miami, where even the school's high-profile football team can struggle to draw crowds amid a plethora of pro sports and entertainment options, Larrañaga took a familiar "door-to-door" approach.

He sold the program whenever asked, whether it meant dinners with Miami's wealthiest donors, speeches to the Greek system or helping out at Dwyane Wade's fantasy basketball camp. He had the team spend nights "dorm storming," handing out pizza and chicken wings to students. He started a youth clinic similar to the one he had in Fairfax. He laid awake in bed texting recruits until 1:30 in the morning. He has yet to turn down an interview request.

The BankUnited Center, meantime, has been sold out for four of the past six home games and students have begun lining up outside on "Larrañaga's Lawn" to get inside the building. Wade and fellow Miami Heat star LeBron James even sat courtside for a game earlier this month.

"If you go two miles east of here, homes are 10, 15 million dollars, and he's very comfortable in those settings. Yet he's very comfortable amongst every-day folk," said Miami assistant Chris Caputo, who also worked under Larrañaga for nine years at George Mason. "It was like hand-to-hand combat and a lot of it was similar [to George Mason], just in terms of building a love affair between the community and the basketball program."

'He can relate to anybody'

Larrañaga loves numbers. He looks up the efficiency-based ratings at KenPom.com on his cellphone every day. He considers it more accurate than any of the national polls that have fallen in love with the Hurricanes this season, a way to determine exactly what he should be working on in practice.

It's also how Larrañaga introduced himself to Miami basketball in April 2011. In a small room of players who knew little about him other than his role in George Mason's Final Four run, Larrañaga went about persuading them his way was the right way.

"Where did we finish in terms of defending three-pointers?" he asked. The players all thought they were around No. 100 in the country. "No," Larrañaga responded. "We finished in the 200s. We were in the bottom third" in the country.

He asked them how they were with turnovers. "Pretty good," the Hurricanes said. "No," Larrañaga responded. "We're ranked around 218."

He then explained how all the best teams in the country hold opponents under one point per possession ("Hopefully around .92, he said.), informing them that the team would go from playing predominantly zone defense to almost exclusively man-to-man.

"At first, when you meet him you're like, 'Uhh, I don't know if it's gonna work out,'" forward Kenny Kadji said last week, when reminded of that first encounter. "I didn't know how he would lead us with the age difference, but he's such an energized guy. He can relate to anybody."

"He pretty much brought us back down to earth and he showed us, or told us, about being good. We had no idea."

Larrañaga inherited a veteran team that features six seniors this season and signed point guard Shane Larkin, the son of baseball Hall of Famer Barry Larkin, just before last season began. The Orlando native is now an ACC player of the year candidate as a sophomore.

But as Rotella pointed out, Larrañaga made a conscious decision to "believe in these kids" rather than start over, a concept Rotella thinks was ingrained in him after George Mason's Final Four run. Even Larrañaga concedes that earlier in his career, "I coached every turnover, every pass, every shot, evaluated every referee's call or no call and tried to correct every mistake. Now I just clap when they make a mistake. You can talk about it the next day."

"He has a lot of confidence in us," sixth-year senior Julian Gamble said. "Probably more confidence than we have in ourselves sometimes."

Parallel successes

Not one to just give away his secrets, Larrañaga insists Gillian must have meant something different, because Miami isn't having success just because of one play. Perhaps what Gillian's really referring to is "when we find something that works, we ride it," Larrañaga said.

But Virginia Tech Coach James Johnson and High Point Coach Scott Cherry, both assistants under Larrañaga in 2006, agreed separately that the Hurricanes are running the same offensive sets the Patriots rode to the Final Four.

Even Larrañaga can't fight some of the parallels, such as how both teams suffered embarrassing early-season defeats that proved to be catalysts the rest of the year: Miami lost to Florida Gulf Coast in its season opener, while in November 2005, George Mason lost to Creighton by 20.

"It's a similar team he has now," Cherry said. "He allows them to be who they are within their skill set that fits into his philosophy and his system. He's the best at that."

Just this week, Larrañaga canceled all of his players' interviews after Miami's 14-game winning streak ended in a double-digit loss at Wake Forest on Saturday. The Hurricanes rebounded with a 76-58 victory over Virginia Tech on Wednesday night.

This, it seems, is the main difference between George Mason's improbable Final Four trip and the one Miami hopes to embark on. The Patriots didn't attract national attention until Selection Sunday, when they drew the ire of national pundits by receiving an unexpected at-large bid. Larrañaga's Hurricanes, none of whom has played in the NCAA tournament, have been dealing with the glare of the spotlight since Jan. 23, when their fans rushed the court after a 90-63 blowout of then-No. 1 Duke.

So don't expect him to savor it all just yet.

"We haven't even made the NCAA tournament. We've got a lot of things that we hope to accomplish, this year and in the future," Larrañaga said. "We've already accomplished a lot in a short period of time, but hopefully there's a lot more years in front of you."

Larrañaga's use of analytics gives Miami secret weapon

USA TODAY

Nicole Auerbach

March 1, 2013

Jim Larrañaga is a storyteller.

He gets comfortable on the couch in his office, leaning back into the memories, and lets the words roll off his tongue.

He talks about George Mason's magical NCAA Final Four run in 2006, and how the flood of media attention mirrors what his seventh-ranked University of Miami team is receiving now.

He talks about the rousing speech Chris Bosh gave the Hurricanes the summer before Larrañaga's first season, and the influence the Miami Heat stars have had on his program.

He even talks about how copy-and-pasting his own Wikipedia page helped land him the job at Miami in 2011.

Despite the plethora of tales, perfectly timed and delivered with smiles and dramatic pauses, cataloging key moments of his career, Larrañaga is missing one vital story.

He doesn't remember how and when and why he was introduced to the world of advanced statistics.

He turns to his long-time assistant Chris Caputo in the hallway and asks about the first time they found kenpom.com, a website devoted to college basketball analytics. Caputo can't remember, either. Maybe five years ago? Definitely after their staff discovered Synergy Sports, video-scouting software that compiles intricately detailed data on every team from every game situation imaginable.

Larrañaga, now 63, was one of the earliest adopters of that technology, too. But even if he can't remember what necessarily sparked his interest, he knows it stirred something within him.

Back in high school, Larrañaga had wanted to win a free-throw shooting award, a prize completely based off percentages — "I've always been fascinated by numbers," he said — and he shot 88% his senior season and won the award by a fraction of a point.

"If I'm going to be good, I'm going to judge myself against other players who are really, really good," Larrañaga said. He carried that into coaching. As an assistant at Virginia, he charted the performances of various lineups to figure out the most effective group of five. Compare, compare, compare. Then go with what works. Video might show him that now. Or a sheet of numbers from kenpom.com.

The use of such tools has propelled Miami

to unprecedented success in the Atlantic Coast Conference this season. The Hurricanes' 13-0 start in league play was the best of any team since 1998-99, and a win Saturday at No. 3 Duke would clinch the ACC regular-season title in this, Larrañaga's second year with the team.

"The thing with Coach is, as long as he's been doing this, he's never stopped learning," Caputo said. "You're looking, searching for things that will give you a bit of an edge. I think it was just word of mouth — there's no great story.

"Looking at a team on a sheet, it's a concise way of understanding. ... A lot of times, you ask someone how they did on a test. They say, 'Good.' Well, what does that mean? A 'C'? That's pretty good, right? Not if everybody in the class got an 'A'. Or I got a 'C', but everybody failed the test. You try to see the things you value ... and then see where that ranks within your league and nationally. That tells you what your team is like."

The Miami players hear about advanced statistics more than they see the numbers themselves. They aren't given statistical printouts; they don't get bogged down in the details. Their coaches tell them the important ones. This team is 50th in tempo, that team is 300th. This one is in the top 10 in offensive rebounding, that one turns the ball over on just 14% of possessions.

"They understand rank very well," assistant coach Eric Konkol said. So the coaches toss the key stats in with normal prep work, like talking about opponents' tendencies or watching video. Together, it provides a full picture of what the 'Canes will be up against. Miami scouts its opponents, but it also self-scouts, tracking where it stacks up against the nation's best to motivate itself.

Said senior Julian Gamble: "They give us those types of statistics to let us know where we are and where we need to improve. You want to be the best, and numbers don't lie. If you say you're not No. 1 in the country in something you want to be, you know you have something to improve on."

Larrañaga and his staff emphasize points per possession; it's a good way to stress defense, something that players can rely on even when shots aren't falling on a given night. On Tuesday, prior to the Virginia Tech game, Gamble recited a sentence that would please his coaches: "We're 16-2 when we hold teams under one point per possession." Make that 17-2 after the win over the Hokies.

Miami is ranked sixth in the country in defensive efficiency, 39th in offensive efficiency and 26th in turnover rate — all significant

improvements from two seasons ago.

This lingo, while new to the Hurricanes, is far from foreign from those at George Mason, where Larrañaga spent 14 seasons before coming to Miami in April 2011.

"He was innovative," George Mason athletics director Tom O'Connor said. "He was focused on (advanced statistics), but that didn't override the fact that he still had to go out there and teach offense and defense. It's good to have all the statistics, and it can definitely be a major plus. I think he saw that early on. He's always been ahead of the curve if he sees something that can help his program be successful."

During the Final Four run of 2006, before he relied on advanced statistics, Larrañaga's attention to detail and search for any advantage manifested itself in scouting and game preparation. He also brought in a sports psychologist to talk to his team before the season.

"He adjusted well to every team," said Will Thomas, a starter on the 2006 team. Thomas added that the points of emphasis were the same then as they are now: overall defensive toughness, rebounding and defending the 3-point line. Those same principles now show up in columns on kenpom.com.

"There are still coaches who don't use email or coaches that don't really like video spliced up because they like to get a feel for the how the whole game is played," Konkol said. "There are certainly positives in every way you do it. It just comes down to being comfortable with your style. We're very comfortable here at Miami using the stats."

The 'Canes have been as high as No. 2 in the USA TODAY Sports Coaches Poll, a landmark reached a week ago, before their Feb. 23 loss to Wake Forest. They are competing for a No. 1 or 2 seed in the NCAA tournament, a remarkable feat for a group of players who never played in the event. They're a veteran group (average age of the starting five? 22.6 years old) — yet are led by a sophomore point guard in Shane Larkin, a Naismith Player of the Year finalist and the son of Baseball Hall of Famer Barry Larkin.

Perhaps, some day soon — or some day far off — Larrañaga will have another story to tell. The story of this team and how these players bought into his world of numbers. How they taught LeBron James and Dwyane Wade a fancy dunk that one time. And maybe, just maybe, how they brought the Miami basketball program to prominence.

Crunch time

ESPN The Magazine
Peter Keating
August 13, 2012

Terms you'll need to know for this story
DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY

For a team: Points allowed per 100 possessions. For a player: Points his team allows per 100 possessions while he is on the floor.

EFFECTIVE HEIGHT

The combined height of a team's centers and power forwards. Measured in inches above or below the national average baseline.

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY

For a team: Points scored per 100 possessions. For a player: Points produced per 100 possessions.

PACE

Possessions per 40 minutes. Faster pace means more possessions in a game.

PLUS/MINUS

A team's point differential when a particular player is on the floor.

TEMPO-FREE STATS

Statistics adjusted for possessions to allow for accurate comparisons across teams.

ONCE IN HIS LIFE, in third grade, Jim Larrañaga asked his father for help with his math homework. The elder Larrañaga, a very private man who never talked at home about his work as an insurance adjuster, looked at the assignment and handed it back to the youngster. "You're going to have to learn that on your own," he said. Larrañaga, now 62, has been learning on his own ever since.

You probably know him as the gregarious hoops lifer who shot to national prominence during March Madness in 2006, when his George Mason Patriots made the Final Four as an 11 seed. A Bronx, N.Y., native with a receding hairline, lively eyes and a restless mind, Larrañaga has fully earned the kind of old-school plaudits that come a man's way over 29 years of successful head coaching: motivator, philosopher, occasional cutup. But there's something more to Larrañaga's approach, and it's nearly unique. The timeless lessons of basketball fundamentals aren't enough of a foundation for him; he has always wanted to ground his teachings in empirical data. "The better you can assess a situation and figure out how to improve it, the better you'll be against teams that don't have that ammunition," he says.

So Larrañaga, who majored in economics at Providence College and graduated in '71, started tracking what we would now call advanced metrics 30 years ago. And as new hoops stats have spread around the Internet, he has embraced, absorbed and applied them with the kind of zeal you'd expect from an enthusiast one-third his age. Larrañaga logs on to KenPom.com and RealTimeRPI.com and WarrenNolan.com. His assistants crunch updated numbers in real time during games. He quotes stats he cares about to reporters. He posts them for his players to see and to focus their goals. "What your mind dwells upon,

your body acts upon," he likes to say.

In short, no other college basketball coach uses statistical analysis more thoroughly to connect strategy to tactics. And this season, his first at the University of Miami, he is delivering what may be his greatest performance yet. With players he didn't recruit, facing a schedule he didn't set, Larrañaga has led a team plagued by injuries, scandal and death to a 15-9 record (through Feb. 17). Indeed, with their Feb. 5 win over Duke, the Hurricanes, who haven't been to the Big Dance since 2008, put themselves right on the NCAA bubble. "You can see the team morphing, kind of like watching Optimus Prime change in slow motion from a junky truck into his magnificent robotic form," says Josh Kaufman, a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Miami who co-runs Category 6, a blog covering all things Hurricanes. "And Coach Larrañaga is how this team plays."

IT WASN'T EASY for Larrañaga to leave George Mason, where he amassed 273 wins, three CAA championships and five NCAA tournament berths in his 14 years on the bench. GMU had grown to love him not just as a coach but as the kind of teacher you always remember. He's constantly reading and watching movies, quoting everything from Aristotle to Abraham Lincoln to the movie *Drumline* to Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers*. He routinely posts a Thought of the Day for his team; this season's first: "Begin with the end in mind."

In 2008, Larrañaga turned down the chance to coach at Providence, his alma mater. But last year, George Mason president Alan Merten (and Larrañaga's best friend at the university) retired and Miami came at him offering \$1.3 million a year. Larrañaga, who always wanted to coach in the ACC, realized that the Canes had a solid core of talent in a great location with access to huge resources in a conference with just two dominant teams, and that Miami was just waiting to be resuscitated. In a word, the program was undervalued, just as so many of Larrañaga's George Mason recruits had been before they shocked the country with their stunning tournament run.

As soon as Larrañaga arrived at the U, his new team faced a wave of problems. Center Reggie Johnson hurt his knee and missed a month of the season. Big man Julian Gamble tore an ACL -- out for the year. Guard DeQuan Jones got caught up in Miami's booster scandal -- his family was accused of taking \$10,000 to commit to the U in 2008 -- and sat out the first 10 games. And in a different category entirely, guard Malcolm Grant's 36-year-old brother, Yatti, died of a heart attack in December. (Larrañaga missed his first practice in several years to go to the funeral.)

"It's all about the percentages. Ten turnovers in a 50-possession game is just as bad as 20 turnovers in a 100-possession game."

-- Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga

Still, Larrañaga pressed on; he would install his hybrid system -- coaching integrated with metric analysis -- with whoever was able to play. Larrañaga's approach starts with basket-

ball box scores. Points, rebounds and assists are hoops' version of batting average, home runs and RBI -- numbers that most of us reflexively value because news accounts have tracked them for so long. But simple counting statistics are hugely influenced by the pace at which a game is played, and to truly measure these stats' value at either end of the floor, you need to adjust for possessions. For example, this season, Wisconsin is giving up 50.3 points per game, the fewest of any team in the country. But the Badgers play at a crawl, averaging just 58.6 possessions per game. Ohio State is actually more efficient on defense, surrendering just 81.2 points per 100 possessions, versus 82.2 for Wisconsin. "It's all about the percentages," Larrañaga says. "Ten turnovers in a 50-possession game is just as bad as 20 turnovers in a 100-possession game."

Former UNC coach Dean Smith invented per-possession, or "tempo-free," stats, and stathead Ken Pomeroy popularized them on his website (KenPom.com). Once you learn about adjusting for pace, the concept seems obvious. But most college coaches aren't keeping up. In October, for example, the CAA Hoops blog surveyed conference coaches, who had to compete against Larrañaga for years, and was shocked to find most coaches pay very little attention to tempo-free stats. "I care about rebounds, turnovers, free throw percentage," Drexel's Bruiser Flint said. "All that other stuff is a little too much. My favorite is what a kid does over 40 minutes. Well, he doesn't play 40 minutes for a reason!" Flint's assertion makes as much sense as disliking on-base percentage because a player gets more than one plate appearance a year. But even that sentiment was light-years ahead of Georgia State's Ron Hunter, who said: "I don't look at stats. I don't read newspapers. People keep trying to tell me and I don't want to know." So the stats revolution hasn't quite arrived everywhere just yet.

Larrañaga, of course, applied it immediately to the Hurricanes. While Miami's slow pace last season obscured some of the team's issues, when the new coach looked at pace-adjusted stats, turnovers jumped off the page: Miami gave the ball away on nearly 21 percent of possessions in 2010-11, ranking 218th among 345 DI teams. Play had gotten so bad that the Canes had to run trick plays to inbound the ball. So at one of his very first practices, Larrañaga put the team through a drill called TOBE: turnover basketball elimination. It starts with Larrañaga putting 12 balls on a rack and letting his players scrimmage. Whenever anyone commits a turnover, he eliminates one ball. After the 12th ball is gone, the players run for the rest of practice, whether for half an hour or two and a half hours.

The Hurricanes started those earliest practices the way they played a year ago: sloppy. But as balls vanished from the rack, play got crisper, and hazardous passes disappeared. 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

Crunch time (cont.)

thinking.”

Now inbounds passes are accurate, and players have vanquished another Miami bugaboo: dribbling into a corner and hanging around until a double-team converges. This season, Miami has soared to 53rd in pace-adjusted turnover rankings, losing the ball on just 18.4 percent of possessions. Of course, that's good coaching and good execution, both driven by data that interpreted turnovers as a priority. “You start to learn any new language through vocabulary, word by word, and eventually the words flow together,” Larrañaga says.

Larrañaga's next change was to go beyond adjusting box score stats to charting what's not in box scores at all. He's been working on this for three decades, since he was an assistant to Terry Holland at Virginia. “We had a guy named Kenton Edelin, who was not a good shooter, who was a terrible free throw shooter, who statistically didn't appear to be very good at all,” Larrañaga says. “But when he was in the game, we did better. He was so tenacious defensively, rebounding and shot-blocking, and on offense he never took a shot. So defensively, we were better, and offensively, he was screening to our best shooters and getting them open so they could take the shots.”

Eventually, Larrañaga started taking notes on how well his teams did when different players and combinations of players were on the floor. Which is to say, he embraced what statheads now call lineup plus/minus -- a stat that captures the cumulative impact of harassing opponents, inspiring teammates and other seemingly unquantifiable skills to the extent that they actually change the course of a game. It's helped clue Larrañaga in to the contributions of low-scoring but high-intensity defenders like Shane Larkin at Miami and Andre Cornelius at George Mason. “Everybody wants to look at his own stats, but while you were scoring 20, your team might have been outscored,” Larrañaga explains. “And when you look at lineups, another player may have scored only four points, but the team was plus-12 when he was in the game.”

Coaches use plus/minus and tempo-free stats to tailor their goals to their program. Tom Izzo at Michigan State and Blaine Taylor at Old Dominion believe in maximizing the number of their teams' possessions, and you'll see those schools post huge offensive rebounding percentages season after season. Larrañaga has studied the statistical profiles of teams that make the NCAA tournament and found that their field goal percentage allowed is typically first, second or third in their conference and that they're usually particularly efficient at stopping threes. So everything Larrañaga's players do at both ends of the floor is keyed to holding opponents to under 40 percent shooting and under 30 percent on three-point attempts.

On offense, Larrañaga instructs his players to rotate the ball until they create a high-percentage shot; he'll often say things like, “What good is it if you're open if you miss eight of 10

from that spot?” He wants them to attempt no more than 17 to 18 three-pointers per game, or about one-third of their total shots, in part to limit long rebounds and fast breaks for opponents. And you won't find the Canes crashing the boards en masse. Larrañaga would rather have them get back after missed shots, again to clamp down on easy breaks for the other side.

Defensively, Larrañaga is known for a disruptive scheme he calls the Scramble -- a man-to-man scheme with trapping options designed to force opponents to consume time and make suboptimal decisions. If defenders anticipate and rotate well enough, they avoid getting caught in the kind of three-on-four and two-on-three breakaways that commonly puncture higher-risk defenses. And because it slows games down, you don't need great athletes to run it. Instead, it requires players with a keen sense of where the ball is headed.

Larrañaga is just starting to implement it at Miami, but already the scheme is giving the Hurricanes a hustling vibe very different from last year's zone defense. And the team is starting to meet Larrañaga's goal of compelling bad shots without gambling. In five consecutive ACC wins from late January through mid-February, Miami held opponents to just 37.8 percent shooting. Again, that's good coaching in a classical sense and good execution, but all focused on goals set by Larrañaga's statistical research. “Our players know our goals,” he says. “If the other team shoots 42 percent, even if we win, we didn't meet our goals.”

HE'S NOT DONE innovating. Larrañaga uses Synergy Sports' video-retrieval and indexing software to scan games to find opponents' strengths, weaknesses and tendencies. “[Assistant coach] Chris Caputo gets all the stats, on our opponents and ourselves, to see how we need to match up and at what tempo,” Larrañaga says. “For example, a player may be dynamite going to his right, but influence him to go to his left and he might be 20 percent less effective.” Another assistant, Michael Huger, fits together the best groups of players to exploit potential matchup advantages and helps monitor efficiency during games. “At halftime, he's able to tell me, ‘These five guys were plus-6, and they were the only group that was effective.’” Larrañaga says. “We then ask whether that was because of their size, or who they were guarding, or how they were beating the other team's zones, or whatever. We try to figure that out and apply it.”

Add it all up and you get a team with a distinctive statistical profile that's suddenly become hugely dangerous for this spring. With their trapping defense slowing the pace, the Canes average just 64.6 possessions a game, ranking 261st in the nation. But because the team protects the ball so well and takes good shots, it scores 110 points per 100 possessions, the 45th-highest efficiency in the NCAA. And despite playing makeshift lineups, Miami has improved its three-point defense from 224th in the country last year to 112th while remaining stout inside. Overall, opponents score just

95 points per 100 possessions against the Hurricanes, ranking them 74th in defensive efficiency.

This is a team with numbers reminiscent of Larrañaga's George Mason squads. In fact, take Larrañaga's last 10 teams and shuffle their stat lines, and you won't be able to pick out which one was put up by this year's Hurricanes. In less than one season, he's imprinted on Miami the statistical templates that made George Mason a winner.

And there's more to come in the off-season. For one thing, Larrañaga has barely begun recruiting athletes to Coral Gables. At George Mason, he found players undervalued by other programs, and year after year, his teams won despite a lack of height. “His recruiting approach was Moneyball,” says Peter Boettke, a professor of economics and philosophy at George Mason and a former AAU coach. “He got exceptionally talented players who were overlooked not for skill or accomplishment but because they were slightly off the expected body type for major-conference players. And most of them stayed all four years and bought completely into Coach L's system.”

In contrast, Larrañaga is stepping into a program that has underachieved in recent years but never lacked for big men. This year, the Canes' effective height is 2.8 inches above average, giving them the 23rd-tallest inside presence in the country. Now he gets to see who else he can bring aboard, and letting Larrañaga pitch Miami is like giving Billy Beane the keys to the Yankees' vault.

Moreover, next season will be the first time Larrañaga helps choose Miami's nonconference opponents. Last May, at the first ACC meetings Larrañaga attended, Virginia Tech coach Seth Greenberg asked him how George Mason, coming out of the CAA, managed to gain so many at-large bids to the NCAA tournament. Larrañaga claims he hadn't planned on saying much, but he launched into an explanation of how he and his staff, led by assistant coach Eric Konkol, had conducted a mathematical study of NCAA invitations and RPI. “We found that bids are determined not just by who you beat but who you schedule,” he explained. “As much as possible, we avoided scheduling the teams likely to end up in the lowest category of RPI.” Further, he noted, his staff looked to face opponents who had the potential to be surprisingly good: “If we beat them and they ended up in the top 50 in the country, that would be a great win on our resume.” So George Mason routinely played opponents from outside power conferences that nonetheless went on to post impressive seasons, like Harvard and Duquesne last year and Dayton and Creighton in 2009-10.

As Larrañaga spoke, his fellow ACC coaches listened intently. Their conference ranked 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 com-

munication with players and messaging about potential recruits uniform. Such a setup also provides for a highly integrated coaching style that gives the team's leaders a greater view into the skills and weaknesses of more players.

The Bronx, N.Y. native is also a voracious consumer of management books. The New York Times writes he "would seem right at home at a TED conference, exchanging innovative management ideas." His favorite: Stephen Covey's "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," which he appears to quote from relentlessly. He's a devotee not only of the guru's ideas but of the FranklinCovey daily planners that bear his name. In his office, Larrañaga keeps two decades' worth of the binders carefully tracking every goal, every practice and every appointment.

That kind of meticulousness carries over into the way he coaches the team, relying heavily on numbers to guide his thinking. He uses stats-driven Internet sites to track each player down to each possession, using that data to help him coach. His defense-driven style instructs his players to limit opponents to 12 points per position. He breaks down practices into minute-by-minute increments that players say are so strategic and organized that they're able to guess what their opponents will do once it's time for the game.

But perhaps the biggest reason for Larrañaga's success is the confidence he has in the players on his team. He borrows the "train it and trust it" philosophy from golf, putting all his focus on practice and then letting his players execute on their own during the game, rather than trying to over-manage from the sidelines. Hit with recruiting challenges following an NCAA ethics investigation into events at

Miami that pre-dated his arrival, Larrañaga has chosen not to start over with a new recruiting class. Rather, he's focused on the players he's got, ten of whom are seniors or juniors. As senior Julian Gamble told the Washington Post's Mark Giannotto recently, "He has a lot of confidence in us. Probably more confidence than we have in ourselves sometimes."

Who knows if Miami could win it all — there are plenty of reasons that might not be in the cards this year. The quality of their coach, however, isn't likely to be one of them.

How Miami's Basketball Coach Is Bringing Back The Ñ

WLRN.org
Kenny Malone
March 28, 2013

The squiggly line seemed to show up out of nowhere.

It happened at the Greensboro Coliseum on Sunday, March 17th.

Confetti was falling. Hurricanes were celebrating. The University of Miami had made history by winning the first Atlantic Coast Conference tournament in school history. Jeannine Edwards, an ESPN reporter, was standing by with second-year UM coach Jim Larrañaga.

And then, the name graphic.

In what the television world refers to as a "lower third," ESPN had identified Miami's head coach with a baffling cultural flair: a tilde.

"JIM LARRANAGA," the ESPN graphic read.

Scott Michaux, a columnist for the Augusta Chronicle took note, tweeting: "Did moving to Miami automatically come with a tilde?"

The short answer: Yes.

The Long Answer

Jim Larrañaga is arguably most famous for ruining the country's collective March Madness bracket in 2006. He coached 11th-seeded George Mason University through upsets of perennial powerhouses like Michigan State, North Carolina and number-one-seeded Connecticut and eventually reached the Final Four before losing to Florida.

"We never used the tilde," George Mason's director of news media for men's basketball, Dan Reisig, wrote in an email. "In fact, no one at George Mason was aware of his Cuban lineage prior to his arrival at Miami."

That's because the lineage has been slowly whitewashed, piece-by-piece, over Larrañaga's life. "Americanized"

Jim Larrañaga is Bronx-born with an accent to prove it. He's 63, Caucasian, and throughout his life, people have assumed his last name was Italian. "Because it ended with a vowel," he laughed.

In reality, the name is Basque by way of Cuba.

According to Larrañaga, his grandfather was born in Cuba and was part of the Por Larrañaga cigar company. (That's pronounced LAW-ruh-NYAW-guh.)

Larrañaga's father wanted his kids to blend in, to be "Americanized." He pronounced his last name with an extra-nasally, American 'a' and left the ñ sound out completely (LAH-ruh-NAY-guh). He refused to let the kids speak Spanish even though Jim's grandmother was fluent.

But Jim Larrañaga liked the way his grandmother said the name, the deep vowels, the ñ. He adopted the Basque pronunciation.

And then he quickly dropped it.

On Larrañaga's first day at a Catholic kindergarten, a nun was going through the class roll. When she called Larrañaga's name, she put her own Americanized spin on it. "I try to correct her," Larrañaga said, "and she wouldn't be corrected...That was it. It stuck."

The Missing Tilde

There's a case to be made that Jim Larrañaga's time at George Mason University was as Americanized a stretch as he'll ever have.

The school -- in Fairfax, Va. -- is 25 miles from Washington D.C. The university's nickname is "The Patriots." And by the time Larrañaga had arrived at GMU his name's spelling was set in stone:

"L-A-R-R-A-N-A-G-A," recalled Bill Rohland, the radio play-by-play announcer for GMU basketball. "Yeah, there was never any accent on any of the 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 key-

board 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: "Maryanna" (said like Maryann-a as opposed to Mari-AH-nuh).

It felt like a constant reminder that she was different and that Kendall wasn't Colombia.

Gaviria started going by "Mari."

"It upset me as a little kid because it wasn't what normal people would call me in my country," said Gaviria. "I understood why, but as a little kid you want to make it easier on people."

Gaviria, who is majoring in political science and international studies, is now fiercely proud of her Hispanic heritage and her name. When she learned from this reporter about Larrañaga's Cuban background, the nun who couldn't say his name and the tilde in his signature, she was delighted. "Something as small as an 'ñ' can make a big difference," she said.

The squiggly line that Larrañaga is pretty sure people simply didn't notice in his signature means the world to Gaviria.

"Everybody has their own story, especially when you're an immigrant and you go to a different country," said Gaviria. "And when you travel a little north, people have trouble saying the name, they just don't understand--understand the different processes that it takes to make it here. And even just a name can link people that way."

It's All About The ñ

Jim Larrañaga was as shocked as anyone when he got his University of Miami business cards: "Jim Larrañaga."

"I showed my wife. I said, 'hey, look at this. They were able to do it.'"

And then again on ESPN: "That was the first time I'd seen it on TV."

How the tilde showed up again is a bit of a mystery. Larrañaga said he never asked anyone to do it, but he prefers the new, old spelling.

"It's always been there [in the signature]," he said. "That hasn't changed for me since I was a little boy."

And so the variable has been everything around Larrañaga -- a father who Americanized the family, a teacher who mispronounced his name, a part of the country where the line in his signature may have been mistaken for a flourish instead of a sign of Cuban heritage.

Larrañaga's glad to have the tilde back, glad to officially wear his grandfather's heritage on his name. Plus he's hoping it'll clear up one misconception.

"People are not going to say, 'he's Italian.'"

Larrañaga making himself at home in Miami

The Examiner
Kevin Dunleavy
March 9, 2013

As he entered Sports Grill in South Miami with an entourage of assistants, family and friends, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga received a standing ovation. His Hurricanes had just walloped then-No. 1 Duke by 27 points. Like a politician, the 63-year-old coach visited each table, holding court and pressing flesh.

The short trip from BankUnited Center down South Dixie Highway to the popular wings-and-beer joint has become a routine for Larrañaga and his coaches as they make new friends and draw fans to a program that has barely registered in South Florida.

It's the same outreach Larrañaga performed in 14 seasons at George Mason with Brion's Grille as his postgame headquarters. More than any other college program in the Washington area, the Patriots belonged as much to the community as to the school.

Now, 1,050 miles to the south, Larrañaga is lighting up Miami with his optimism, enthusiasm and self-help catechism. On cue, his team has arrived. After never finishing better than fifth in the ACC, Miami (23-6 entering Saturday) is ranked No. 6 and will open the conference tournament as the top seed this week in Greensboro.

"It's been quite a transition," Larrañaga said Friday. "It's 75 today. The sun is shining. It's absolutely beautiful. My wife is going to play golf in an hour and she is loving that."

In a city where the NBA champion Miami Heat overwhelm the sports conversation, the Hurricanes are carving a niche. For the first time ever, Miami sold out consecutive games, and for the first time since joining the ACC in 2004 the Hurricanes will not have the league's lowest attendance.

Students now line up for tickets, camping overnight between palm trees on "Larrañaga's Lawn," some wearing T-shirts with the coach's face above the slogan "40 Minutes of L." The morning of the Duke game, Larrañaga and wife Liz

stopped by Costco, picked 300 Krispy Kreme doughnuts and distributed them to the campers.

"We wanted to create a family atmosphere within the basketball program," Larrañaga said. "We wanted our students to also be part of our family -- to make them feel part of our success."

At Miami, Larrañaga has recreated his success in Fairfax. He's done it in a more competitive basketball conference, in an area less receptive to college basketball and at a school in need of an image makeover. Despite some raised eyebrows when Larrañaga took the job, no one was better suited for it.

"We built a grassroots network of people who support our program," Larrañaga said. "My staff and I have reached out to the local community to try to get young kids to follow our program. We had our first high school basketball game in the BankUnited Center. Those are the kind of people that want to become season ticket holders and fans."

As coach at Bowling Green from 1986 to 1997, Larrañaga saw how families involved in the basketball programs of his two sons were drawn to Falcons games. These days, Larrañaga goes to extremes to ensure his summer basketball camps are attractive to local youths. His players serve as instructors and role models in the summer, then as drawing cards in the winter. After games, children are invited to a designated area of the locker room for posters, photo opportunities and autographs.

To energize students, the Hurricanes conduct "dorm storms," with Larrañaga beckoning students to come outside and accept posters and T-shirts. It's reminiscent of his early days at George Mason when Larrañaga conducted karaoke nights.

The Canes are not only attracting families and students. The glamour set has taken note. Rapper Flo Rida and WWE star The Big Show have checked into BankUnited. After a Heat game in which All-Star Dwyane Wade threw a pass off the backboard to feed a teammate for a flashy fast-break dunk, he told reporters

he was inspired by Hurricanes sophomore Shane Larkin, who did the same at a game Wade and LeBron James had attended.

Many of the school's illustrious football icons are showing up. At the Duke game, NFL Hall of Famer Warren Sapp was seated near the Miami bench and when the rout was assured, he urged Larkin to slap the floor, Duke-style, before a defensive possession. When all five players complied, Sapp and those nearby had a hearty laugh and an amusing snippet with which to remember a transformational night.

Later in the evening, the revelry was transported to Sports Grill where Larrañaga got down to business.

"He's the best at going to every table and saying hello," assistant Eric Konkol said. "Now people count on us being there, talking about the game."

Longwood head coach Mike Gillian, who served under Larrañaga at Bowling Green and George Mason, says his promotional efforts are as detail-oriented as his game plans.

"In college sports, a big portion of what you do is community, fans, media. Jim understands that better than anyone," Gillian said. "Trust me. It's on a list. It's planned out. It's organized."

Given his deep roots in the community, Larrañaga's departure from George Mason was anything but a routine step up the coaching ladder. After leading the Patriots to the Final Four in 2006, he had fended off offers from big-conference schools and appeared settled in Fairfax. Moving to another job and doing it his way would be a massive undertaking.

But Larrañaga has pulled it off, turning another dormant community on to college basketball.

Larrañaga gets support from brother on Suncoast

ABC 7

Don Brennan

April 3, 2013

MANATEE COUNTY - The Final Four is set, and the University of Miami is not in it. But under head coach Jim Larrañaga, the Hurricanes won 29 games in their best season ever. And here on the Suncoast, his biggest supporters had a front row seat.

"If I go down there, I want to spend time with Jim. He's my brother before he's a coach, and so if I can't spend time with him, I have a better seat here, looking at a 52" TV," says John Larrañaga.

He and Jeannie are almost always camped out to watch the 'Canes games. They are always in the same spot, but not always in the same seat for each game. "I sit here, and Jeannie sits here, or vice versa. Souffle is in the middle between us."

The Larrañagas are a close family, and older brother John has watched Jim on the court from the time he was a child, through high school at Archbishop Molloy, through college at Providence, and now up to this 'Canes successful season. "Really exciting; I mean it gives me chills all the time. When he was growing up and played ball in high school, I saw virtually every game he played."

This season, the 'Canes beat a #1 ranked team for the first time ever, they went 29-7 overall, reached the Sweet Sixteen, and won the ACC. "Jim instilled man-to-man, not zone. He instilled defense; keep the other team scoring at 60 points or less. And it became a winning formula. He knows exactly what he wants, and he gets that from our father."

As the younger brother coaches, the two

older brothers sit, watch, and dissect.

"We got on the bus to go to the game. He turned around to say to Bob and I: 'I don't want you guys coaching me. You just watch, I'll do the coaching.' I said to Bob, okay we got the message."

Jim Larrañaga has a place near his brother in Lakewood Ranch, but he only gets up here a few times a year.

"We're really proud of him. Win or lose... he's always our brother. We are very proud that he has accomplished what he accomplished."

Feel the Love

Sports on Earth
Chuck Cluopper
March 28, 2013

AUSTIN, Texas -- Twenty-five years in the wacky practice of seeking quotations from athletes at their lockers, and somehow I happened upon my all-time favorite team when I wasn't looking.

It's not my alma mater. It's not a team from a place I have resided (although I wish I had). It's in either my fourth- or fifth-favorite sport to cover, depending on which week you ask. It's unforeseen, objective love, and it hit fast and hard with one night in Miami and February and four hours of access sprinkled across an Austin weekend.

I've seen umpteen teams with camaraderie, collaboration, cohesion, chemistry, heard untold "we-are-a-family" testimonies. Hell, I just got finished swooning three weeks ago as the Washington Nationals extolled their esprit de corps. But this finds a fresh level. In all my quote-scribbling years, I just never heard quotations quite like these.

Come to the Miami Hurricanes' basketball locker room. Feel the love.

Twenty-three-year-old senior big man Julian Gamble: "We love each other so much and that extends so far beyond basketball that it's really hard to put into words."

Twenty-two-year-old senior guard Trey McKinney Jones: "I can honestly say it's something like I've never experienced before. It's relationships we're going to have for the rest of our lives, and we understand that."

Twenty-three-year-old senior big-big man Reggie Johnson: "Now, from the standpoint of people saying, 'College is the best years of your life,' now I really understand what that means."

Twenty-one-year-old junior guard Rion Brown: "Man, this is the funnest thing I've ever been part of in my life."

They're uncommonly engaging. They're unusually aware. They're unquestionably ambassadors. They're bonded in a way you can feel in the air at a level previously unfelt even in all the years. They might

remind you why you ever liked sports.

When the starting five goes out for a tense second half against Illinois, somebody says something and they break into a laugh. When they have an on-court issue with each other, they tend to gather in a circle and say it like gentlemen, inaudible to opponents. Nobody feels insulted. When they have an off-court time and they go to wherever teams go after practices or games, they go together. "This morning, everybody just went to Kenny's room," Johnson said last Saturday, referring to the Cameroonian senior big man Kenny Kadji. "He put a beat on. Everyone was just freestyling."

He added: "There's no one who veers off. No one. Not one person. This team has no cliques. It's not Trey and me over here, this other clique over there ..."

They dance as a team, and sometimes 63-year-old head coach Jim Larrañaga dances in front of them, and when that happened after the second-round win over Illinois, their essence seemed to gush right out of the video snippet.

If they lose and this ends, they're going to feel sadness. If they win four more games and this ends, they're going to feel sadness. They want to win to advance, but not as much as they want to win to sustain this time.

Maybe it's simple. Maybe it's bracing because in college basketball anymore, some players stop by for such a short time that entire teams don't get this much time to grow acquainted. "I really think it's having six seniors," Larrañaga said. It also could be having six seniors plus a roster full of guys who weren't humongous recruits jaded with the humongous-recruit process. It also could be having six seniors plus their various travails with injuries such that Larrañaga lists them and says, "That's a lot of knees."

It also could be having six seniors plus a sophomore point guard who fits so agreeably into his gathering stardom.

View the general conditions of Shane Larkin's upbringing, and the forecast might call for entitlement: son of a famous athlete, lucky childhood, days at baseball spring training chasing balls and taking batting practice from stars, nickname

("SugaShane") bestowed by one Deion Sanders, even a story in which a Little League coach opined that whoever had taught Larkin to hit knew nothing about hitting, when that teacher happened to be Pete Rose.

That forecast, like many, would be wrong. Even as the son of the retired Cincinnati Reds' 12-time All-Star shortstop Barry Larkin came to be the kind of athlete who can make you gasp, who adored being chased at football until he broke his ankle at 14, and even as Larrañaga insists Shane could go right across to big-time baseball -- "tremendous lateral quickness," "tremendous anticipation," "great hand-to-eye coordination," "great speed" -- Shane also brought along his gracious father's tutelage.

"He was always, like, cool," Shane Larkin said of Barry Larkin. "He never showed out. He was a humble guy." The son reels off the advice, for dealing with media and teammates and sports: "Be friendly. Don't get on anybody's bad side. Always be willing to talk. Don't make predictions. Don't be a bad guy. Be humble." And: "Have fun. Don't put too much pressure on yourself. There's always going to be another game, going to be another season, the next play."

"No one was hating on him or not liking him or not trying to accept him," Johnson said. "The first year, we tried to get him to be more vocal, but he didn't want to step on any toes." He played behind former All-ACC point guard Malcolm Grant; he didn't start until late January 2012. "He was the same player last year," Johnson kept going, "and he was just falling back and not trying to step on toes. The fact [is] he didn't come in trying to say, 'I'm the big point guard here.'"

"I'm his big brother," Johnson said. "Most teams don't really have that. This is the first year Miami really has that."

Miami has something else, for sure. My objectively favorite team has something alluring. It's something that makes you picture these guys as older men, maybe at weddings, maybe in their forties, maybe in their fifties, still in each other's lives, still getting together, still talking about 2013, still sitting at tables you'd feel lucky to join.

Bronx-born Larrañaga has Miami flying high

New York Post
Steve Serby
March 27, 2013

On The bus that was about to take him from Coral Gables to the airport for the flight to Washington and a Sweet 16 showdown with Marquette and maybe beyond, Miami coach Jim Larrañaga wasn't only taking a fun bunch of driven college basketball players with him, he was taking the voice of the late Jack Curran, too, a legendary New York voice he will never stop hearing.

"The last time I spoke to him about the team was after the Duke game, I called him, we lost by three points at Duke," Larrañaga said. "He said, 'Larry, you didn't play any defense.' I said, 'Mr. Curran, Duke's pretty good.' He said, 'Didn't you tell your players [Ryan] Kelly can shoot? I was yelling at the TV, 'Kelly can shoot!' Kelly was killing you.' It was a great conversation. He had me laughing the whole time."

WELCOME BACK:

Miami coach Jim Larrañaga returns this week to Washington, where he orchestrated one of the most memorable Cinderella runs in NCAA Tournament history in 2007, leading George Mason to the Final Four.

Larrañaga is New York all the way, from 1501 Metropolitan Ave. in the Parkchester section of The Bronx, living out his dream of doing for others in basketball what Curran had done for him, all the way back to Archbishop Molloy High School. Seven years ago, Curran beamed with pride as Larrañaga wrote his Cinderella story, taking George Mason to the Final Four in 2006. "He would say, 'You guys are pretty smart,'" Larrañaga recalled. "I like smart teams. Smart teams can win."

Curran liked this Miami team, too. "He would love the competitiveness of our guards and he liked the size and versatility of our team," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga likes his team plenty, likes how

it has overcome injuries and adversity. "Life is 10 percent what happens to you," he tells you, "and 90 percent how you handle it."

So you ask him: Could this be a Team of Destiny?

"William Jennings Bryan says, 'Destiny is not a matter of chance. It's a matter of choice.' It's not something you wait to have happen. It's something you go out and earn."

They've earned this right to a magical journey and laughed every step of the way. I asked Larrañaga what his wife thought about his Ali Shuffle in the locker room after the 'Canes had survived Illinois.

"My wife watched it repeatedly," he said. "She absolutely loved the players' reaction. She said, 'They're jumping for joy. That's what it's all about.'"

The funniest thing he heard about it came from a grad assistant named Chris Alvarez, who asked Larrañaga: "Coach, did you know it went viral?"

"I said, 'What the hell does that mean?'" Larrañaga said.

"It's all over the Internet," he was told.

"I said, 'You're kidding,'" Larrañaga said. "If you can't find anything more entertaining than me doing the Ali Shuffle..."

Larrañaga, 63 years young, is as fierce a competitor now as he was back in the East Quadrant, where the best basketball could be found, where the opposition could have been Dean Meminger or John Roche or Dave Wohl or Gary Brokaw.

"Parkchester was divided into four quadrants — North, South, East and West," Larrañaga said. "Each one had its own park."

He looks for every edge, whether it be

through statistical analysis or seeking advice three times a week from renowned sports psychologist Dr. Bob Rotella. Every day brings a quote of the day the players have to memorize. What was yesterday's quote of the day?

"Defend the drive, block them out, rebound," Larrañaga said.

Asked why, he said, "Marquette is the No. 1 offensive rebounding team in the Big East."

These are heady times in Miami with the Heat and the Hurricanes. Larrañaga talked about getting texts from Pat Riley and Erik Spoelstra and a tweet from LeBron James after beating Illinois. And Larrañaga reflected back on a talk Chris Bosh gave the 'Canes two summers ago right after Larrañaga took over. Bosh had been working out with some of the team and told Larrañaga: "I'd never get a good workout when we scrimmaged."

So Bosh became the only person outside the program asked by Larrañaga to speak to the team. "He gave the best five-minute, 10-minute talk I ever heard," Larrañaga said. "He talked about how badly he wanted to win a championship, and the regrets he had playing the way he played in the sixth game against Dallas. He wasn't gonna let that happen again. He let it be known to these guys if they want their dreams to come true, they better start working a lot harder."

Larrañaga and his team have made school history and now they are shooting for more. Shooting for the Final Four.

Said Larrañaga, "It would be the culmination of a tremendous amount of hard work, coming together and creating memories that last a lifetime."

Jack Curran would be so proud.

Larrañaga delivering

Toledo Blade
Dave Hackenberg
Feb. 13, 2013

Serving on the staff of the Michael Jordan Fantasy Camp in Las Vegas was a tough ticket. It helped if you coached in the NBA or were in the Basketball Hall of Fame. Then there was the case of Jim Larrañaga and some others who had coached in an NCAA Final Four.

He made that magical trip, a mid-major miracle of sorts, with George Mason University at the end of the 2005-06 season and found himself coaching at Jordan's camp the following summer.

There, he met two Miami businessmen, Jose and Jorge Mas, well-known Cuban-Americans in south Florida. They became friends, especially after learning the ties went even deeper.

You might not guess it from his last name or his Bronx birthplace or his New York City/Eastern seaboard accent, but Larrañaga's paternal grandfather was Cuban and immigrated to Key West in the early 1900s. The coach's father was raised there.

So when the University of Miami coaching job opened in April of 2011, Larrañaga knew what phone numbers to dial. It became a hurry-up process. The George Mason coach was traveling and didn't have a resume at hand. So he cut-and-pasted his Wikipedia page and forwarded it to the selection committee. To make a long story short, including a hearty recommendation from Boston Celtics coach Doc Rivers, he got the job.

Before becoming head coach at Bowling Green State University in 1986, Larrañaga had been an assistant under Terry Holland at Virginia for seven seasons. In four of those years the Cavaliers had, at one time or another, been ranked No. 1 in the country, and twice they went to the Final Four.

From the day he left he had one burning desire — to return to the Atlantic

Coast Conference as a head coach. A quarter of a century later, he owned 470 collegiate victories, had led George Mason to five NCAA tournaments, and in that regard was a hot prospect. He also had celebrated 61 birthdays and in that regard he was not.

For various reasons — storm clouds of an NCAA investigation that would envelop the entire Miami athletic department were brewing, minimal interest in a basketball program that had never been competitive in the ACC — big names weren't exactly lining up for the job. After Coach L used his connections to crack the door, he blew 'em away with an energetic interview. As the school's new athletic director said at the time, age went out the window. He couldn't imagine not hiring Larrañaga.

Today, the Miami Hurricanes will play at rival Florida State as the No. 3 ranked team in the nation. They are 19-3, 10-0 in the ACC, and have made a wild, almost unprecedented climb the last five weeks going from unranked to No. 25 to No. 14 to No. 8 to No. 3. Their power ranking, strength of schedule and RPI are off the charts. Once a ghost town at a football school in a pro-sports town, fans now line up for tickets at the beautiful but fairly small (7,972 seats) BankUnited Center on the campus in Coral Gables. The NCAA tournament is a foregone conclusion; the discussion now is over a No. 1 seed.

Larrañaga said Tuesday he is not the least bit surprised; if not for injuries and suspensions he felt as if last season's team, his first at Miami that won 20 games and posted a first-ever winning record in ACC play, might have done the same.

"It's been great," he said via telephone. "When I took the job people said, 'You're never going to draw fans; you'll never create any interest in the program.' They told me the same thing at Bowling Green and George Mason. By the end, we were packing the place at both schools. This

past Saturday, our North Carolina game (a blowout 87-61 win), we had LeBron and Dwyane Wade sitting courtside. I think people noticed that. I know recruits noticed. I think the nation is noticing now."

When the Miami job opened, coupled with coaching changes at other ACC schools, Larrañaga said he saw a league in transition with Miami sporting a veteran team while sitting in the midst of a fertile recruiting area.

"It's the ACC, the best basketball league in the country, and I saw an opportunity to succeed," he said. "The first meeting I had with players at George Mason in April of '97, I asked them who had the best programs, the role models. The first two places mentioned were Duke and North Carolina. And I tried to build the program at Mason in their image, that ACC image. I loved every minute of my 14 years there, but when [the Miami] opportunity came up I very much wanted to achieve this goal.

"I envisioned success."

Larrañaga has always had a vision, even if it wasn't clear to others. Maybe never fully appreciated at BG — he is the second winningest coach all-time at 170-144 while operating in an antiquated Anderson Arena, but never took the Falcons to the NCAAs — many were surprised when he made what appeared to be a lateral mid-major move.

At George Mason Larrañaga saw a modern, 9,500-seat arena and a chance to make an impact at a school where no resources were siphoned off by football or hockey. Fans saw a lateral move to a fairly anonymous school in a similar, maybe then slightly better league; he saw potentially another Gonzaga or Butler. And, for the most part, he delivered.

Now, Larrañaga's latest vision is coming into focus. And he is delivering big again, finally back home, in the ACC and south Florida.

Larrañaga lands in dream job with Miami Hurricanes

Miami Herald
Greg Cote
Feb. 5, 2013

The University of Miami men's basketball team climbed as high as it ever has Monday — to a No. 8 national ranking in The Associated Press poll — and the man who made that magic ladder appear, Jim Larrañaga, had just heard the news when we spoke.

"It feels great. I'm excited," the coach said. "It represents a major step forward."

I asked Larrañaga if he planned to break the news to his team. He smiled.

"Those guys know everything before I do," he said. "By now someone has texted it, tweeted it, Facebooked it or instant messaged it."

Nothing stays a secret for long anymore, and so these Hurricanes haven't.

Less than a month ago they were off the national grid, and barely making South Florida pay attention. Now they are one of the sweet stories in all of college basketball, rocketing up in the polls from nowhere to 25th to 14th to eighth in three heady weeks.

A signature 90-63 pasting of No. 1 Duke on Jan. 23 in Coral Gables made America take notice. Reggie Johnson's miracle last-second tip-in to win at No. 19 North Carolina State on Saturday made you wonder if this team wasn't charmed.

Football is done now. You ready to pay attention to something besides the Heat?

This is your team. This is the time.

Larrañaga's guys have won nine in a row entering Tuesday night's home game vs. Boston College. They are 17-3. They are 8-0 in the mighty Atlantic Coast Conference — the first ACC team other than Duke or North Carolina to do that since 1981.

The only other time the UM men ranked No. 8 was in March 1960, even before Rick Barry arrived. The Canes have never finished a season ranked higher than 10th.

This year, though, you get the idea anything is possible. You get the feeling March Madness will very much include this team as a major player.

A couple of weeks ago there was speculation

about this being a Sweet 16 team. Then came the stunning whipping of Duke. Then came the top 10. Now if you're talking Sweet 16 you seem to under-selling UM's potential.

Elite Eight, anyone? Final Four, even?

This is Larrañaga's problem at the moment. Well, his challenge, at least. The excitement of possibility nourishing this program is all good, but it also raises the stakes on the coach making sure his players keep their focus.

"Our point of view is to get ready for Boston College," he said Monday. "At any time, circumstances can change. We are not looking two weeks or a month down the road. The only thing [being ranked No. 8] does is fire up your opponent. The whole reason we are enjoying success is that we have prepared one day at a time. We do not get too full of ourselves just because somebody else has decided we're good."

The even keel is easier because five of UM's top six scorers are seniors — Johnson, Durand Scott, Kenny Kadji, Trey McKinney Jones and Julian Gamble — itself unusual (and pleasantly so) in the one-and-done NCAA.

That is also why this season figures to be Miami's best opportunity, although Larrañaga, 63, in his second season here, has earned the faith that he can recruit and win with his own guys, not just with the talent inherited.

This coach took a long time to get to his dream job, but he has arrived at it.

He is best known for coaching mid-major George Mason to the Final Four in 2006, but that was just part of the climb.

"I'm very goal-oriented. I was an assistant in the ACC at Virginia [1979-86], and when I left I wrote down that one of my goals was to become a head coach in the ACC," Larrañaga said. "So when the Miami job opened up I was very interested."

He did his research. He always loved the talent pool in Florida, and he found more than half the teams in the ACC had changed coaches recently.

"I saw a league going through a transition period," he said. "If we were able to recruit well, we could do some damage in this conference. It seemed like an opportunity to come in and succeed very quickly."

Larrañaga had a very small inner circle of family and friends he consulted about the Miami job: his wife, two adult sons, Celtics coach Doc Rivers and sports psychologist Bob Rotella.

The conduit for Larrañaga coming here was Jose Mas, whom he had met while coaching at a Michael Jordan fantasy camp. Mas, the son of Jorge Mas Canosa, the former Miami business leader and Cuban exile fixture, called Larrañaga and invited him to forward his résumé to UM.

Larrañaga was traveling and had no access to his résumé so, at a son's suggestion, he copy-and-pasted his Wikipedia page and sent it to UM. An interview was set up. His hiring didn't take long thereafter.

(Speaking of Mas Canosa, it happens that Larrañaga is part Cuban. His father's father was Cuban, emigrating to Key West in the early 1900s.)

Larrañaga knew he was coming here to not just coach a team, but to grow a program in a city that hardly is a college hoops hotbed.

"I want everyone in this community to be dying to get a ticket to watch us play," he said. "At Bowling Green and George Mason everybody also told me we couldn't draw, but by the time I left the place was packed every night."

Coaching in the ACC had been Larrañaga's "ultimate goal to really test yourself." Now he is finding out the league isn't too big for him. He's big enough for the league.

I asked him if the satisfaction he feels is different now.

"Don't know yet. We are still in the process of competing," he said. Then he added something that should make Canes fans smile as much as that No. 8 ranking: "My career here at Miami has really just begun."

Larrañaga, Meier tour campus to rally support

CaneSport.com

Feb. 13, 2012

David Furones

Both the men's and women's basketball programs are hot right now. The women are No. 6 in the nation and have won 11 straight while the men are winners are five of their last six and are currently listed in Joe Lunardi's "last four in" to make the tournament. But neither team can seem to get warm bodies in the seats, especially in the student section.

On Monday night coaches Jim Larrañaga and Katie Meier, along with cheerleaders, Sebastian the Ibis and players from both teams, traveled to four different on-campus housing facilities meeting students and rallying support from the UM student body as part of the Buffalo Wild Wings Coaches Campus Tour.

The team's goal: get students to come out to men's home games Wednesday against No. 8 North Carolina and Saturday versus Wake Forest and the women's game against FSU Sunday.

"We're in the final push here and we just want to get the students out," Meier said. "When they do come, it makes a huge difference."

Members of the teams got on the residence halls' PA systems and called students out of their dorms and down to the lobbies to treat them to wings and pizza while pumping up the fans with a megaphone. They handed out towels and shirts to students who correctly answered trivia questions.

Larrañaga, who dropped by a flag football practice on the intramural fields to rally support, says this is an important event because it builds a bond between

the team and the students.

"Students might watch a game on TV, but won't go across campus because they don't know the players that well," Larrañaga said. "Our players are out here trying to talk to the students, get to know them and encourage them to come out and cheer them on."

Larrañaga wants the students to feel as if they're part of the team.

"The most fun you have in college is being a part of something," says Larrañaga. "And if you can be part of a winning program, a team that makes the NCAA Tournament, creates some national news—that's the best, not only for the players and coaches but for the students as well."

Senior guard Malcolm Grant, who busted out the pom-poms to lead cheers at Hecht Residential College, agrees.

"When they come out and they see the players in their dorm and they're trying to get them to come to the game, it makes them feel like they're wanted and that's the whole idea," Grant said. "We want them to come out, we want them to feel the support and understand that we need them to win."

Meier says building relationships with students is critical for support in the long run.

"You can invite a thousand strangers to a game, and they come one time and they don't understand why they're there," Meier said. "Or you can get the students to get real involved, build relationships with them and see the growth of the team."

So, after storming the campus dorms, what kind of a crowd does the men's

team expect for the home game against UNC?

"I'm hoping for a big crowd, the biggest crowd I've ever seen since I've been here," Grant says. "Usually it's always a good crowd when we play [North Carolina], but I want to see it packed, like every seat I want to see somebody in it cheering, going crazy."

Shenise Johnson, who leads a women's team that has won 38 consecutive home games, talked about how helpful it can be to have a hostile environment behind the team.

"It gives us that sixth man, that person off the bench," Johnson said. "It gets us excited and makes us play a lot harder when we have our peers supporting us."

Larrañaga says he will coach until at least 2019

Sun Sentinel
Jan. 27, 2012
Steve Gorten

CORAL GABLES – Miami men’s basketball coach Jim Larrañaga will be 69 years old when his new three-year contract extension, signed Wednesday and announced today, expires on April 30, 2019.

Will he still be coaching then?

“You know, I talked to my son Jay last night and that question kind of was posed in the opposite,” Larrañaga recounted. “Jay basically said, ‘You’re a lifer. You’re going to coach until the day you die.’”

“That’s just what I love to do. So I expect to coach at least that long [2019], if not longer.”

At least that long?

“It just proves how much he loves the game and how much passion he has, how much he wants this school to become a great school,” freshman point guard Shane Larkin said with a smile. “I know Coach is very passionate, so I think he’ll definitely finish the deal, and if he can, he’ll sign another extension after that.”

Larrañaga joked that his wife, Liz, tells him “I don’t do anything else but coach,” adding he tries to coach her on driving while she’s behind the wheel and on the golf course, even though he knows “nothing about golf.”

“[Coaching] has been in my blood for a very long time, and I’ll expect I’ll be doing it as long as I can,” Larrañaga added.

This is, after all, a man who sees his mentor and former high school coach, Jack Curran, still coaching basketball and

baseball at 80 years old at Archbishop Molloy in Queens, N.Y.

The average age of NCAA men’s basketball coaches in 2010-11 was 49.65 years old.

The oldest active NCAA men’s basketball coach is Jackson State’s Tevester Anderson, who’ll turn 75 on Feb. 26. The next oldest, Miami (Ohio) coach Charlie Coles, will turn 70 on Feb. 6. Connecticut’s John Calhoun will also turn 70 in May. San Diego State’s Steve Fisher will be 67 in March, the same age as Syracuse’s Jim Boeheim. Florida Atlantic’s Mike Jarvis will turn 67 in April.

So Larrañaga finishing his new contract is quite possible. If he does stay at Miami through the 2018-19 season — there’s no reason to believe he’ll leave, considering his affinity for the ACC and ties in Florida — and doesn’t retire, he will not only turn the Hurricanes into a consistent winner, but more importantly an established program a high-profile coach would want to take over.

He knows the game as well as anyone, and he teaches it as well as anyone, which means players will develop — something that too often hasn’t been the case here.

Now, it will take time. This isn’t a one-year or two-year project, but rather a “long-term project,” Larrañaga acknowledged today, adding, “We want to build correctly.”

It’s hard to have patience if you’re a ‘Canes fan, considering that was the mantra during Frank Haith’s tenure the past seven seasons and the ‘Canes made the NCAA Tournament just once — 2007-08.

Unfortunately, it’s necessary.

“We want to help develop a brand that the community wants to follow,” Larrañaga said. “People tend to follow winners and we want to build a winning program that people will be excited about. It doesn’t happen overnight, but we did it at two other institutions.

UM athletic director Shawn Eichorst made a good move offering Larrañaga an extension and making a commitment to him.

The timing might seem peculiar, considering the ‘Canes are just 11-7, 2-3 in the ACC in Larrañaga’s first season, but with the injuries and off-field issues 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 learning. He told me, 'If you ever stop trying to improve as a coach, you might as well

quit.'"

Jones says players took to Larrañaga quickly, noting, "we did our research and his track record speaks for itself. He's a winner."

Added Jones, "It's easy to buy into someone who has a history of winning and being successful. Once we started practicing and he started showing us a lot of different things, it was, like, 'OK, this is our guy right here.'"

It took Johnson perhaps the longest to make the transition from Haith to Larrañaga. Johnson didn't attend Larrañaga's first meeting with UM players — he was home in Winston-Salem, N.C. for spring break. Larrañaga flew up there to meet with him personally.

"It took me a while honestly," Johnson said, noting Haith gave him a chance out of high school when other coaches didn't want to because of his weight issues. "So I was real close to him. It kind of hurt. I still miss him to this day, but Coach L is probably the best thing for us as a program right now."

Johnson, like his teammates, was especially touched by Larrañaga's decision to attend the funeral of Grant's older brother in New York the day before UM played Appalachian State at home Dec. 30. Larrañaga missed a practice for the first time in eight years to do so.

Grant said Larrañaga kept calling to check up on him and wanted to know when and where the funeral would be.

"Just him coming up shows the type of person he is — true class act," Grant said. "My whole family really appreciated it. ... You're at a funeral home, a sad time, and I look over and see my coach. It brightened me up a little bit just to see him there."

Sometimes, just making an effort can leave an impression. And if it makes your 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 basketball. He has dissected it like a Wall Street analyst does the stock market, and compiled hundreds of pages of notes and formulas along the way. He majored in math and economics at Providence, and remains a number cruncher. His staff keeps detailed stats at every practice, and posts them for players to examine.

He insists players focus on points per possession, not just points. If you scored 20, but took 25 shots, that's not a good game. He wants them to "select" shots instead of "take" shots, based on their tendencies and those of their teammates. He recently chided a player in practice who was taking a lot of 3-point shots despite not being a particularly good long-range shooter. Asked why he was taking them, the player replied: "Because I was open," to which Coach L answered: "What good is it if you're open if you miss 8-of-10 from that spot?"

When a player turns the ball over during a scrimmage, his team loses a point. Every rebound in practice is tallied. The top rebounder at each position is excused from running or weight training that day, so the battles have become fierce.

"Those numbers are a reflection of something and I want them to be aware how they impact performance," said Larrañaga, 62, who led George Mason to the Final Four in 2006. "It's very different from what they're used to, but they seem intrigued by it. During practices now, they are constantly calling over the statistician. What your mind dwells upon, your body acts upon. We need their minds focused on the right things.

"Most kids, they're focused on 'How many shots am I getting? How many points am I scoring?' If you ask them the most important thing, they'll say win-

ning, but they're not focusing on the things it takes to win."

He is particularly concerned with UM's alarming turnover rate. The Hurricanes, who won 21 games but finished ninth in the ACC last season, ranked 205th out of 336 Division I teams in turnovers. His George Mason team ranked No. 22. UM ranked 271st in assists per game, so the assist/turnover ratio ranked 248th.

Game technician

Larrañaga said UM players were in too much of a hurry to make fancy passes and shots rather than slowing down, thinking, and making smarter, more high-percentage plays. He blames the AAU culture, where young players are thinking of "entertainment value" and "dunking on SportsCenter rather than fundamental basketball. He is trying to bring back the basics.

"I've had three coaching staffs, and this is definitely the most challenging," said UM center Kenny Kadji, who transferred from the University of Florida. "He's a master of the game and wants you to think about every part, every position. He slows it down for you so you can understand it. I've learned more in a few months with him than my first three years in college."

Added guard Malcolm Grant: "He definitely makes us look at the game in a different way, and he took a mid-major to the Final Four, so we'd be fools not to listen to him. His resume speaks for itself."

After resurrecting GMU, Larrañaga faces new challenges

Washington Post
October 10, 2011
By Amy Shipley

Coral Gables, Fla. — Jim Larrañaga took three out-of-state recruiting trips — one overseas — two weeks ago, leaving himself with a jammed calendar on his lone weekday in town. Hours after returning on a midnight flight, he showed up at the University of Miami's basketball offices in an orange and green polo shirt facing no fewer than five formal meetings, a host of informal ones, a luncheon and a tryout for prospective walk-ons.

Larrañaga mastered the art of managing the round-the-clock bustle of college basketball as he resurrected George Mason from non-competitive commuter school to a perennial overachiever, but the race he's gotten himself into in Miami is both fast and, Larrañaga admitted, complicated. Since Larrañaga agreed on April 21 to leave George Mason and take over as the Hurricanes' coach, he has faced challenges he expected, and many he didn't.

"I would have loved for it to have been smoother, for the circumstances to have been a little more comfortable for me and my family," Larrañaga said from behind the desk in his new office, whose shelves and coffee table are bedecked with a host of photos from his days at George Mason. "It got more complicated than I would have liked."

What was complicated? Better question: What wasn't? Nothing about his departure from Fairfax, or arrival in Miami, went smoothly. Five months after he agreed to lead the Hurricanes, the NCAA's investigation of allegations that a jailed former booster gave improper benefits to football players and coaches at Miami — and to current basketball reserve player DeQuan Jones — became public. Larrañaga, who had known nothing about the probe when he accepted the job, found the task of competing with the ACC's powerhouse schools for recruits more trying than he imagined.

"For the players, it's business as usual," Larrañaga said. "For the coaching staff and I, it's a little more complicated. I get questions all the time, and quite frankly, I just don't have any answers now. It's definitely impacted our recruiting. ... Are some students eliminating us because of concerns? The answer to that is yes. But we then just have to beat the bushes harder.

"It certainly complicates my job. It wasn't what I was anticipating, but I can't look in the rearview mirror. I have to look straight ahead. The best way is to continue in the direction I planned on going."

Other setbacks came on the court: losing star center Reggie Johnson to a knee injury in June that will keep him out until December or January, and forward-center Julian Gamble for the year because of a torn anterior cruciate ligament. Larrañaga said he has tried to respond by leaning on sound work habits honed over 27 years as a head coach, with 11 at Bowling Green before he joined George Mason in 1997 and kicked off 13 straight winning seasons.

"The last few months have been about injuries," Larrañaga said. "It's frustrating that not everyone is out there every day. [Actually] I wouldn't use the word frustrating; I'd just like them to be there."

Planning ahead

To cope, Larrañaga has schooled his players about the importance of planning and being proactive, instructing them on "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" by self-help author Steven B. Covey.

He's also sought to form friendly ties throughout the campus, local community and state of Florida. He figures more excitement about a team usually dwarfed regionally by the NFL, college football and the NBA will help create a winning environment. He and the trio of assistants he brought from George Mason, Eric Konkol, Michael Huger and Chris Caputo, looked outward as much as inside the roster when they first arrived, sending out about 1,000 e-mails a day three or four days a week.

The e-mail blasts usually contained inspiring thoughts or other messages designed to connect with potential allies and community figures in a personal way. Miami, which finished 21-14 last year and missed an NCAA tournament bid, averaged just 4,763 fans a game. During his tenure at George Mason, attendance at men's basketball games grew from around 3,000 fans per game to nearly 6,000.

Larrañaga knew a priority would be shaking hands and making himself known. Indeed, he believed he was an afterthought in the minds of Miami's decision-makers when a replacement for former coach Frank Haith was sought. Larrañaga believes he drummed up interest by calling upon longtime friends and associates to speak on his behalf.

What puzzled and disturbed him, he said, was feeling like an afterthought at his own university.

"I guess what I had anticipated was George Mason, having been through 14 years of my leadership, I'd been there the entire time, that they would have responded immediately to any overture from another school," Larrañaga said. "By

that not happening, it allowed the process with Miami to develop more and more. When Miami made the offer, I was ready to make the decision to go."

George Mason Athletic Director Tom O'Connor disputes the assertion that there was anything slow about the school's response. O'Connor claimed he had to wait on Larrañaga's own lawyer, but yet pushed the process of getting raises and contract extensions for Larrañaga — who last year earned \$525,000 — and his assistant coaches as fast as he could get approval from above his head.

"I wanted to make sure we were doing the right thing," O'Connor said. "Everyone wanted Jim to stay."

Difficult decision

Larrañaga said he considered the decision from every angle, professional and personal. He had grandchildren in the Washington area, but three siblings in Florida. What proved decisive was the list of goals he had kept for years, checking them off one by one. He'd ticked off "advancing to the Final Four" via George Mason's improbable run in 2006, leaving only two big ones: Win a national championship. Coach in the Atlantic Coast Conference, where he had spent seven years as an assistant with Virginia from 1979-86.

"Being a head coach in the ACC has been on the list since 1986," he said. "It's something that has always been in the back of my mind. It's something that I wondered if I would ever get a chance to do."

To Larrañaga, the ACC represents the top of the college basketball mountain. And even though Miami was coming off a disappointing season, he believed the conference's financial security, long tradition and the school's location would help him reach his primary goal, winning a national title, earlier than he could do it at George Mason.

Still, one question nagged him and his wife, Liz, he said: "Were we willing to give up the joy and happiness we had? I loved every minute of it at George Mason."

Larrañaga brushed away a question about whether he would consider trying to get out of his contract should Miami get hit with NCAA sanctions; he said his only contract "option" was to win. That, of course, is what he did — against seemingly all odds — at George Mason.

"That's something my wife says to me," Larrañaga said. "Can we do it all again?"

Rebuilding The Hurricanes

ESPN.com
July 28, 2011
Andy Katz

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. -- Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski and North Carolina coach Roy Williams were in attendance, as were Florida State's Leonard Hamilton, Ohio State's Thad Matta and Pitt's Jamie Dixon. Alabama and NC State were represented as well.

Sitting among the headline names at the HP Field House on the campus of the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex was Jim Larrañaga, adorning a freshly acquired bright orange golf shirt with a "U" embroidered on the left chest, the traditional moniker for the University of Miami.

For 14 years as the coach of upstart George Mason, Larrañaga relished his role as the underdog, most notably when the Patriots embarked on a historic run to the 2006 Final Four. He cashed in on that achievement by becoming a successful motivational speaker with a Washington, D.C.-based speakers group.

Larrañaga had carved out his niche. George Mason was a Colonial Athletic Association power and a regular contender for an NCAA tournament berth. The Patriots are expected to be a preseason Top 25 team this season, and one that could possibly go on another magical March run.

He was 61. Yet he wasn't satisfied.

"I loved my 14 years at George Mason, and I know a lot of coaches say this: 'Don't mess with happiness,' and I was very, very happy at George Mason," Larrañaga said. "I'm very goal-oriented and I wanted to take a shot at a league that gives you a chance to win a national championship."

Larrañaga had an opportunity to return to his alma mater, Providence, three years ago when the Friars fired Tim Welsh. He turned them down.

"I've always been driven by the opportunity to succeed in your own league, so when I was being courted by my alma mater, Providence, in the Big East I knew the money was substantially better, but the opportunity to win the Big East for Providence would have been a stretch. To compete with teams like Connecticut, Syracuse, Georgetown and Louisville?" Larrañaga said.

So Larrañaga stayed on at Mason in the CAA. The league put another team in the Final Four in April when Virginia Commonwealth made an improbable run from the inaugural First Four to the Final Four. That means the CAA has put two teams in the Final Four in a five-year period; Miami has four NCAA tournament wins in its history.

And let's be honest: Miami isn't beating North Carolina or Duke for the ACC regular-season title any time soon. But getting access to an NCAA tournament berth should be easier out of what is currently a rather pedestrian ACC once you get past the Blue Devils and Tar Heels.

After former coach Frank Haith was scooped up by Missouri, Miami initially flirted with Harvard's Tommy Amaker, but to no avail. Then Miami president Donna Shalala and her top administrators got word of some interest from Larrañaga and,

suddenly, there was a match few would have predicted.

"Every individual is on their own journey," said Larrañaga, who consistently speaks as though he were giving a motivational speech. "I've never been driven by money, and when other schools came courting everyone thought I would move for the money.

"Right now, the ACC is going through a tremendous transition with eight new coaches [over the past three seasons], and any one of those eight could jump up into the upper echelon and make themselves a national contender," Larrañaga said.

The theory that a coach has to move to a power-six job to compete for a national title seems to have less clout. Larrañaga, in large part, helped start the trend that has since been followed by Butler's Brad Stevens and VCU's Shaka Smart.

But one thing that hasn't changed is access to players. Recruiting at a high level remains difficult, and in most cases out of reach for schools outside the power six.

"The quality of the player that receives our phone calls and shows genuine interest is different," Larrañaga said. "We're now in the battle to get the really good players. Our football team has won five national championships. Our baseball team has won titles. In my mind, and the coaches here feel the same way, there's no reason why we can't compete with the best teams in the country to win a national championship. That's our goal."

Larrañaga is no stranger to the ACC. He was an assistant to Terry Holland at Virginia in the 1980s when Ralph Sampson starred for the Cavaliers. But Duke wasn't Duke then. Now, North Carolina and Duke aren't going anywhere but the top of the ACC. The rest of the league is trying to catch them, with each taking a rotating turn in the chase. Maryland is going through a transition with the departure of Gary Williams and the arrival of Mark Turgeon; Hamilton has made Florida State consistently good; Virginia Tech has been a thorn in the side of all the above teams under Seth Greenberg but hasn't been able to get through to the NCAA tournament; Clemson made a smooth transition from Oliver Purnell to Brad Brownell and should be a regular in the postseason discussion; Virginia appears to be on the verge of a breakthrough under Tony Bennett.

It's too early to judge Steve Donahue at Boston College, but he is facing an overhaul of his roster. Mark Gottfried and Brian Gregory just arrived at their respective schools, NC State and Georgia Tech. Wake Forest is facing a major rebuild under Jeff Bzdelik.

"I love the challenge of now recruiting against the best teams in the country," Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga's current team took a major hit when one of the best big men in the ACC, Reggie Johnson, went down with a knee injury (torn meniscus) that will sideline him until January at the earliest. Johnson, a 6-foot-10, 305-pound center, averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds for the Canes as a sophomore.

"Reggie was going to be an impact force for us in

the low post and could have been the leading rebounder in the league," Larrañaga said. "Because of the sensitivity of the knee and the decision to repair the cartilage they need four to five months for it to heal properly. He weighs 300 pounds and that can pound on his knee. So it will take three to four weeks to get him in playing shape.

"The earliest is Jan. 1 for a return, but it's more realistic to think mid-January," Larrañaga said. "There will be a transition when Reggie comes back. He'll have to shed the cobwebs from being out for six months. Then we'll have him hopefully for the close of the ACC season in February, the ACC tournament and hopefully the postseason."

Larrañaga will be counting on Florida transfer Kenny Kadji -- who never realized his potential with the Gators -- senior Julian Gamble and sophomore Raphael Akpejori to fill in for Johnson. All are about 6-10 to 6-11, but none have proved themselves at this level.

Getting shooting guard Bishop Daniels to keep his commitment was one of Larrañaga's most significant coups after he got the job. Daniels will join an experienced roster in the backcourt with Malcolm Grant, Durand Scott and DeQuan Jones, and there's an expectation that UMKC transfer Trey McKinney Jones will have an impact, too.

Miami had the talent a year ago to be an NCAA tournament team, but the guard play wasn't strong in late-game possessions, notably early in the season at Memphis. That contributed to a bizarre season in which the Hurricanes finished ninth in the ACC at 6-10 overall, yet finished 21-15, enough to earn a bid to the NIT, where they lost to Alabama in the quarterfinals.

"Miami did win 21 games last season, but they did finish [ninth] in the ACC, and that concerns me," Larrañaga said. "I think everyone thinks we'll be better this season, but it's a new system and a new philosophy and there will be an adjustment. They played a lot of 2-3 zone, and we'll only play zone in an extreme situation."

Larrañaga said the Hurricanes will have multiple seasons within one -- the nonconference, the early ACC without Johnson, the latter part of the ACC with him and the ACC tournament before possibly the postseason. To reach that postseason goal, the Hurricanes will have to make some noise in the nonconference schedule. The ACC ranked 16th in nonconference scheduling last season. The Big East was No. 1. That was a major issue at the annual spring meetings. The ACC had four NCAA tournament teams. The Big East had 11.

Larrañaga knows about scheduling into the NCAA tournament. He had multiple at-large berths at Mason, including in its 2006 Final Four run.

This season, the Canes will play Purdue, Memphis, West Virginia, Rutgers, Ole Miss and UMass in nonconference play.

"If we can succeed without Reggie in the nonconference then we should be able to set ourselves up to compete for postseason play out of the ACC," Larrañaga said. "I've never had the ambition to retire. I love coaching. I have the passion to keep doing it and see players develop and mature."

Larrañaga ready to put UM on national map

CaneSport.com
April 22, 2011

Jim Larrañaga was introduced today as the Miami Hurricanes' new men's basketball coach. And he has lofty goals for UM's program.

"I am very excited to be here, there ain't no question about that," Larrañaga said. "(This) offers a tremendous opportunity to compete at the highest level of college basketball. The ACC since the day I arrived at Virginia in 1979 is the best basketball league in the country. And it is our opportunity now as coaches, players and a community to get behind the program and do something very, very special. It's going to take a lot of work, but the reason I came here is because of the people.

"We have a lot of hard work in front of us, but I'm excited to get started."

Larrañaga pointed out how his George Mason team was being ranked in the early top 25 for next year and said, "I would not have left that caliber of team if we didn't feel we had that caliber of talent already here at the U, if we had the capability of challenging the very best teams not only in the ACC but also the entire country. Our challenge is to build a program that can (be successful) over an extended period of time so everyone in this community will be dying to get a ticket, get a seat to watch us play. You may say 'that ain't going to happen here.' I heard it at Bowling Green and George Mason (and fans packed the stands there). We want to create that atmosphere here."

Larrañaga also joked that "It didn't take me long to feel part of the program when Malcolm Grant greeted me as I walked into the office and tried to pronounce my name correctly."

Larrañaga addressed trying to get more students show up for games by saying "My staff and I will be in the dormitories recruiting students. We will work with the faculty.

"We need to reach out to the community of Coral Gables, the people who make up the community. My wife is the social director - I guarantee she will know more people in the community in the next year than some people who have lived here their whole lives.

At 61 years old, Larrañaga was asked why he wants to take this job at this point of his career.

"I'm crazy," he said to laughs, adding, "I love a challenge. I thought about my own career, what goals I wasn't able to accomplish in my 40 years. And one was I'd love to coach in the ACC, take a team to Cameron Indoor Stadium or the Dean Dome. At this time in my life I felt once I talked to Shawn Eichorst and could hear the energy in his voice, to find out things about the other basketball program here, the job that Katie Meier has already done - it showed if the women can do it the men should be able to do it. It's a challenge for me, but something that excites me very much. It's like the last piece in a coaching career to finalize what I hope to be all about. When I first arrived at George Mason I said we wanted to do something very special, and our run to the Final Four was that moment. But we didn't win the national championship, and quite frankly that irks me. I think being a member of the ACC, with the

opportunities to recruit nationally but with a focus locally and regionally, with the talent already on hand, we can be headed in the right direction to challenge the best programs in the conference and the country."

* Larrañaga said that when the UM job opened up he inquired about it through friends that were tied to a Michael Jordan camp "as coaches do - who is going to get the job?" Larrañaga said. "They shared a name with me (who was being looked at), it wasn't me. And then they called me back and said 'Hey, would you be interested.' So I made contact with the University to let them know of my interest."

* Larrañaga addressed the team, which met with him before the press conference and then attended it as he spoke: "The members of the team become our family," Larrañaga said. "We will have the players to my house. My wife will cook for them - you will love her chocolate chip cookies."

- Reggie Johnson wasn't at the press conference - Larrañaga said he remained home in North Carolina.

* Two of Larrañaga's players at George Mason were from Florida, and he made it clear that recruiting Florida is his No. 1 priority.

"We will actively recruit in-state players to try and build our program with a very strong foundation of local recruits," Larrañaga said. "We want to develop the relationship with youth league coaches, high school coaches, AAU coaches."

* Larrañaga addressed leaving George Mason, saying, "The players that I leave behind at George Mason are an incredible group of young men. They just finished the best season in school history in terms of record. I thank those players who made my job so much fun every day. I told those players today that when we met in Fairfax in our locker room that I was going to become the head coach of the U basketball program. Every one of them hugged me and wished me well, and I did the same to them. But this opportunity is very, very special to me. ... I love coaching, helping players be the best that they can be."

* Larrañaga's grandfather on his father's side was from Cuba, and Larrañaga said "I'm very proud of my heritage, of having grown up spending time in Kissimmee and Key West and in the State of Florida, because that's where my father vacationed every year. And now I feel I'm back home at the University of Miami. We're going to put together a fantastic Hurricane team."

* First-year athletic director Shawn Eichorst said of his decision to hire Larrañaga that "I was asked what we were looking for in our next men's basketball coach - we are delighted to say we have found it, and it's Jim Larrañaga. (He) is a fundamentally sound teacher of the game and will positively lead our student-athletes with a tremendous amount of passion, integrity and dedication. Jim is a man of great character who will be a first-class ambassador for the University of Miami and our basketball program. He has successfully transitioned two other programs at George Mason and Bowling Green. And he is no stranger to the ACC having served as an assistant coach at Virginia - they won three ACC championships and finished in the top five of the AP rank-

ings. Jim is a tremendously gifted speaker and communicator. His players follow his philosophy and play fundamentally sound basketball, take care of the basketball, play fierce defense and are very efficient on the offensive end of the court.

"This is an exciting day for the University of Miami."

* Football coach Al Golden attended today's press conference, giving Larrañaga a hug before it began.

* Of his basketball philosophy, Larrañaga said, "I have two boys - when my wife and I were raising our sons the two things we stressed (were) we wanted them to grow up to be happy and successful. But to accomplish both those goals they had to be great students and use those smarts to advance themselves, enjoy their life. That's the same approach we take as a coaching staff with this team. Basketball is a game, it should be fun. We emphasize attitude, commitment and class. Attitude, we ask our players to have a positive attitude, talk about life being 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react to it. Second we talk about making a total and unconditional commitment to being the best at everything you do, every aspect of your life. The third is class - we want our players to always behave in a first-class manner.

"As far as basketball is concerned, I'm a big believer that defense wins championships. And we are coming here to compete and win. That means we have to be fundamentally sound on the defensive end of the floor. We have to be able to guard the basketball but also help the guy who guards the basketball. Players will hear me and my coaching staff say 'one man guards the basketball and four men help him guard the basketball.' Our choice is to be an up-tempo team. The defense will create the offense. One part of our offensive opportunity is to create fast-break layups and open threes in transitions. That will not change.

"The scramble defense - I'm hoping to implement that to a degree so it can become a weapon and something the opponent has to prepare for. But it will depend on the work ethic of the team, because it forces the players to play at a high level of intensity for a (long) time. It requires a deep bench. My Bowling Green teams scrambled 70, 80 percent of the time. My George Mason teams of recent years have scrambled less because we were so strong in the half court."

* Larrañaga said he's still in the process of putting together his coaching staff.

* Larrañaga has a home in Sarasota that he purchased from Dick Vitale's daughter (Vitale is a friend of his).

UM embraces new men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga

Palm Beach Post
April 22, 2011
By Jorge Milian

CORAL GABLES — So why would a 61-year-old guy leave a cushy job at a top mid-major college basketball program to coach a team whose history is mostly forgettable?

“I’m crazy,” Jim Larrañaga said a couple of questions into a news conference introducing him on Friday night as the University of Miami’s men’s basketball coach.

Anything but, although Larrañaga certainly has plenty of personality.

During his question-and-answer session with reporters, Larrañaga quoted Confucius, emphasized words by unexpectedly shouting them out and broke out into a little Spanish.

“You can tell he’s going to be a lot of fun,” said senior guard Malcolm Grant, who was in attendance Friday with most of his teammates.

Judging by his history at George Mason, Larrañaga will do far more than act colorfully. In 14 seasons, Larrañaga coached the Patriots to five NCAA tournaments and famously led his 2006 team to the Final Four before it lost to eventual national champion Florida.

After passing up other intriguing offers during his tenure at George Mason, most expected Larrañaga to remain at the Fairfax, Va., school until he retired.

“I started thinking about my own career, where I am and what goals have I not been able to accomplish during the course of my 40-year career in coaching,” said Larrañaga, who also coached at

Bowling Green and Division II American International. “One thing kept coming back in my mind, that I’d love to coach in the ACC.

“It’s kind of the last piece of a coaching career”

Larrañaga inherits a team that is expected to return virtually its entire roster, including Grant, an All-ACC third-team selection last season. But, like his predecessors, Larrañaga will also be tasked with selling a program whose existence has been marked by apathy.

The Hurricanes shut down the program from 1971 to 1985 and have ranked last in ACC attendance since joining the league in 2004. UM rarely attracts more than a few hundred students to games even though they are admitted for free and are further enticed by offers like free pizza.

“It’s going to be hard,” said Sammy Hernandez, a member of George Mason’s Final Four team who attended Friday’s news conference. “But when I was at George Mason in 2005-06, I was a freshman and our stadium is the way you guys have it now – empty seats. By 2007, there were huge crowds. And not because of the Final Four, but because of him.”

Larrañaga, whose father is from Key West and grandfather was from Cuba, promised to build a team in which “everyone in this community is going to be dying to get a ticket and a seat to watch us play.”

Larrañaga’s signature style is what he calls “scramble defense,” a high-intensity, full-court press that demands extreme fitness and a deep bench.

“I’m a tremendous believer that defense wins championships,” Larrañaga said.

Larrañaga’s deal is for five seasons and will pay him \$1.3 million per season, according to The Washington Post. Last season, Larrañaga earned \$700,000, including incentives, on a contract that ran through the 2015-16 season.

Larrañaga said he made it known through a search firm used by UM that he was interested in replacing Frank Haith as the Hurricanes’ coach. Haith resigned earlier this month to become Missouri’s coach.

UM athletic director Shawn Eichorst and Larrañaga spoke on Wednesday and a deal was in place by Thursday evening.

Eichorst said he didn’t allow Larrañaga’s age to concern him.

“For me, age is a number,” said Eichorst, named UM’s athletic director 10 days ago. “That’s not a factor for me. He wanted to be here and we wanted him to be here.”

The hiring drew rave reviews around the college basketball world.

ESPN analyst Dick Vitale referred to the move as a “grand slam for Miami.”

“Jim is going to bring a certain spark,” Vitale said. “He’s got a personality. You’ll see them playing exciting basketball and, more importantly, with Jim, they’ll play winning basketball. You have to get people excited about basketball and, in Miami, they have not been excited about college basketball.”

Larrañaga’s hiring completes a major overhaul among UM’s most prominent positions in the athletic department. Al Golden was hired in December as the school’s football coach. Eichorst replaced Kirby Hocutt, who quit in February to become athletic director at Texas Tech.

Chris Caputo Is Living His Hoop Dream

Westfield State Communications Office
Mickey Curtis
Dec. 20, 2012

It is a full court shot from Parenzo Hall Gym to the big time world of college basketball, but Westfield State alumnus Chris Caputo is living his dream as an assistant coach at the University of Miami.

Caputo, a 2002 Westfield State graduate and a four-year letterwinner as a reserve point guard for the Owls, has been in sunny south Florida for the past two years. Prior to that, he was a member of the George Mason University coaching staff in Fairfax, Va., for nine years. The 32-year-old Caputo already has many memorable moments in his short basketball odyssey: Miami's upset victory at Duke last season, George Mason's remarkable run to the NCAA Division I Final Four in 2006, and his four years at Westfield State.

"I've seen a lot of great places like Duke and North Carolina and I have been to the Final Four, but I wouldn't trade those for my time at Westfield; it was special and worthwhile," said Caputo the day before the Miami Hurricanes departed for a Christmas Tournament in Hawaii.

Caputo's passion for coaching began at an early age and continued at Westfield State. As a seldom-used point guard for the Owls, Caputo was a keen observer on the bench as a member of Westfield State head coach Rich Sutter's first recruiting class in 1998. In between classes he was a regular visitor to Sutter's office, peppering him with questions on coaching strategies. Caputo also watched a lot of game tape on Westfield opponents and gave Sutter detailed scouting reports. "I don't know if he used them," said Caputo with a chuckle.

Interestingly, Caputo stresses his academics at Westfield State also played a pivotal role in preparing him for the 24/7 world of big-time college basketball.

"My time at Westfield was really valuable," said Caputo. "It's a place where you cannot get lost because it is a smaller school and a lot of demands are put on you academically. I was a finance and economics major where I had to grind it out and fight through it studying, especially near the end of the semester. That's

helped me today."

Caputo's connections (he and Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga both graduated from Archbishop Malloy High School in New York City where they played for the legendary coach Jack Curran), coaching passion and work ethic landed him a job straight out of Westfield State as a volunteer assistant coach for Larrañaga at George Mason. The Elmhurst, N.Y. native toiled as an unpaid assistant for three years before becoming a full-time staff member at George Mason in 2005. He even turned down several full-time paid positions at other colleges to remain at George Mason because it was such a priceless training ground.

"Ten years ago there were not as many NCAA restrictions and I was able to do more things," said Caputo in explaining why he didn't take the money and run. "In addition to breaking down film, I could make calls to recruits, work camps and recruit off campus within 30 miles of the school. Plus coach Larrañaga is a great mentor and a veteran in the business."

Caputo's main duties at the University of Miami are recruiting and scouting opponents. He admits the pay and perks are good; his per diem is a lot more than the \$7.00 meal money he received at Westfield State. But the lifestyle isn't always glamorous and the pressure to win is enormous as Miami is a member of the Atlantic Coast Conference.

"It's more than just two hours in suits coaching basketball," said Caputo. "There are late nights watching film, countless trips to see high school recruits that you are not going to get, and hours of sacrifice and family time missed. It is a tough profession and a very workmanlike job. But being at Miami has been great and the school has such a name brand – five football national titles and four baseball national titles. And the ACC is the best basketball conference in the country. Every night is a moment in this league. It's a great city with great weather and an exciting place to be."

Caputo's first "coaching moment" came when he was a sophomore in high school. In March of 1996, he and a friend went to the Hilton in midtown Manhattan, the headquarters for the NCAA Final Four. Caputo watched in awe as a who's

who of coaches roamed the lobby.

"I saw coaches like Mike Krzyzewski and Jerry Tarkanian and I said this is what I want to do, this is cool," said Caputo. "Then 10 years to the date I was living out my dream of walking around the lobby at the Final Four as a coach."

One day Caputo dreams of strolling the lobby and the sidelines as a Division I head coach. He is realistic that may not happen for some time, if at all, because head coaching positions are scarce and highly sought. But he does point out that that four of Larrañaga's former assistants during the past decade are currently head coaches. A content Caputo just bides his time, works hard, and continues to network and make new friends in the coaching profession. He frequently sends text messages to Erik Spoelstrag, the head coach of the 2012 NBA champion Miami Heat.

"Anyone who is in this business does it to become a head coach," said Caputo. "But if I become a head coach it has to be the right fit for me; I am big on that. I am also big on knowing what the commitment is from a school. But if nothing comes along I will also be happy to work with Coach Larrañaga."

Commitment and loyalty are constants for Caputo. He remains good friends with his

Westfield State teammates, in particular Phil Connors (Class of 2002). And two other Owl teammates – Kris Kachelmeyer (2001) and Jon Mazzone (2001) – visited with Caputo when Miami played at UMass Amherst in early December. Wherever Caputo's coaching odyssey takes him, Westfield State will be of big part of it.

"A lot of nice things happened to me at Westfield State and playing there was a great experience," said Caputo.

Hoops Recruiting: UM wants “State of Miami”

CaneSport.com

Oct. 30, 2011

by Matt Shodell

The men's basketball program has taken to bringing official and unofficial visitors to UM football games.

And coaches say they're trying to take a page from former football coach Howard Schnellenberger's book: Creating a “State of Miami.”

Chris Caputo, whose primary responsibilities include recruiting and scouting the opposition, says UM plans to cast a recruiting net from Jacksonville down, searching for top talent that wants to come to Miami.

“Most people want to go four hours from where they live, for the most part,” Caputo said. “So the State of Florida has to be the first place we look. Just like years ago with Schnellenberger, it has to be the State of Miami, up to Jacksonville, through Tampa and Fort Myers over to Broward, Dade and Palm Beach. We have to be certain we're recruiting all the best players in those areas.”

The team will also try and cherry pick top prospects from Atlanta (“Miami's had success in Georgia, which is a neighboring state - there's a lot of talent in the Atlanta area and similarities between the Atlanta metro area and Miami metro area,” Caputo said), North Carolina and South Carolina (“they're good because of the ACC, the amount of times their kids get back to play in front of family”), Virginia and Maryland (“because of our relationships there because of the time we spent there”) and New York (“Miami's had success there, always say ‘This is like the sixth borough. I'm from New York; coach Larrañaga is from New York’”).

“And we're willing to go to other places to recruit guys as we did at George Mason - we had guys from Florida, Texas, Memphis, Charlotte. We're not afraid to do that, but I think we also are going to make a commitment to recruit the State of Florida because we feel there are guys like Brandon Knight that are No. 1 rated, but also guys that have been under-recruited, hidden that are good.”

Caputo, in his 10th season on coach Jim Larrañaga's staff, says the overall recruiting philosophy won't change much for these coaches despite moving from George Mason and the CAA to Miami and the ACC.

With one exception: Center.

“The only thing that's different is the size in the front court (in the ACC) - there's a little bit more of a need defensively to match up with some of the size,” Caputo said. “Like in the CAA, for many years centers in the league were 6-6, 6-7 - they could pass, shoot, score around the basket.”

Other than looking for bigger bodies down low, the team will continue to seek athletic ball handlers who can penetrate and shoot.

And Caputo sees players similar to the ones he's seeking already on Miami's roster. He praised coach Frank Haith's staff for putting together a team that these new coaches feel can reach great heights.

“You look at our team, and I would say we have arguably top four, five or six talent in the league at this point,” Caputo said. “We were picked to finish fifth in the league (this preseason), and they don't know anything about us as coaches. So those guys were good in identifying who was good and who they can get, and that's important.”

UM landed its first commitment for the Class of 2012 earlier this month in shooting guard Melvin Johnson, who is from New York. Helping sell Johnson: attending UM's football game that weekend.

“Things like that - you're trying to put your best foot forward,” Caputo said.

Coaches can't comment on specific recruits, but Caputo spoke about what the Canes sell prospects on.

“You sell playing time, the type of institution we are - the City of Miami, the weather,” Caputo said. “All those things separate us, make us different than the places we're recruiting against.”

Caputo says he expects to have a better success at attracting so-called “national names” now that the new coaches can sell UM and the ACC.

“At the University of Miami you should be able to at least engage in some conversation with anyone in the country because you have a great institution, a great city, great league,” Caputo said. “Miami is a national name.”

* Caputo says he begins following potential prospects starting their freshman year of high school, continuing to keep tabs on them as their careers progress and getting in touch with them when allowed by NCAA rules.

And keeping in regular contact with high school coaches also plays a major role for the coaches. The UM sports information department says hoops coaches send out approximately 1,000 e-mails to high school coaches every day - typically a motivational quote, an offensive set or different ways to do things.

To help connect with area coaches, Caputo says a coaching clinic is in the works that high school coaches will be able to attend.

“It's a key thing to build a groundswell amongst the people in the area, have them feeling good about our access as far as going to practice, feeling they can come over, have their guys come over,” Caputo said.

* The system in place for giving a scholarship offer?

A coach will watch a prospect live, and if he feels that player is worthy of a scholarship then Larrañaga will also watch the recruit and meet with him before an offer goes out.

Caputo gave a prime example of how this staff works together: “We recruited Luke Hancock at George Mason,” Caputo said. “He was one of our best players. But he had no scholarship offers coming out of high school, was a Division III recruit. He goes to Hargrave Military Academy, pays his own way. Coach (Mike) Huger goes down there to see someone else, says ‘I like this Hancock guy, I'm going to bring coach (Larrañaga) down next week.’ So him and coach went down and the kid doesn't play quite good enough. Coach says ‘I like you, just didn't see enough today - I can't offer you.’ So then Eric (Konkol) and I go down the next week and we watch him for five minutes and it's ‘Man, this guy is really good.’ We called back to coach, said ‘Hey, I think you should offer him.’ So we offered him. We had the No. 1 rated non-BCS recruiting class in the country, and he's the sixth heralded guy in that six-man class and turns out to be the best in the group, was an all-conference player by his sophomore year (note that Hancock wound up transferring to Louisville after Larrañaga and the staff left George Mason).”

* Of his role breaking down film and scouting opponents, Caputo said, “As the season starts I'm watching us less than the other (coaches) and watching the opponents much, much more than maybe they are.”

Could Erik Swoope be another Jimmy Graham?

State of the U.com

Jerry Steinberg

Nov. 18, 2012

We caught up with Miami's talented 6'6 junior forward Erik Swoope and asked him about the current state of the team, his incredible athleticism, his potential to play another sport down the line, and much more.

Much like Jimmy Graham, Swoope is a high energy player who can guard multiple positions, and play above the rim. Swoope had an excellent performance in Miami's win over Jacksonville Friday night providing energy with 7 points, 2 thunderous dunks, and 2 steals. Additionally he is a very good interview.

Here is our full Q&A with Erik Swoope:

SOTU: We talked with Bishop Daniels a few weeks back and asked him who was faster between Shane and him, and your name came up. So among Shane, Bishop, and yourself, who is the fastest?

ES: Oh man, its very close. If we had a footrace Bishop would win by a very small margin and Shane and I would be tied. We did actually get timed earlier in the summer in three-quarter court sprints, and actually I had the fastest time at 2.99 seconds. Shane was right at 3 flat, and Bishop was at 3.01. I wouldn't mind seeing us do a 40 yard sprint and see.

SOTU: It would be cool to see the three of you on the break and see who gets the alley-oop.

ES: Yeah, exactly (laughs)

SOTU: This is a very difficult question, but

we have to ask. What has the team been doing to overcome the slow start? Are there any major adjustments or changes we can expect?

ES: I think we need to just learn what's best for us. We have some new guys in Tanye and Bishop and we're missing Durand as well. Right now we are just trying to build a stronger chemistry. Coach L is doing everything he can to help us understand how important the little things are like winning the free throw battle and boxing out. It is starting to slowly come together. I think between the new guys and all of the seniors we will come together.

SOTU: How do you see your role on this team?

ES: My role is mainly to come in and provide as much energy as possible. I may need to match up with guards, wings, bigs, so I make sure I am prepared to contribute offensively but also guard all 5 positions. I focus on offensive rebounds, and guarding the other team's best guy. Something like a Dennis Rodman,

SOTU: Can you tell fans a little about the mohawk?

ES: Yeah I had never done anything like that before, and I thought would be fun. My family also encouraged me to do something different. I actually just recently cut the mohawk, I'm looking to try some new styles.

SOTU: That's very cool and fits the Dennis Rodman mold just a bit?

ES: Yeah. (laughs).

SOTU: Considering your incredible ath-

leticism, ever consider pulling a Jimmy Graham, and giving football a shot?

ES: That would just depend on if the opportunity came up. That is something I have contemplated. I'd have to talk to my family, but I haven't had any formal communication with the football staff. But yeah, there's maybe a possibility.

SOTU: Hey maybe we can send a note to Al Golden on your behalf. Although Coach L would probably take care of that?

ES: Yeah I'm sure they would.

SOTU: Any final message for the fans?

ES: Come and support the team. It means a lot. We will do everything we can to give them a great show. Going back to last year, when we played Florida State. It was the first sell out of the year. And the team, and the coaches, we really fed off of it. When an opposing team comes in they feel the energy, and we'd like to get that every night.

Well there you have it Canes fans. Erik Swoope and the Miami Hurricanes are looking for you to come out and support them. We certainly appreciate Erik taking the time to do this Q&A with us, and wish him good luck during the season and in all of his endeavors.

Canes Bringing Style to the Court

Inside The U
Chris Stock
Feb. 1, 2013

When you watch the Miami Hurricanes basketball team play, there's one thing that stands out.

Their shoes.

As one of the nation's hottest teams at 16-3 and a perfect 7-0 in ACC competition, the 14th-ranked Hurricanes are also one of the most stylish teams.

Each player brings a unique style to the court with them as the UM coaching staff doesn't restrict the players from only wearing team shoes or even team colors.

Lately, two players—Shane Larkin and Durand Scott—have been rocking a bright neon yellow pair of shoes with Larkin in the Nike Air Zoom Huarache 2K4 and Scott in the Nike Zoom Hyperdunk 2011.

Larkin and Scott first broke out the pair of highlighters two weeks ago in their win over No. 1 Duke.

"I didn't even know coach was going to let them do it, but it looked good out there," McKinney-Jones said.

Larkin spotted his shoes at nearby Sole Fly, a sneaker boutique store specializing in unique shoes and the latest designs. The shoes immediately caught his eye and he took a picture of them to send to assistant coach Michael Huger, who has to approve each shoe. Huger gave the Larkin the go-ahead and Larkin got the bright pair of shoes.

"A lot of people like the bright shoe," Sole Fly store manager Tony Perez said. "So the guys have got them to wear in the games. There's a lot of stuff in here and the guys come in saying they need a shoe for game day." Not only did Larkin and Scott look good on the court, the backcourt duo combined for 43 points, 16 rebounds, and nine assists in Miami's first ever win over a No. 1 Duke as the Hurricanes blew out the Blue Devils, 90-63.

As Mars Blackmon would say, "It's gotta be the shoes."

Scott was planning on wearing his bright yellow shoes last season in a game against Memphis, but head coach Jim Larrañaga, who was in his first year at UM, wasn't comfortable with the idea so the staff had Scott change into a different pair before the game.

"We were coming from George Mason so we weren't used to that," Huger said.

Since then, Larrañaga put Huger in charge of which shoes can and cannot be worn. Huger receives plenty of requests and suggestions from the creative group of players looking to lead Miami to its first NCAA tournament appearance in five years.

"I use it as an incentive and say, 'Hey, if we win this game, you guys are allowed to wear the lime green shoe that's how they came into play (against Duke)," Huger said. "We were at Boston College and the guys weren't as sharp in our practice and shoot-around so I gave them a little extra motivation and said, 'Hey if we win this game you guys can wear those lime green shoes that you want to wear so badly. We wound up winning by one point."

Larkin and Scott had the brightest shoes on the court that day against Duke, but the other Hurricanes deserve high marks for their style as well.

Most notably, Julian Gamble. While the highlighter shoes might stand out the most, devoted sneakerheads will be proud of Gamble's shoes. Gamble has been wearing a special-edition Solefly x Jordan Spizike shoe. There are only about 60 pairs in the world of the impressive orange, green, black and grey shoe.

Trey McKinney-Jones wore the Air Jordan 11 "Cool Grey" and Kenny Kadji was in a pair of the Nike LeBron X id shoes to round out Miami's starting five against Duke. Then there's Rion Brown, who has been wearing a Nike Kevin Durant orange shoe throughout the season and Erik Swoope has had a unique mix including seen in Kobe's "Christmas" shoe although Huger wouldn't let him wear a "Gym Green" pair of Foamposites.

"Everybody has pretty good style," Larkin said.

McKinney-Jones led the shoe charge in

Miami's next game against Florida State wearing a pair of Nike KD 5 "DMV" shoes that pays tribute to Kevin Durant's hometown. McKinney-Jones scored game-high 15 points in the win over the Seminoles in his orange and blue colorways with a neon logo, which were released in December.

"Me, Shane and a few other guys on the team are real big shoe fanatics so we like to stay up on what is in with Jordans, Nikes, and switch it up for the games, especially the big games that are on TV," McKinney-Jones said. "We like to pull something nice out of our closets."

Larkin switched it up against Florida State as he put on a pair of Nike Air Foamposite One "Polarized Pink" shoes and had the socks to match.

"I like wearing shoes that nobody has and it catches my eye," Larkin said. "Hopefully I keep window shopping and I find some more crazy stuff."

For the majority of the season, Larkin has been wearing a pair of orange Chris Paul's CP3 VI shoes, but has been switching it up lately. He has a pair of highlighter orange shoes in his locker that he'd like to wear at some point, but says he needs time to break them in.

As far as other plans for the future, Larkin has ideas in mind.

"I have tricks up my sleeve that I already have," Larkin said. "I don't want to spoil the secret of the shoes I'm going to wear, but I'm definitely going to be pulling out some crazy stuff down the road."

The players are enjoying being able to show their creative side on the court.

"They're having a lot of fun," Huger said. "Winning solves everything and when you win, the team, coach L, everybody is happy about the program, the university, the students, and everyone is showing up to the games. We just have to continue winning and playing together, that's the key. And then the shoes speak on their personalities on the court and I want to continue with that. I give them some freedom with the shoes and colors. I won't let them go over-the-top, but when we win, I'll give them a little more freedom."

Miami basks in post-Duke glory, hoping for bright future

SportsIllustrated.com

Brian Hamilton

Jan. 25, 2013

First everyone had to wait for the stragglers, the Miami players bobbing in the flume of students on the court. Once they extracted themselves, these Hurricanes caught in the storm, the coach entered the locker room for a postgame chat that was anything but standard. The No. 1 team in the land had been reduced to cinders over the previous couple hours, and Jim Larrañaga told his club to enjoy it before turning their attention to the work ahead. Then he left. Then sophomore guard Shane Larkin arranged a circle of chairs, center Kenny Kadji ratcheted up his African music, and one by one they jumped in the middle to dance.

The celebration was just getting started. By Thursday morning, campus hummed with Miami's ascent to the top of the ACC and the program's newborn relevancy, underwritten by the previous night's mauling of Duke. Larkin walked to a 9:30 a.m. sports management class and fellow students stopped him, repeatedly, for chest bumps. As he made his way to his next class, Larkin estimated a group of 20 to 30 students followed along, talking about the game and asking for pictures all the way. The fans finally showed up. But that required Miami to arrive.

"Every program has to start somewhere," Larkin said. "People are saying it was the biggest game in school history and it could be a program-changing game. Hopefully, with what we did, it put us on the map."

Everything seems on the upswing for the basketball team with the best winning percentage in south Florida. One year after notching its first-ever winning record in ACC play, Miami is 5-0 in the league and thus two games clear of everyone else in the standings after its first victory over a No. 1 team in program history. And the Hurricanes are in position to defend that lead because the Hurricanes generally are in position to defend everything.

Duke scored 63 points on Wednesday night -- itself a manageable total -- and that was the most points Miami had allowed in a game since two days before Christmas. No one has scored 70 points on the Hurricanes since the season opener. Miami is eighth in the country in adjusted defensive efficiency (85.2 points per 100 possessions), one slot behind the Blue Devils team it just vanquished. Opponents shoot just 36.2 percent, the seventh best figure nationally and a "high-priority" number in the staff's mind. The effective field goal percentage defense of 42.4 is still bested by only 13 teams.

In Miami's first team meeting after the Final Four last April, Larrañaga asked his team a

question: Where did all four participants' defenses rank nationally? Not shockingly, his players were clueless. So the coach who just finished his first year on the job gave them one: None of the four clubs finished lower than ninth.

"It's definitely the biggest reason why we've continued to play well," Larrañaga said. "We've gotten better at helping each other. We've gotten better at rebounding at the defensive end of the floor. We've gotten better at communicating, at talking to each other and switching when it's appropriate, showing when it's appropriate, trapping the ball screen when that's called for. Those subtle adjustments, to the common observer, don't really mean much. But to a coach and to a player, when you see the impact it has on your opponent, you recognize it as a key to the game."

Some of it was just a matter of time. Larrañaga arrived after directing George Mason to five NCAA tournaments, including the 2006 Final Four run, and found a group of players making what he called "a major adjustment" to their thinking, especially on the defensive end. The result was acceptable enough in 2011-12 -- 20 wins, that 9-7 finish in the ACC -- but the Hurricanes don't believe they came to grips fully with Larrañaga's philosophy until this year.

"Having another year under coach L has helped, just knowing exactly what he wants," said senior guard Durand Scott, the team's leading scorer. "When he came in, he came with a plan and a vision. He didn't come with the intent of just getting by. We did so-so our first year, and the second year, we came to an understanding of what he wants and what he needs us to do. We just put everything together."

The Hurricanes help each other now, but they are instinctive and aggressive enough to help themselves, too. Early in the second half, Larkin jumped on a simple Duke exchange after a made basket to produce a score that further buried the Blue Devils. He had taken note that, for most of the game, Duke's primary ball-handlers managed inbound duties. After this particular score, he saw point guard Quinn Cook inbound the ball to center Mason Plumlee -- and, in a fraction of a moment, deduced that Plumlee inevitably would return the pass to Cook. In a flash, Miami had the ball back, and after Larkin missed a three-pointer, the ball came back to him for a layup and a 30-point lead.

"I'm always watching, trying to catch a routine or a habit they're doing," Larkin said. "I just saw it, and I knew Mason Plumlee was going to have to pass it back to Quinn. When I saw him catch it, I just made a run for it. And he threw a pretty soft bounce pass, and I was able to pick it up."

Every program needs a moment to compose itself. For Miami, that was Wednesday. The Hurricanes had cracked the top 25 and Warren Sapp and Jimmy Graham were among those in attendance for the showdown with Duke. Larrañaga even had 20 guests fly into town for the event. The win over the Blue Devils means little if the Hurricanes lose their sense of purpose and thus their place near the apex of the ACC ... but the point is they actually have that problem.

"Experiencing this together has given them a lot of confidence and quite frankly had given them a lot of joy," Larrañaga said. "To go through a winning streak like the one we're on right now to start conference play, for the first time in school's history, is very special to these players. They know they're blazing a trail that's never been blazed before."

The Hurricanes' second-year coach had dinner with his phalanx of friends and relatives as Wednesday's delirium became Thursday's, returning home after midnight. He had 96 text messages and 50 emails and responded to those until 1:30 a.m. He then re-watched the Duke game. He went to sleep at 3 a.m., then awoke 75 minutes later to drive his son to the airport.

In a matter of hours after what he deemed the biggest regular-season win of his coaching career, though, Larrañaga dispatched a text message to the team that arrived on Larkin's phone precisely at 7:41 a.m. It read: Great job last night. Enjoy the day, be ready for practice tomorrow. We must prepare for Florida State. Coach L.

"Right to the point," Larkin said.

Memo delivered, but it was impossible to ignore the deliverance that preceded it. Scott, the 6-foot-5-inch senior from the Bronx, was stopped for pictures as he walked to his car. He received congratulatory text messages, about 15 he guessed, from numbers he didn't recognize. He thanked them, then added: Who is this? After the senders identified themselves, Scott still didn't know who they were.

He pulled up for a late-night meal at The Cheesecake Factory and continued to hear echoes of applause dissolve into the late-night air. Cars stopped and honked their horns at him as he crossed the street. He was steps away from the restaurant when he passed by a police officer, sitting outside another eatery, who had but one question for him.

"How'd the 'Canes do tonight?" the officer asked, plainly oblivious. "Did they win?"

For the first time in a night of revelation, and maybe for the last time in a while, somebody had no idea who Durand Scott was or what Miami basketball had just done.

"The 'Canes won tonight," Scott assured the officer. "They did a good job."

Former PDS star Reed overcomes injury to excel at Miami

The Trentonian
Nick Peruffo
April 1, 2015

Back in early September, former Princeton Day School and University of Miami forward Davon Reed thought his season could be over after undergoing surgery on his torn left meniscus.

Seven months later, the Ewing native has not only fully recovered, but has emerged as one of the main catalysts for a Hurricanes team that will meet Stanford in the NIT final Thursday night at Madison Square Garden.

“His work ethic is nothing like I’ve ever seen before,” said coach Jim Larrañaga, after Miami’s 60-57 semifinal win over Temple Tuesday night. “He was in that training room with the doctors, with the trainers, with our strength and conditioning coach. The doctors told me in November that it’s the fastest they’ve ever seen anybody recover.”

Though the sophomore scored just six points on 3-of-8 shooting against the Owls, he was still able to have a huge impact on the game with seven rebounds, four assists and three blocked shots in a team-high 37 minutes of action. Defensively, he was able to help the Hurricanes overcome the loss of 7-foot center Tonye Jekiri, who left the game with a concussion in the first half, by guarding nearly every position on the floor.

Temple finished the game shooting just 30.2 percent from the field, and 10.5 percent from beyond the 3-point arc.

“My dad (David Reed) always taught me growing up that it’s not about how tall you are or how big you are,” said Reed, who measures in at 6-foot-6 and 208 pounds. “It’s about the size of your fight. It doesn’t matter (guarding) one through five. Obviously sometimes you are outmatched, but if you have the heart and the will to do it, you can do it.”

Reed had a solid freshman season, averaging 6.6 points in primarily a bench role, but looked primed to make a major leap in his second year in Coral Gables. His defense in particular earned rave reviews during the Hurricanes’ summer trip to Europe.

“Davon had a sensational summer,” Larrañaga said. “We took the team to Spain and he was our best perimeter defender, our second-best rebounder. He was shooting the ball extremely well.”

Shortly after the team returned home, however, disaster struck.

“It’s strange,” Reed said, when asked to describe the injury. “I was actually in the training room. My leg was folded and it just locked up on me and I couldn’t straighten it. I went to the doctor and they said my meniscus had folded. It was a freak accident, but things like that happen”

The original prognosis was that he’d miss four to six months, making a redshirt year seem likely.

“It’s very hard to come back from that,” Larrañaga said. “In fact, I told him ‘if you are out for three months, it’s going to take you three months to get back.’ In the back of our minds, we thought, well, if he’s not able to do it, we’ll just redshirt him.”

By the time Reed made his return against Green Bay on Dec. 6 — just three months after surgery — his doctors had declared his left knee was stronger than it had been before the injury.

“We have an excellent training staff at the University of Miami and excellent facilities, so they did a good job of pushing me and I pushed them as well,” Reed said. “It has been a blessing in disguise.”

Reed moved into the starting lineup Jan. 17 at Notre Dame, and has averaged eight points and four rebounds in 29 games this year. He was recently named a team co-captain along with Jakiri,

Sheldon McClellan and the injured Angel Rodriguez.

“He’s shot the ball well, he’s passed the ball well, he’s defended, he’s rebounded, he’s played multiple positions, and late in the season I decided that we’d give him even more responsibility,” Larrañaga said.

Though the Hurricanes finished the regular season 21-12 with a 16-point win over Duke on their resume, they also had a pair of bad home losses to Green Bay and Eastern Kentucky and were ultimately left out of the NCAA Tournament. Reed acknowledged that the NIT represented a chance for his team to prove the selection committee wrong.

“We were definitely disappointed, but at the end of the day, we left it up to the committee instead of locking up a spot in the Dance because we had those two bad losses at home,” Reed said. “We set out a goal at the beginning of the NIT of ‘why not win this and show why we belong in the tournament?’ I think the team took heed of that, and every game we are coming more and more together.”

On a more personal level, reaching the NIT’s Final 4 also meant playing at Madison Square Garden, just a short New Jersey Transit ride away from Mercer County.

“I had a lot of family and friends here tonight, so it was great seeing them,” Reed said.

Considering what he’s already overcome this season, Reed may just give those familiar faces something even bigger to celebrate Thursday night.