

Miami Men's Basketball Clips

2020-21

Six Weeks of Work

By Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
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CORAL GABLES, Fla. – It is 15 days later than expected, but the first official practice date of the 2020-21 college basketball season has arrived.

Tomorrow, Oct. 14, programs across the nation will move from skill workouts and lighter training into full-fledged practices. The date comes 42 days before the first game of the season, which the NCAA moved back from Nov. 10 to Nov. 25 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the University of Miami men's basketball team, like its competitors all over the country, tomorrow presents a small step towards normalcy and the start of a new season.

"[We are] just looking forward and anxious to get back on the court together," redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty said. "...There was a lot of doubt with the season [due to] this whole coronavirus, from the time it started until now. So, I'm glad that they got a date for us to get started and we're all just excited."

Despite the difficulties created by the pandemic, Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga is encouraged by where his team is at right now.

Entering his 10th season at the helm of the Hurricanes, Larrañaga looks forward to seeing the players compete against one another to get an even better assessment of their status as a whole.

"I would love to have a few [additional] scrimmages right now to see where we are because I think we're much further ahead than we have been the last two seasons," he said. "I think we're at a good place. We're healthy; we've got 11 scholarship players available. We've got size, we've got guard play, we've got athletic ability. I think our team should be very well-prepared to compete with the best teams in our league."

Including walk-ons and transfers, the Miami coaches actually have over a dozen players at their disposal entering official practices.

For a team that has battled significant injuries for the last three seasons, it is particularly beneficial to have a complete roster available. In fact, just last Wednesday, the Hurricanes played a 40-minute game amongst themselves for the first time in multiple years.

"I remember last summer when we were doing workouts, we didn't even have 10. So, we

couldn't even do five-on-five. We were doing four-on-four, three-on-three, stuff like that," McGusty said. "So, it's definitely good and it's going to help us because now we can get a real look. We can get real reps of five-on-five now and build our team up and build our great habits through these scrimmages, now that we have 10 guys."

In addition to physical health, Larrañaga also likes where his team is at from a mental standpoint as the clock ticks closer and closer to the start of the season.

"I think you can easily evaluate where you are mentally and emotionally by the level of energy that the players bring to a practice session," Larrañaga said. "And right now, the guys have worked very, very hard. They're very enthusiastic. I think they have a lot of confidence in each other."

To McGusty, these next six weeks will actually be more about the team's cohesion than they will be about anything else. The 6-foot-5 guard is excited to see the Hurricanes put talent and chemistry together.

A big boost to Miami's team-building goals over the next month-and-a-half comes from the significant veteran presence on the roster. There are seven seniors in the group, including five scholarship players who will be on the court this year.

"We've got guys that have been in college and playing college basketball for four or five years," McGusty explained. "That always helps, not only in-game, but also for times like now when we're trying to build our culture, put our team together. We just need that leadership and that comes from older guys that have experienced it and been there."

As important as veteran leadership is, Larrañaga notes that "youthful enthusiasm needs to be there" from Miami's underclassmen, as well.

Along with its three-man sophomore class, the roster features two highly-recruited freshmen in forward Matt Cross and guard Earl Timberlake.

Both of them have impressed those around them during offseason workouts, but their coach knows they still have work to do over the next few weeks—and even after that—to be fully ready.

"I think both Matt and Earl are very well-prepared to contribute at the offensive end," Larrañaga said. "Earl has a lot of different skills that he brings to the table. Matt Cross is one

of our best 3-point shooters. The challenge for all freshmen is really at the defensive end of the floor. The game is faster, it's more physical."

Larrañaga and his staff will have three primary focal points in the lead-up to the season, not just for the rookies, but for the entire team.

The first is strength and conditioning. The second is skill development. The third is game preparation.

It is that initial category where many student-athletes, in all sports at all schools, fell behind due to issues presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Hurricanes, however, having been working hard to be in top physical condition over the past several months—and they have had some extra spark when doing so.

"As a team, I think we're in some of the best shape we could be in. Ever since we were allowed back on campus, we've been in a constant mode of just grinding and really trying to get back on track. The last two years haven't been some of the best years; we haven't made the Tournament," McGusty shared. "...I think we take that on and we accept it. When we're working out together or whenever we're doing these practices and going through these drills, I feel like that's in the back of our head. These last two years that we've had where we just haven't had seasons that we're expecting to be having. So, I think that motivates us."

McGusty added that every senior on the team is focused on making the 2021 NCAA Tournament and not ending their college careers with a losing season.

The Katy, Texas, native is confident this group has the abilities to excel and now needs to take all the necessary steps to make that happen.

"I think we have a very talented team this year," he said. "It's just going to be how we are going to put it together."

Starting tomorrow, the Hurricanes have six weeks of practice to work on doing just that.

Top storylines for the 2020-21 University of Miami men's and women's basketball teams

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Oct. 31, 2020

The college basketball season tips off in less than a month, on Nov. 25, and the University of Miami men's and women's teams still do not know their schedules.

The men's team only knows that it will play host to Purdue on Dec. 8 in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge and that a non-conference game against FAU is said to be in the works. The women's team is planning non-conference matchups against regional opponents within driving distance.

Like everything else, the ACC has been disrupted by COVID-19 and working out a schedule of indoor sporting events during a pandemic has proven to be a major challenge. Basketball teams play as many as three games a week, teams and officials are required to travel far more frequently than in football, so the conference is still working on protocols and testing plans.

A schedule is expected to be released soon. In the meantime, UM men's coach Jim Larranaga and women's coach Katie Meier are preparing their teams the best they can.

Larranaga enters his 10th season with the Hurricanes and Meier her 16th. Both teams finished middle of the pack in the conference last year. The men were 15-16 overall and 7-13 in the ACC. The women were 15-15 and 7-11.

Both coaches are doing all they can to ensure their players stay safe during the pandemic.

"I'm very, very proud of our guys for handling it so far, but we've almost been in our own bubble," Larranaga said. "Our practice facility has been limited to our players, coaches and a couple of managers. That's it. They've all been tested. It was once a week, now twice a week. As long as we're smart about who we interact with, I think we can stay safe, but when you're dealing with young adults who already have been quarantined since last March, you got guys with COVID fatigue. Will they interact with other people?"

"I've lost a friend to COVID, a former player to COVID and I have a relative with COVID. It's a very dangerous virus. You can't let up your guard. We want to keep ourselves safe so we can have a basketball season. It's great our football team hasn't missed a game, but others in the ACC have."

Senior Taylor Mason said the UM women's team has become more dedicated to the sport during the pandemic.

"It has changed our mentality, mindset and drive, so COVID has had some benefits," Mason said. "It has made us love the game more, made us appreciate the small things, so we are going much harder than before."

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Here are some storylines heading into the 2020-21 season...

SAM WAARDENBURG OUT FOR THE YEAR

Senior power forward Sam Waardenburg is out for the season with a left foot injury. The New Zealand native started 24 of 30 games last season

"It was a big blow to lose Sam," said Larranaga. "He was our most experienced front court player, our leading rebounder from last year, practicing extremely well and we're going to dramatically miss his defense, rebounding, experience and his overall demeanor on the court."

Sophomore Anthony Walker, freshman Matt Cross, and red-shirt junior Deng Gak will have to step up.

NYSIER BROOKS IS THE NEW "GLUE GUY"

Keep an eye out for 7-foot redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks, a grad transfer from the University of Cincinnati, where he ranked among the conference leaders in blocks and rebounds. Brooks, one of 11 siblings, said his large family taught him to speak up and deal with different personalities, so he has become an instant leader for UM.

"He's very vocal," Larranaga said. "That's going to really help us defensively. Nysier will be a really good defender and rebounder for us, will block some shots."

Brooks called himself "the glue guy who can chain everyone together" and teammate Kam McGusty agreed. "Every good team has a guy like Nysier, a player who brings energy," McGusty said. "Nysier is our energizer."

FRESHMEN TO PLAY BIG ROLES

Larranaga said freshman guard Earl Timberlake and freshman forward Matt Cross are expected to play significant roles. He compared Timberlake to former UM player Bruce Brown, now with the Detroit Pistons

"Earl is more physically ready than most freshmen," Larranaga said. "He's 6-5, strong, athletic, can handle. He's a tough hard-nosed guy going to basket. Whether he starts or come off the bench, he's going to be a major contributor from Day One."

GUARDS IMPROVED FROM LAST SEASON

Sophomore guard Isaiah Wong gained 20 pounds of muscle in the off-season and comes in at 182 lbs, "considerably bigger and stronger" than last year, Larranaga said. He has also worked on his three-point shooting.

McGusty has given up soda, gotten in the best shape of his life, and his fitness is showing on the court.

The coach said starting point guard Chris Lykes recovered from knee surgery and is "playing the best basketball in practice. Will it convert to games? I really hope so because he's had a great summer and fall."

MEIER AIMS FOR POSTSEASON BREAKTHROUGH

The UM women reached the post-season 10 years in a row from 2009-19, and Meier's team has had a 100 percent

graduation rate. She'd like a deeper run in March.

"I'm satisfied with my body of work, but we want to break through the second, third weekend in March, that's something we're trying to do," Meier said. "Overall, the 100 percent graduation rate and 10 straight post-seasons is pretty impressive. More so the graduation rate. Everyone who's ever played for me that spent four years has graduated. I have never had an ineligible player, so the culture's good."

INTERNATIONAL FLAVOR HELPS HURRICANES

The Canes roster reads like the United Nations with five internationals -- two from France and others from Sweden, Spain and Croatia. Meier said they blend perfectly with her domestic players.

"There are some programs that commit to recruiting internationally and they get all the scouting services and do it that way, but we really have a relationship connection," she said, adding that the players she got from Sweden and France knew of former UM players from those countries who had good experiences at the school.

"A lot of times we have a very athletic style and we've been able to use the international players in positions of the vision, passing and time per touch and they keep us playing fast," Meier said. "That's really helped, and I've really fallen in love with the combination of that mix of talent."

NO EXCUSES WITH SENIORS

With four seniors on the team -- Endia Banks, Mykea Gray, Taylor Mayson, Kelsey Marshall -- Meier said it is time to make a postseason run.

"This has to be a year when close games have to break our way," Meier said. "We have no excuse for that. We have to rely on our upperclassmen who have been there before."

The Hurricanes Endured an Up-and-Down Season Last Winter and Are Ready to Hit the Hardwood Running

Wyatt Kopleman
State of the U
Nov. 2, 2020

Despite no official schedule having been released for the 2020-2021 Miami Hurricanes' season, the program looks to rebound strongly after finishing tied for 10th place in the ACC standings last March.

Similar to the prior season, Canes fans watched the team lose games with an onset of injuries to key players including guard Kameron McGusty (a 2021 NBA Draft prospect) as well as forwards Keith Stone and Sam Waardenburg, who will now miss this season having suffered a foot injury. Guard Chris Lykes also encountered a groin injury mid-season and a face injury prior to the ACC Tournament.

Finishing 7-13 in the conference is nothing for a program like Miami's to hang their hat on, having been avalanched by blue blood teams like Duke with two, 30-point defeats in both meetings.

That is not to say all 13 losses were wash-outs, however. A handful were pure nail biters, serving as reminders for how detrimental mental lapses can be in late-game situations. Many recall the 79-83 overtime loss to ninth-ranked Florida State suffered at home on Jan. 18, a contest that initially saw the Hurricanes ahead by 13 points with nine minutes remaining in the second half.

And then there were the games where coach Jim Larrañaga's unit resembled the mighty Miami Hurricanes of old, having won an ACC Championship in 2013 and advancing to two Sweet 16 games. Blowout wins against opponents including Wake Forest and Boston College in mid-February were certainly a reviver, but a 102-95 triple-overtime win against Virginia Tech at Cassell Coliseum breathed even more life into the locker room.

More importantly, the latter reminded the Canes how vital mental toughness and trust remain against some of America's top teams, with countless overtime games that end with a margin of five points or fewer. Larrañaga stated after the fatiguing battle that they "expect every ACC game to be a struggle and then you just have to find a way."

The rest of the season brought a mixed bag. The following game would result in a 16-point loss at the hands of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind., as Miami allowed Fighting Irish forward John Mooney a double-double and guard T.J. Gibbs to can five of six 3-point shots. Two games later would bring another

heartbreaking loss, losing 44-46 to the No. 22 Virginia Cavaliers at home. The Canes would prevail against the Syracuse Orange three days later with a four-point overtime win at the Watsco Center to close out the regular season.

The program would soldier on into the ACC Tournament as the No. 9 seed and would face a No. 8 Clemson team led by forward Aamir Simms and guard Tevin Mack. The Tigers were more than hungry for revenge having lost to the Canes by five in overtime at Littlejohn Coliseum on New Year's Eve.

21 points from Lykes, who averaged over 15 points per game, and 17 points from guard DJ Vasiljevic would not suffice with the second-round contest ending in favor of Clemson by five. The winner would face top-seeded Florida State in the quarterfinals, only for it to be canceled due to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

With another rollercoaster season in the books, the Canes knew they could have had another crack at beating the Seminoles with the leadership they had from Vasiljevic and Stone, besides Larrañaga's empowering voice.

"When we recruit, we really recruit role models, kids that not only we would want to coach, but that our university would be very proud of and community would be very proud of them, both on the court and off the court," Larrañaga said of Vasiljevic and Stone. "They've got great attitudes. They've got a great work ethic. They behave in a first-class manner."

Attitude, class, and commitment to the program has remained something Larrañaga has preached since his arrival to Coral Gables in 2011. Miami has surely seen better days from a success standpoint though what has not wavered is the talent that has gravitated to UM, given the commitments of four-star recruits in guards Earl Timberlake and Matt Cross.

So, now what? With just shy of a month until the school and its fans really see what the team with added depth and star power is made of, coach Larrañaga and his coaching staff have been preparing under radically different conditions than normal. COVID-19 has overshadowed how college basketball will be scheduled and operated this winter, and the health and safety of all will be of utmost importance.

The team's two newcomers will nonetheless be heavily relied upon for offensive produc-

tion, in addition to rebounding. Guards Harlond Beverly and Isaiah Wong will be critical to the success of the program, after impressive freshman campaigns. Forward Anthony Walker and transfer center Nysier Brooks will have to step up to fill the absence of Waardenburg, as the team already lacked consistent rebounding and shot blocking.

With already a storied coaching career in his back pocket, Larrañaga looks to celebrate his 10th season at UM with an improved ACC record in addition to a potentially deep March Madness run.

Lessons Learned

By Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Nov. 2, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – To say Isaiah Wong's freshman campaign started off cold would be generous.

To say it ended hot would simply not be doing him justice.

Through the first 18 contests of the year, Wong averaged 3.1 points, 1.7 rebounds and 0.6 assists per game, while shooting 29.7 percent (19-of-64) from the floor, 30.8 percent (4-of-13) from 3-point range and 60.9 percent (14-of-23) at the line.

He ranked eighth on the team in scoring during that span and only three times did he surpass five points, notching a high of eight.

"It was real frustrating. Just seeing all these kids coming in—they were doing their thing and I was just struggling, missing shots that I normally make," Wong recalled. "So, I felt like just coming into the game, I was like, 'What's happening?' My mental game, it was not there at the time. During warmups, I was missing layups. I was air-balling shots during warmups. It was just not happening for me. During practice too, I was just really overthinking stuff."

Over the final 13 outings, Wong averaged 14.2 points, 4.7 rebounds and 1.6 assists per game, while shooting 47.6 percent (60-of-126) from the field, 39.5 percent (15-of-38) beyond the arc and 92.5 percent (49-of-53) at the stripe.

He placed second among Hurricanes in scoring in that stretch, tallied double-digit points 10 times and thrice eclipsed 20.

"I felt like I always had this in me," Wong shared. "It was just recognizing it and getting my confidence up."

Wong went from an afterthought on opponents' scouting report to the very forefront of it. He claimed back-to-back ACC Freshman of the Week accolades, becoming the second Hurricane to do so along with Lonnie Walker IV, a one-and-done, top-20 NBA draftee.

Although his stats really started to shift in the 19th game, Wong actually felt like it was in the prior outing, at famed Cameron Indoor Stadium in Durham, N.C., when he began to get in the groove.

"I felt like the Duke game when I had [eight] points, I felt like I was coming back. It was Duke and I ... wasn't really scoring, but I felt like when I was missing, I was feeling my touch coming

back," Wong shared. "So I was like, 'These are good misses. I'm making some of them.' I was getting my touch coming back."

Starting guards Chris Lykes and Kameron McGusty missed the next game, a road matchup at North Carolina, due to injury. That gave Wong a chance to earn his first start as a collegian.

After posting 19 points on 6-of-11 shooting against the Tar Heels, Wong never lost his spot. He opened every game the rest of the season.

"The opportunity that Isaiah had to move into the starting lineup changed everything about his freshman year," Miami head coach Jim Larranaga said. "...When you're a sub, the one thing you know is when you go in there, you're going to come out so that the coach can get the starter back in. But once you move into the starting lineup and you know you're going to play 30 minutes or more, it helps you to relax and play with a lot more confidence."

Wong credits assistant coach Adam Fisher for providing suggestions during the season to help him understand concepts at both ends of the floor better.

It all paid off during those final 13 games when Wong showed everything he could do, putting on full display the talents that made him a consensus top-80 recruit.

"He always had that potential; he just had to gain some experience," Larranaga said. "The mental part of the game, learning a new offense, learning your responsibilities defensively, those were the more difficult things for Isaiah, [as was] getting accustomed to being the youngest guy on the team rather than the oldest. Just a lot of adjustments that just took time [for him] to overcome."

Now that he has all of that behind him, Wong is looking to carry the late-season success from 2019-20 into his second campaign.

The 6-foot-3 guard feels capable of doing just that.

"I feel a lot more confident going from freshman to sophomore year because I feel more adjusted," Wong shared. "I know a lot more than I knew my freshman year. I'm a lot more comfortable running the plays ... and [I am] used to college right now."

Wong also recognizes that in addition to his increased understanding on the hardwood, he needs to put in extra effort off it. He has thus made it a priority to get up additional shots and spend more time in the weight room.

In addition, Wong will need to adjust once again when the season begins, albeit this time in a different way.

"Last year he primarily played the two-guard spot. This year we're expecting him to play the one and two," Larranaga said. We're expecting him to have a little more versatility and play multiple positions, including the point guard position."

Wong also has another role that he plans to take on during his sophomore campaign and that is one of a leader.

Having gone through his own difficulties as a freshman, he wants to be there for this year's crop of newcomers—forward Matt Cross and guard Earl Timberlake—when they do so, as well as be there for the team as a whole.

"Just being more vocal, [as well as] just trying to calm down sometimes when people are in a rush when we're struggling," Wong said of his goals for this season. "When we're down, just try to figure out what's happening and try to get better as a team. We got freshmen on the team—we got Earl and Matt—and I know they're going to have times when they struggle and I'm going to try to help them throughout the season."

Along with Cross, Timberlake and Nysier Brooks, a redshirt senior center who sat out last year as a transfer, the Hurricanes return eight of 10 scholarship letter winners from the 2019-20 season. That list includes four of five starters.

Miami is looking to get back to the NCAA Tournament for the fourth time in six years and Wong thinks the team has a chance "to be very good."

The Piscataway, N.J., native feels the Hurricanes will be consistently capable of producing points and knows defensive toughness will be of significant importance.

Now, after months of on-court troubles transformed into dazzling performances, Wong is set to play a vital role in both areas.

"He's gone through the struggles that freshmen go through, but I think he's practicing very hard and very well, and will be very ready to have a successful sophomore campaign," Larranaga said. "...He's going to be a huge factor because he not only can score the ball on offense, he's also learned to be a very good defender."

2020-2021 Preview: Miami Hurricanes Men's Basketball

Wyatt Kopleman
State of the U
Nov. 9, 2020

The Miami Hurricanes men's basketball program has been working tirelessly to prepare for what could be a very different college basketball season ahead, as the NCAA continues to endure the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I'm very proud of our guys for the way they've handled it so far," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. The skipper originally from the Bronx, N.Y., has reaffirmed that the team maintains operations in the safest way possible at the Watsco Center's practice facility.

"We've almost been in our own bubble. Our practice facility's been limited to our players, our coaches, and a couple of managers, and that's it. It's a very dangerous virus [and] our players have been very, very smart in dealing with it so far," said Larrañaga, who will be coaching his 10th season in Coral Gables, Fla., this winter.

Larrañaga added that the frequency of team testing has increased as an extra precaution with the season approaching.

"At one time it was once a week and now it's twice a week. So, as long as we're smart about who we interact with when we're not at practice, I think we can stay safe," Larrañaga said. The 71-year-old coach has also lost a former player and friend because of the coronavirus.

But despite the prevention of the coronavirus' impacts, the Hurricanes look to rebound after a rollercoaster season that ended with a second-round loss to the Clemson Tigers in the ACC Tournament.

"I would say as long as we stay healthy, we should be in much better shape than we have been in the last two seasons," Larrañaga said.

With added talent and depth in guard Earl Timberlake, forward Matt Cross, and Cincinnati transfer center Nysier Brooks, Miami will also return seven players from last year's roster. The lone exception is redshirt senior forward Sam Waardenburg who will be sidelined with a foot injury for approximately six months, missing the entire season.

"It's a big blow to us to lose Sam," Larrañaga said. "He was our most experienced frontcourt player [and] our leading rebounder from last season. He was practicing extremely well, and we're going to dramatically miss his defense, his rebounding, his experience, and just his overall demeanor on the court."

Larrañaga stated that sophomore forward Anthony Walker, Cross, and redshirt junior forward Deng Gak would have had to compete with the now-injured New Zealand native for the starting power forward slot. That now remains open given Waardenburg's absence, though Larrañaga remains optimistic with the available talent.

"I'm pleased with the way Anthony was practicing, the way Matt has practiced and what he brings to the table," Larrañaga said. "It's very nice having Deng Gak back, because Deng can play both the four and the five."

Gak, who could have helped bolster Miami's frontcourt last year, has also been sidelined the past two seasons with both left and right knee injuries. It was initially believed that the Sydney, Australia, native would receive a medical waiver since he had only played in less than 30 percent of games per year.

Redshirt senior center Rodney Miller has been improving offensively through the offseason, as his veteran leadership will remain vital this year.

"I've really worked on mastering my left and right-hand jump hook," Miller said. "I can do both really smoothly either hand, so I think you're gonna see a lot more of that. I've been working on my free throws [and] my mid-range game just to expand a little bit and give them [opponents] some space."

After being the team's lone center last year, Miller believes that the Canes having extra players at hand will help them more in the long run.

"I feel like that's been a question that we've had for the past couple years I've been here because we've plagued with injuries and eligibility issues," Miller said. "We have a stockpile of guys and it's gonna be huge for us. We've realized that depth is what helps teams make it far because it just lowers injuries if you can rotate capable guys who are ready to play, and that's what we have."

The addition of Brooks will aid Miami's big men in Miller and Gak with defending and rebounding, as the Canes were second-to-last in scoring defense allowing 73.2 points per game.

"I know we'll be real good at being able to adjust to different kinds of teams that different play styles," Brooks said. "We'll be good to adjust in any type of game situation with the players that we have with the young freshmen coming in and some of the older players that still will be here."

Miami saw senior guards Chris Lykes and Kameron McGusty sidelined with injuries at various points in the season. But now the two are prepared to help lead the program against the ACC's toughest competition.

"I think we've got a lot of talented guys that can play a number of different positions," Lykes said. "We've been working on a couple of different things, so the offense might be a little different, but it's really just going to take some time just for us to get together."

McGusty, a former Oklahoma transfer, has worked on his body this offseason from a nutritional and conditioning standpoint as this will likely aid in more efficient performance on both ends of the court.

"I really took my body serious, changed my diet a little bit, [and] started taking my off-court conditioning a little more importantly," McGusty said. "If I want to play good on both sides of the ball you gotta be in the right shape. Those are some of the things I wanted to do last year but I just realized I wasn't in enough shape. That's honestly the truthful answer, so that's one of the things I worked on this offseason and I'm looking forward to put it altogether and get on the court and show it."

Lykes averaged over 15 points per game last season, shouldering the scoring load for the second consecutive season. McGusty, on the other hand, initially joined his backcourt teammate in doing the same until sophomore guard Isaiah Wong broke out and impressed the coaching staff in the second half of the season.

For Wong, it was a literal tale of two halves while only averaging 3.1 points, 1.7 rebounds, and 0.6 assists in the first 18 games last season. The final 13 matchups, however, saw the Piscataway, N.J., native increase those numbers to 14.2 points, 4.7 rebounds, and 1.6 assists per game, while shooting 47.6 percent.

"I felt like I always had this in me," Wong said. "It was just recognizing it and getting my confidence up."

Whether Larrañaga starts or brings Wong off the bench, performances similar to his first college start in Chapel Hill, N.C., will be critical for the Canes.

"He always had that potential; he just had to gain some experience," Larrañaga said. "The mental part of the game, learning a new offense, learning your responsibilities defensively, those were the more difficult things for Isaiah. Just a lot of adjustments that just took time [for him] to overcome."

Wong, who has gained about 20 pounds of muscle, worked hard in the weight room during the offseason with the team's strength and conditioning coach Phil Baier. That investment has paid dividends on the hardwood, and Larrañaga had not failed to take notice.

"He is considerably bigger and stronger," Larrañaga said. "He's practicing very well; he's played both the one and two

and he's playing both positions with a great deal of confidence. He's shooting the three with a lot of confidence and I would say he's significantly improved from last year in that category."

The program's freshmen in Cross and Timberlake will provide an additional amount of fresh energy in terms of scoring and rebounding. Both will be able to fit in to the team's rotation, regardless of whether Larrañaga's game plan has the Canes with a smaller or larger five on the court.

"Earl has practiced very hard and very well," Larrañaga said. "He's a tremendous competitor. He brings an entirely different set of athletic skills and basketball skills. He's more physically ready than most freshman in a sense that he's 6-foot-5, he's strong, athletic, and he can handle [the ball]. Whether Earl starts or comes in off the bench, he's going to be a major contributor from day one."

Even Larrañaga cited how Timberlake's rebounding abilities will benefit the team, a major team weakness to better from last year.

"He's been rebounding the ball very well at both ends," Larrañaga said. "Losing our best rebounder in Sam Waardenburg, all of the sudden the coaching staff is very, very focused on 'Who can play that position and give us the best chance of defending and rebounding at that position?' We keep stats in practice, and he's one of our leading rebounders in practice. He's also someone defensively that would allow us to switch one through four, and we're hoping that would help us improve our defense versus ball screens."

In terms of defense, Lykes said that "it will be a different team defensively and better, too." He and McGusty strove to set the tone on that end of the floor by improving their defensive game.

"I think we have solid rim protection in both Rod, Deng and Nysier Brooks, who was Defensive Player of the Year at Cincinnati," Lykes said. "I think we also got guys that guard a number of different positions. One of the focal points that we've picking up on in practice is picking up full court. I think we have the agility and speed to do that."

Among the ACC, the Canes finished last in defensive rebounding, averaging only 38.5 rebounds per game due to the lack of size and strength in the paint. This will remain a critical category to improve upon besides obtaining more balanced scoring.

After also ranking ninth last year in the conference with a scoring average of 71.2 points per game, Miami hopes that their newcomers can effectively contribute and take pressure off of Lykes and McGusty. The team's offense remained stagnant at times, leading to more opportunities for blue-blood programs including Duke and Louisville to force contested shots.

With two consecutive seasons of NCAA Tournament absences, the Miami Hurricanes will begin the season with a sense of redemption to contend for a potentially higher ACC ranking and a deeper run in the ACC Tournament, let alone March Madness itself. The only game that currently lies on their schedule remains the ACC/Big Ten Challenge at home against Purdue on Dec. 8. An official schedule is likely to be released within the coming weeks.

Lykes Named Preseason First Team All-ACC

MiamiHurricanes.com
Nov. 11, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Chris Lykes of the University of Miami men's basketball team earned Preseason First Team All-ACC distinction, as announced Wednesday morning by the league office.

A 5-foot-7, 160-pound senior guard, Lykes tallied 50 points in the balloting, tied for the fifth-most of any player in the conference.

The Mitchellville, Md., native is the first two-time Preseason All-ACC honoree in program history; he earned second-team status last year. The other Hurricanes to garner at least one such accolade are Jack McClinton (2008-09), Malcolm Grant (2011-12) and Bruce Brown Jr. (2017-18), the former two of whom also picked up first-team plaudits.

Lykes was also one of eight players to receive a nod for Preseason ACC Player of the Year, tying for sixth among that group with three votes.

The third-leading returning scorer in the league, behind only North Carolina's Garrison Brooks, the Preseason ACC Player of the Year, and Georgia Tech's Michael Devoe, Lykes averaged 15.4 points per game last year.

Along with the all-conference teams, the ACC also announced Wednesday the preseason predicted order of finish. The Hurricanes placed seventh in the voting with 1,223 points, just 11 behind sixth-place Syracuse.

This is the highest Miami has ranked in the preseason balloting since a fourth-place mark in 2017-18. It is also fifth-highest selection in head coach Jim Larrañaga's 10-year tenure in Coral Gables.

Lykes and the Hurricanes are set to open the 2020-21 campaign at home Nov. 25 against Stetson.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2020-21 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

ACC Preseason Order of Finish (first-place votes in parentheses)

1. Virginia (97), 2214
2. Duke (34), 2146
3. Florida State (15), 1973

4. North Carolina (7), 1933
5. Louisville (2), 1693
6. Syracuse, 1234
7. Miami, 1223
8. NC State, 1149
9. Georgia Tech, 1147
10. Clemson, 1057
11. Virginia Tech, 794
12. Notre Dame, 769
13. Pittsburgh, 635
14. Boston College, 404
15. Wake Forest, 229

First-place votes in parenthesis; 155 total voters

Preseason All-ACC Team

First Team

Name, School, Points
Garrison Brooks, North Carolina, 137
Sam Hauser, Virginia, 89
Scottie Barnes, Florida State, 59
Jalen Johnson, Duke, 52
Chris Lykes, Miami, 50
Aamir Simms, Clemson, 50

Second Team

David Johnson, Louisville, 46
Jose Alvarado, Georgia Tech, 43
MJ Walker, Florida State, 38
Kiehi Clark, Virginia, 37
Wendell Moore Jr., Duke, 32

Preseason ACC Player of the Year

Garrison Brooks, North Carolina, 102
Sam Hauser, Virginia, 24
MJ Walker, Florida State, 10
Wendell Moore Jr., Duke, 7
Aamir Simms, Clemson, 5
Matthew Hurt, Duke, 3
Chris Lykes, Miami, 3
Kihei Clark, Virginia, 1

Preseason ACC Freshman of the Year

Scottie Barnes, Florida State, 64
Jalen Johnson, Duke, 60
Caleb Love, North Carolina, 9
Day'Ron Sharpe, North Carolina, 6
DJ Steward, Duke, 4
Reece Beekman, Virginia, 3
Jeremy Roach, Duke, 3
RJ Davis, North Carolina, 3
Mark Williams, Duke, 2
Cam Hayes, NC State, 1

PG Chris Lykes having 'great' offseason; named Preseason All-ACC

By Chris Stock
InsidetheU
Nov. 12, 2020

Point guard Chris Lykes has had a very good offseason as he gears up for his senior year.

Lykes, who ranks 24th on Miami's all-time scoring list, was named to the Preseason All-ACC First Team.

"He's playing the best basketball in practice," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "Will it convert to games? Surely hope so because he's had a great summer and fall and that's after knee surgery. He came back very, very strong. He rehabbed the knee, got himself in great shape, he's playing, very, very well."

Lykes averaged 15.4 points a game and increased his efficiency last season to lead the Hurricanes in scoring for the second straight year. However, Miami was 15-16 a year after going 14-18.

Wins, not personal accolades or accomplishments, are the focus for Lykes.

"I felt like I've had a solid career here at UM, but I think careers are always defined by winning," Lykes said. "Unfortunately I haven't won much here. I'm really just trying to win as many games as possible and that's how I'm going to end my career."

Lykes is seeing similarities with the 2020-21 Hurricanes, with newcomers Nysier Brooks, Earl Timberlake, and Matt Cross, to his freshman season when they went 22-10 and reached the NCAA Tournament.

"I think the closest comparison I can give to this year's team is my freshman year," Lykes said. "We have a lot of talented guys who can play a number of different positions. We've been working on a couple different things so the offense might be a little different, but it's really going to take some time for us to gel together. The way we've been playing in practice reminds me of the way Toronto plays and how the Rockets play."

Brooks is a 7-foot senior center who played on three NCAA Tournament teams at Cincinnati. He sat out last year at Miami and ready to make an impact on the court as a defensive prowess, but also as a key leader.

"He's a very vocal guy not afraid to insert his opinion," Lykes said. "Most of the time when he's inserting his opinion, it's the right way. He's not afraid to let guys know and that's something that I kind of look up to him for."

The addition of Brooks is much-needed on the defensive end of the court where the Hurricanes struggled last season. Miami ranked 12th in the ACC in conference-only defensive efficiency (105.5) according to Kenpom.com and 13th in rebounding margin (minus-3.6). Timberlake and Cross, two freshmen, are also expected to provide a defensive boost while the returners are aiming for improvements.

"I think it will be a different team defensively, better too," Lykes said. "I think we have solid rim protection in both Rod and Deng and Nysier Brooks. I think we definitely have rim protection, but I think we have guys who can guard a number of different positions. One of the focal points we have been doing in practice is picking up full court. I think we have the agility and speed to do that."

Lykes will be looking for a new backcourt mate after Dejan Vasiljevic graduated. Sophomores Isaiah Wong and Harlond Beverly are vying for the spot after showing flashes last season.

"The relationship between me, H, and Isaiah has been there since day one," Lykes said. "I feel like they look up to me. They ask me a lot of questions. They're good kids and I'm grateful to be able to teach them some things that I've learned in college. Relationship is great."

Lykes and Hurricanes, who were pegged seventh in the preseason ACC poll, are slated to begin their season on Nov. 29 against North Florida after their previously-announced opener on Nov. 25 against Stetson was postponed.

"I always believe we can go all the way," Lykes said. "Every team I have played on I felt like we can go all the way. It's just a matter of staying healthy and sticking to it. We're going to be alright this year, we just have to focus, and keep trusting."

Miami Hurricanes expect to rebound after two losing seasons

Steve Wine
AP
November 13, 2020

Coach Jim Larranaga is coming off back-to-back losing seasons for the first time since 1991-93, and he knows why.

His Miami Hurricanes have had trouble guarding their opponents, especially in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

"We have been perhaps worst team in ACC defensively the past two seasons," Larranaga said. "Some of it has to do with our lack of depth, some of it has to do with not being quite as big and talented as in my previous seasons."

This season the Hurricanes are taller and deeper, and they hope to be better. Five of their top six scorers return from a team that went 15-16 last season, and at least three newcomers are expected to have significant roles.

BETTER D?

One of Miami's newcomers is 7-foot senior Nysier Brooks, a transfer who blocked 51 shots for Cincinnati a year ago and is eager to upgrade Miami's interior defense.

"I know a lot more people at this level intend to try me, so I'm going to focus on going vertical," Brooks said. "A lot of people aren't going through me to finish, but there will be a lot of people that have athletic abilities, so I'm just waiting for them to come see. I'm planning on trying to get defensive player of the year in this conference."

Regarding perimeter defense, senior guard Chris Lykes says several of his teammates are versatile enough for the Hurricanes to mix and match.

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"It will be a different team defensively, and better, too," Lykes said. "We have solid rim protection. We've also got guys who can guard a number of different positions. We have been picking up full court in practice, and I think we have the speed and agility to do that."

ENTRENCHED

Larranaga, 71, is heading into his 35th year

rebound after two losing seasons

as a head coach and his 10th at Miami. He's under contract through 2023-24 and says he has no plans to retire, but acknowledged the past two seasons have been trying.

There was more frustration when forward Sam Waardenburg, Miami's leading rebounder a year ago, suffered a season-ending foot injury in practice last month.

"Before," Larranaga said, "when I was speaking to anyone from the media, I would say as long as we stay healthy, we should be in much better shape than we have been the last two seasons. But it a big blow to us to lose Sam."

Larranaga has coached four NCAA Tournament teams at Miami, but the Hurricanes went 14-18 in 2018-19 — his first losing record since 1997-98 at George Mason. Last season was only slightly better, and the Hurricanes have lost 17 consecutive games to ranked teams since February 2018.

Larranaga blames the Hurricanes' downturn on an FBI investigation into college basketball that raised questions about his program and hurt recruiting. No wrongdoing by Larranaga surfaced.

MORE DEPTH

Recruiting struggles and injuries left the Hurricanes had only eight scholarship players for some games a year ago. This season the rotation could be 10 deep, even after the loss of Waardenburg.

"We can actually get in full practices now," guard Kameron McGusty said.

Along with Brooks, newcomers include freshman guard Earl Timberlake and freshman forward Matt Cross. Deng Gak, a 6-11 junior, returns after missing most of last season with a knee injury.

The 6-5 Timberlake is among the mostly highly ranked recruits in Miami history.

"He is more physically ready than most freshmen," Larranaga said. "He's strong and athletic and is going to be a major contributor from day one."

LYKES

Lykes led Miami with an average of 15.4 points a year ago, and he's the third-leading returning scorer in the ACC. Putting up points isn't his primary goal, however.

"I'm trying to win as many games as I can,"

Lykes said. "I feel like I've had a solid career here, but careers are always defined by winning. Unfortunately I haven't won much here."

SCHEDULE

The opener against Stetson on Nov. 25 was postponed because of a COVID-19 case within the Hatters' program. Miami is now scheduled to play four non-conference games, beginning Nov. 29 at home against North Florida.

Because of the coronavirus, no fans will be permitted at home games through at least the end of December.

SG Kameron McGusty 'anxious' to show offseason improvements

By Chris Stock
InsidetheU
Nov. 17, 2020

Shooting guard Kameron McGusty put a strong emphasis on being a better-conditioned, two-way player for his upcoming senior season.

McGusty got in better shape by paying attention to his diet and improved his strength while becoming more athletic.

The 6-foot-5 Katy, Okla. native lost about seven pounds in the offseason down to 185. He also lowered his body fat percentage from 12 to eight.

"My body just feels better," McGusty said.

Head coach Jim Larranaga has noticed McGusty's transformation. One day at practice Larranaga called out to McGusty.

"That's the most athletic I've seen you since you arrived," Larranaga said.

McGusty responded: "It's the first year where my back is not bothering me."

McGusty's back limited him down the stretch last season, causing him to miss three games and relegating him to a reserve role in seven others. He averaged 12.5 points in his first season with the Hurricanes after two years at Oklahoma. He is hoping by improving his physical stature will translate to him being more reliable and more productive.

"I really took my body serious, changed my diet a little bit, started taking my off-court conditioning a little more important because to play good on both sides of the ball you've got to be in the right shape," McGusty said. "Those are some of the things I wanted to do last year, but I just realized I wasn't in good enough shape last year. That's the honest truth. So that's one of the things I worked on this offseason and I'm looking forward to being able to put it all together, get on the court and show it."

McGusty had the third-highest percentage (23.8) of possessions used last season with a 96.3 offensive rating according to Kenpom.com, noting his importance to the offensive end of the floor. He is looking to become more of a factor on defense as well.

"I wanted to make sure I was one of the most-conditioned guys on the team," McGusty said. "I handle the ball a lot in the offense, my job is to make plays for people so I have to be able to do that and withstand defensive game plans and different things teams throw at me,

but at the same time being able to guard one of the other team's better guards or the guard they like going through. It takes a lot of energy to be able to do it for 25-30 minutes and guarding as hard as you can."

There were a few key factors in improving his diet.

"In terms of my diet I've been cutting back on all of the sugar, not really drinking juices and sodas and sticking with water and putting the right stuff in my body, stuff that gives me energy as well as taking my vitamins," McGusty said. "Just all of the little things that you would forget about when you're at college that really does help give you more energy by putting the right stuff in your body and it makes you feel good. I'm glad that I made that change with my body and I'm anxious to show it."

McGusty is one of four seniors on the roster for the Hurricanes who open up their season on Nov. 29 against North Florida at the Watsco Center.

"It's definitely an advantage and we're embracing that advantage of having older guys, guys who have played and played in different conferences," McGusty said. "It's always good to have that experience just because any time there's a situation in a game, you could have three or four who have been there before so it's a lot easier and not as much nerves and pressure."

Miami Hurricanes men's basketball reschedules Stetson game to Dec. 4

Phillip Suitts
Palm Beach Post
Nov. 17, 2020

Miami Hurricanes men's basketball will play Stetson this season, but instead of the season opener, it will be team's second game of the season.

Miami was originally set to open the season against the Hatters on Nov. 25, but the game was postponed last week after a member of the Stetson basketball program tested positive for COVID-19.

Now, Miami will host Stetson on Friday, Dec. 4, at the Watsco Center. More details, including a tip-off time and TV broadcaster, will be announced at a later date.

Miami's new season opener is Nov. 29 against visiting North Florida. Tip-off is 6 p.m., and the game will be televised on the ACC Network.

It's all part of a five-game non-conference slate, all home games, that includes a Dec. 8 matchup against Purdue as part of the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

The Hurricanes open ACC play Dec. 16 against Pittsburgh and plan to play a 20-game conference schedule.

UM basketball team prepares for unique season under COVID protocols

By DAVID FURONES
SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL
NOV 19, 2020

rañaga reported before shifting gears with a quip. "We have a whole lot of other issues. I'm dealing with kids that are 18-to-22 years old.

The Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team is preparing for its season opener, while the UM football team is on a two-week hiatus due to a COVID-19 outbreak and positive cases spiking on campus.

Coach Jim Larrañaga had a simple answer when asked about how the team is going to keep safe from the coronavirus this season, specifically when traveling.

"We're going to do everything the protocols ask for and do everything possible to keep our players and coaching staff and travel parties safe," Larrañaga said.

The Hurricanes, who open their season Nov. 29 at Watsco Center against North Florida, will fly charter for every away game. Players will have assigned seats on the plane and on team buses, sitting next to their roommates.

File photo of Miami Hurricanes men's basketball coach Jim Larranaga.

File photo of Miami Hurricanes men's basketball coach Jim Larranaga. (Miami Athletics)
Everybody will wear masks when traveling. They will not eat food while traveling so as to not remove masks. If someone needs to have a drink, they will sip through a straw under their mask.

At team hotels, players will room with their same roommates that they live with on campus. The Hurricanes won't have any sit-down meals together like they normally would in a banquet room. It will be boxed meals to go.

RELATED: Hurricanes look for turnaround basketball season, even without F Sam Waardenburg »

Per ACC protocols, all basketball teams will have to test three times a week on non-consecutive days to identify coronavirus cases and isolate those who test positive or who can be identified as being at risk due to contact tracing.

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Miami's basketball team has had success keeping COVID-19 away from the team in the preseason.

"We don't have any issues with COVID," Lar-

"We've had so many bumps and bruises and things that have kept us from having a full complement of players. It's been very difficult to practice correctly."

UM lost a starter for the season in redshirt senior power forward Sam Waardenburg. Fellow forward Anthony Walker, a sophomore, sprained his knee trying a 360-degree dunk. He missed a month of practice but has returned. Freshman guard Earl Timberlake sprained his ankle last Saturday. Rodney Miller had a medical issue related to allergies, and fellow redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks missed a practice this week while ill.

Portal Prowess

By Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Nov. 19, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Manny Diaz grew up cheering on the Miami Hurricanes. Not just the ones in helmets and shoulder pads, but also those on the hardwood.

A Magic City native, Diaz remembers watching the Hurricane men's basketball team back in the 1980s at the James L. Knight Center and Miami Arena.

"Rooting for the Hurricanes is something I've been doing for a large part of my life," Diaz said. "And the neat thing is when you do get to know the personalities and the coaches, like 'Coach L' and coach Caputo, and you see what solid people [they are] and how the program is on such solid ground over there, you always want to root for good people. When you've got good people at your hometown school, it makes it even more fun."

Now in his second year as the Miami head football coach after three seasons as defensive coordinator, Diaz continues to support the Hurricane basketball program.

He also picked up a tip early in his Miami tenure from Chris Caputo, Miami's associate head basketball coach, that has proved beneficial in shaping his team.

"When I first got here back in 2016, the topic of transfers came up with Chris and he mentioned how they had, had great success with transfers," Diaz recalled. "Transfers had not really become a big thing in college football yet, but it was coming. What Chris mentioned was how student-athletes are very often looking for different things after they've been in college for a couple years than when they are coming out of high school. And that Miami is a very, very attractive destination for someone with that mindset."

Few college football programs have embraced the transfer portal like Miami, but the basketball program was, as Diaz alluded to, years ahead.

When Jim Larrañaga, with Caputo at his side, came to Coral Gables in 2011, the Miami roster featured a trio of transfers who helped teach Caputo the lesson he would eventually relay to Diaz a few years later.

"I've always felt like Miami is such a great location for transfers. We sort of learned it a little bit early on when we inherited Kenny Kadji and Trey McKinney Jones and Malcolm Grant," Caputo said. "Those guys were older, mature, good players—all-conference level players. And then we started to figure out, the ... environment here may be a little bit more conducive to a guy who's older."

The Hurricanes' interest in bolstering their roster through transfers only intensified after Larrañaga had a conversation with Fred Hoiberg, then the head coach at Iowa State.

The Cyclones, at that point, were utilizing transfers like almost no other team in the nation and they were doing so quite effectively.

"He shared with me his philosophy about recruiting transfers," Larrañaga said. "And the way he explained it was, 'I don't think we're going to be able to beat Kansas or Texas or some of the other high-profile programs in our league for a McDonald's All-American, but I think if we have older guys—juniors and seniors—dominating our roster, that we have a good chance to be very competitive.' Because a 21- or 22-year-old will play with a great deal of confidence against an 18-year-old, no matter how talented that guy is."

Larrañaga quickly picked up arguably the best transfer in Miami basketball history, landing Shane Larkin from DePaul. The guard from Orlando, Fla., went on to be the ACC Player of the Year in 2012-13, helping the Hurricanes sweep the league titles and reach the Sweet 16 that season.

From there, the staff continued to stay on the lookout for more transfers who could come in and make an impact. After that successful 2012-13 campaign, they added Sheldon McClellan from Texas and Angel Rodriguez from Kansas State.

Those two helped guide Miami to another Sweet 16 berth in 2016 on a roster that also included Kamari Murphy and Ivan Cruz Uceda, who joined the Hurricanes from Oklahoma State and Harcum College, respectively, in 2014.

Those are just a few of the many transfers Larrañaga, Caputo and the Hurricanes have utilized during their time in Coral Gables.

"The combination of being older, more experienced and, in some cases, having a year off where they could really work to develop their games and become the type of players that we felt like they could be, [all of that helped]," Caputo said of why trans-

fers have worked so well for Miami. "And then it was a way to supplement your high school recruiting, where you set out to get a certain amount of high school players, you try to get guys that you feel like can make an impact at this level. If you go three-of-five like most people, or three-of-seven, then you need [to give out] two more scholarships. Instead of dropping down in terms of tier of high school recruit, you supplement with a transfer."

Both Larrañaga and Diaz feel their success with past transfers has helped them sign new ones. Diaz has even had former ones connect with players of interest in the portal.

The draw for older players to come to Coral Gables goes well beyond that, though, regardless of the sport.

"The way that I think it through is when they're coming out of high school and they can be really influenced by a 48-hour unofficial or official visit, you can make anything look like it's amazing in 48 hours," Diaz shared. "I think when they really spend time on a college campus somewhere and then they come see everything that Miami has to offer, I think at that point, I think they really understand that this is a great, great place; not just a great school and a place where you can compete for championships, but a great environment to live in. We can really increase your brand, which is so important now."

Many of the attributes that make Miami an excellent spot to be appeal to recruits of all ages, both at the prep and collegiate level.

To Caputo, those positives are just heightened when it comes to an individual with less time left remaining to make the most of a college student-athlete experience.

"Miami is a great location for all sports for high school students. That's never going to change," Caputo said. "The best high school athletes in the country in any sport should consider Miami for a number of reasons. But in addition to that, we think it's a uniquely great situation for transfers, as well."

While colleges recruit high school players for years before landing a commitment, they sometimes have just weeks, or even days, to garner the pledge of a transfer. Although the evaluation process is sped up, it remains imperative for the coaches to fully vet the players they are going after to ensure they are a fit.

Sometimes—such as in the case of Murphy—the coaches already know the player and have a relationship from pursuing him in high school. Other times—like with Rodriguez, Zach Johnson, Keith Stone and Joe Thomas—it is a local recruit whom the staff is well aware of and has connections to.

No matter the situation, though, the coaches do their due diligence before bringing in a new player, even in a warp-speed recruitment.

"You have to do a lot of research. You have to talk to a lot of people—people who have been around that person. You have to find out what they're looking for, you have to find out why they're leaving the place that they came from," Diaz explained. "And you have to find the right fit. This is not fantasy football where you're just adding stats to your team. You're adding a person to your locker room and if they're not the right person, it could have a negative effect. We've been right more than we've been wrong, but that's something we're always very conscious of."

When the assessment is indeed correct, the transfers have the ability to not only help on the court/field, but also off it. Diaz cites the players he refers to as Miami's first high-profile transfer and most recent high-profile transfer to demonstrate the type of impact older players can have outside of the stat sheet.

The former is Adrian Colbert, a defensive back who came from Texas in 2016, and the latter is D'Eriq King, who joined the team from Houston this year and is currently its starting quarterback.

"We were trying to rebrand what it meant to play defensive back at Miami from 2015 to 2016. We were trying to set a [new level] of toughness in our secondary and bringing in Adrian Colbert and the toughness ... and physicality that he played with, I thought inspired all of the other defensive backs," Diaz said. "And then, fast-forward to this year, bringing in D'Eriq King and, in addition to all of his hats on the field, just who he is off the field and his leadership and his ability to connect with everybody in the locker room has transformed our team into a much more [tightly-knit group] than we were a year ago."

The third player in ACC history to throw for 400 yards and rush for 100 yards in a single game, King is part of an extremely talented group of transfers on Miami's football roster now.

King owns three ACC Quarterback of the Week accolades, while Jaelan Phillips (UCLA) has two ACC Defensive Lineman of the Week plaudits and Quincy Roche (Temple) sports one. Bubba Bolden (USC) is a two-time ACC Defensive Back of the Week and Jose Borregales (FIU) has one ACC Specialist of the Week distinction.

"I think for them, it's always going to be about the 305, the tri-county area, the state of Florida," Caputo said. "But transfers have been a wonderful way, it looks, for them to supplement their roster."

The Miami basketball program, too, has once again supplemented its own roster with transfers. Three of the Hurricanes' 12 scholarship players began their careers at other Division I schools.

One of them, Kameron McGusty, made a big impact last year in his first season after sitting out. The former Oklahoma Sooner averaged 12.5 points and 4.0 rebounds per game in 2019-20, scoring 20-plus four times for the Hurricanes.

Caputo thinks the Katy, Texas, native could be poised for a McClellan-esque redshirt senior season. Larrañaga, in part due to McGusty's clean bill of health after dealing with multiple injuries over the past two years, also feels the 6-foot-5, 190-pound guard is in for a big campaign.

"Right now, he's shooting the ball the best [he has] since he's been here," Larrañaga said. "He has gotten himself in great shape. He's running the floor and has shown more consistent athletic ability. He's certainly more experienced in our offensive and defensive schemes. So, I think he's heading towards an outstanding senior year."

Nysier Brooks, who came to The U from Cincinnati, is set to take the court for Miami this year after sitting out the 2019-20 season.

A 7-foot, 240-pound redshirt senior center from Philadelphia, Brooks will aid the Hurricanes in some areas the team struggled last year.

"Nysier is very strong, has a great physical presence. He's also very much a vocal leader. He loves to talk on defense," Larrañaga shared. "He's a really popular player amongst his teammates because he's so friendly and engaging. Nas is someone we're counting on to be a major contributor at the defensive end of the floor and in rebounding at both ends of the floor. We think he can be an outstanding receiver of bounce passes and lob passes in around the basketball that could lead to dunks. We're also working very hard with him on his jump hook so he has a bread-and-butter shot and a bread-and-butter move to get that shot so he can contribute mightily at the offensive end. But his greatest contribution is going to be the energy he brings every day."

One transfer whom Hurricane fans will not see on the court this year is Elijah Olaniyi, who joined the team this summer from Stony Brook. A 6-foot-5, 205-pound senior guard Olaniyi will redshirt this season in accordance with NCAA transfer rules.

Although the Newark, N.J., native might not be appearing in games in 2020-21, he is still expected to have an impact on the team's success.

"First of all, Elijah is kind of the same size of the players that we've had that have enjoyed so much success. Starting with Durand Scott and Rion Brown, a Sheldon McClellan, a Davon Reed, Bruce Brown, Lonnie Walker," Larrañaga said. "They're all in that 6'5, 6'6 range with long arms, great jumping ability, have the ability to shoot the three, but are also good going to the basket. He's a very serious competitor."

"He gives a great effort every day in practice and we're going to need that because the teams we play in the ACC are so gifted at that position, we need Elijah to kind of be the best player for our opponent in preparation for that game," Larrañaga continued. "I think he's going to provide that. With a year of experience under his belt, I think he'll be ready to really contribute next year."

With transfers playing a pivotal role for both the Miami football and basketball programs, it is clear the conversation Diaz and Caputo had years ago has proven correct and both individuals have recognized just that.

"As time has gone on," Diaz said, "we've probably had some conversations where we circle back to that initial talk and the affirmation that, that was true."

2020-21 Miami men's basketball preview

Duke Chronicle
Nov. 20, 2020

Head coach: Jim Larrañaga

Tenure at Miami: 10th season

Career coaching record: 632-422

Home court: Watsco Center

Starters: G Chris Lykes, G Kameron McGusty, G Isaiah Wong, F Rodney Miller Jr., C Nysier Brooks

Bench: G Harlond Beverly, F Anthony Walker, F Deng Gak, G Willie Herenton, F Matt Cross, G Earl Timberlake, F Sam Waardenburg

Overview: Last season's run was only slightly better than the year before for Jim Larrañaga and the Miami Hurricanes. Finishing with just one more win in a season cut short, the Hurricanes found a few players they can build around this year. Returning senior guards Chris Lykes and Kameron McGusty were injured at various points throughout last season, but both averaged over 10 points per game when they played. Joining those two are five more returning players, a key for chemistry that is seen much less often in the one-and-done era. Unfortunately for Miami, redshirt senior Sam Waardenburg will miss the whole season with a foot injury. Waardenburg was keyed up to earn the starting position and was expected to play a key role as the team's main rebounder. That production will have to be found elsewhere, possibly through Cincinnati transfer, center Nysier Brooks.

Miami has a decent chance to make some noise in the ACC this year with this returning group. Offensively, they were already very talented. With key transfers like Brooks, as well as two four-star recruits, expect a better performance than last year.

Team ceiling: Don't expect a Cinderella run to the Final Four for this team. But if they do come together to the best of their ability, they could make it as far as the Round of 32.

Team floor: The absolute bottom of this team's expectations should be toward the cellar of this year's strong ACC competition, and around a 12 seed in the NCAA tournament.

PF Anthony Walker appears to have edge in earning starting nod

By Chris Stock
InsidetheU
Nov. 20, 2020

There have been four players competing for the starting power forward spot after Sam Waardenburg went down with a season-ending injury.

It appears Anthony Walker has the edge of earning the nod when the Hurricanes open up their season on Nov. 29 against North Florida.

Walker, an athletic 6-foot-9 Baltimore native, missed four weeks of preseason practices with a knee sprain, but has since returned and head coach Jim Larranaga hinted Walker could be the starter, praising him ahead of the rest of the other three.

"Thank goodness Anthony is back now and looks very good," Larranaga said on ACC Network's Packer and Durham on Friday. "I think he'll have a good sophomore year, but he's still very, very inexperienced."

Deng Gak, Matt Cross, and guard Earl Timberlake are also options with Walker being the most experienced after playing in 25 games last season.

Even if Walker begins the season as the starter, he will have to be more productive and efficient on both ends of the court than he was last season to stay in the starting lineup after averaging 3.3 points on 40.5-percent shooting to go with 2.5 rebounds in 12.3 minutes last year. He had an offensive rating of 94.1 and defensive rating of 102.9 points per 100 possessions making his minus-8.8 points the third-lowest on the team.

Larranaga discussed his thoughts on the backcourt, which figures to be the strength of this year's team.

"Chris Lykes is a dynamo," Larranaga said. "He's a high-octane scorer, a very entertaining player, very acrobatic, he can shoot the 3 from very long range, he's got an assortment of layups and pull-up jump shot that really make him hard to guard, but he's not alone. We've got a very experienced backcourt with Kam McGusty, Isaiah Wong, and Harlond joining him plus our freshman standout Earl Timberlake so we have five guards. If they can stay healthy, we can have a very good backcourt."

Larranaga then detailed his outlook of the frontcourt:

"A few weeks ago I was really confident with Nysier Brooks and Rodney Miller at the five,

Sam Waardenburg, Anthony Walker, and Matt Cross at the four and then add Deng Gak, he can play both positions, so we were looking awfully good and then all of a sudden Sam Waardenburg goes down," Larranaga said. "He just stepped on someone's foot. He ends up having surgery and he's out for the season. He's our most experienced frontcourt player, our best defensive frontcourt player, our leading returning rebounder so other guys have to step up to fill his shoes."

Lykes, Wong, and McGusty are the likely starters in the backcourt with Brooks at center.

The Hurricanes will hold an intrasquad scrimmage at the Watsco Center on Saturday in preparation for their Nov. 29 season opener against North Florida.

Matt Cross eyeing key role in first year

By Chris Stock
InsidetheU
Nov. 22, 2020

It could be something, it could be nothing.

Either way, Matt Cross is expected to contribute in his first season with the Hurricanes.

Cross, who has been in a battle for a starting position, played with the White Team in Saturday's closed intraquad scrimmage, which featured four other projected starters.

It could be a sign that he, and not Anthony Walker, who had missed four weeks with a knee sprain, oft-injured Deng Gak, or talented freshman guard Earl Timberlake, will be a starter when the Hurricanes open their season on Nov. 29 against North Florida.

Cross is a 6-foot-7, 225-pound forward from Beverly, Mass. known offensively for his shooting ability, which is much-needed for the league's worst 3-point shooting team last season.

"Matt Cross is an outstanding shooter," head coach Jim Larranaga said.

Cross also brings toughness and rebounding to the defensive end—again, two areas of improvement needed for the Hurricanes after being one of the league's worst in both categories last year.

"One of the things that we're hoping is that our two freshmen, Earl Timberlake and Matt Cross, as well as Nysier Brooks will give us a great effort on the defensive end of the floor helping with individual defense, team defense, and rebounding," Larranaga said. "That will make a big difference because it will give us a little more size. I think we'll miss DJ Vasiljevic's shooting and Keith Stone's defense and rebounding, but hopefully with the three additional guys it'll more than make up for those two."

Cross averaged averaged 18.6 points, 10.0 rebounds and 3.0 assists per game as a senior at Brewster Academy, which finished 37-3. It was his fourth high school in four years. He was a four-star prospect who was considered the 18th-best small forward and 87th-best overall prospect according to the 247Sports composite rankings.

He had a productive summer in 2029 playing for BABC in the Nike EYBL, averaging 23.3 points (seventh), 9.5 rebounds (sixth), 2.7 assists and 1.6 steals a game. Only current NBAers DeAndre Ayton, Marvin Bagley, RJ Barrett, Miles Bridges and Michael Porter

Jr. also ranked in the top 10 in scoring and rebounding.

Senior shooting guard Kameron McGusty has been impressed with Cross and Timberlake.

"Very talented freshmen," McGusty said. "From the moment they came in, they had the respect from me and all of the other guys on the team. They're hard-workers, they're going to help us out a lot this year and I'm excited to be on the court with them."

Chris Lykes, Isaiah Wong, McGusty, and Nysier Brooks were also on the White Team according to photographs released by the university. Harlond Beverly, Rodney Miller, Anthony Walker, and Deng Gak were seen on the Orange Team.

University of Miami basketball: Men look to return to NCAA Tournament while women seek breakthrough

By Cory Nightingale
Palm Beach Post
Nov. 24, 2020

For University of Miami men's basketball coach Jim Larranaga, the coronavirus pandemic has not only upended his professional career, but also his personal life.

The longtime coach, who has been at UM since 2011, has been rocked by COVID-19, losing both a friend and a former player to the respiratory disease. But he's still ready to coach basketball this winter, altered schedule and all.

"It's a very dangerous virus," Larranaga said during UM basketball's virtual media day on Oct. 30. "Our players have been very, very smart dealing with it so far. But you can't let down your guard, especially with there being more and more cases diagnosed each day. Instead of this going away, it's getting worse. And we want to keep ourselves safe so we can really have a basketball season."

The season starts in less than a week, with a home game Sunday against North Florida. But even that has been changed. The original season opener against Stetson was postponed to Dec. 4 following a positive COVID test within the Hatters program earlier this month.

And since Larranaga's comments in October, cases, hospitalizations and deaths have continued to rise in Florida.

"I'm very, very proud of our guys with the way they've handled it so far," Larranaga said then. "But we've almost been in our own bubble. Our practice facility has been limited to our players, our coaches and a couple of managers. And that's it. And they've all been tested. At one time, it was once a week. Now it's twice a week."

The Hurricanes won't have to leave the friendly confines of Coral Gables until mid-December, although fans won't be allowed to attend games. UM is, however, leaving open the possibility of having fans at games in 2021.

UM opens the season with six home games, including hosting Purdue on Dec. 8 as part of the ACC/Big Ten Challenge. The Canes also begin conference play at home, against Pittsburgh on Dec. 16, before concluding the five-game non-conference schedule against Jacksonville three days later.

After March Madness was cancelled last year — one of the first big events to be affected by

the pandemic — Larranaga and his players are hoping for an unaltered postseason.

"As long as we're smart about who we interact with when we're not at practice, I think we can stay safe," said Larranaga. "But when you're dealing with teenagers and young adults who already have been basically quarantined since last March, you got guys maybe with COVID fatigue. And will they, you know, go out and interact with people? So we need to be very, very diligent and be on our toes throughout this entire school year."

Along with the five non-conference games, Miami will play 20 ACC games, 10 at home and 10 on the road. That includes six games against teams ranked in the top 25 of the preseason USA Today Sports coaches poll, including a home-and-away with No. 16 North Carolina and No. 18 Florida State.

On the court, the Hurricanes will lean on senior guard Chris Lykes, a preseason All-ACC first-team selection, as they look to get back to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2018. Lykes averaged 15.4 points per game last season and is the first Hurricane to earn multiple preseason All-ACC honors (he was preseason second-team last year).

But UM will be without 6-foot-10 forward Sam Waardenburg, who was lost for the season with a left foot injury sustained in practice. The senior from Auckland, New Zealand, was a major shot-blocking presence.

"He was our most experienced frontcourt player, our leading rebounder from last season, he was practicing extremely well and we're going to dramatically miss his defense, his rebounding, his experience and just his overall demeanor on the court. He was someone that did a lot of things for us," Larranaga said. Sophomore Anthony Walker, freshman Matt Cross and junior Deng Gak are competing for Waardenburg's starting power forward position. Gak can also help at center along with 7-foot Cincinnati transfer Nysier Brooks.

While just 5-7, Lykes is the Canes' savvy floor general and led the team in scoring, assists and steals last season. But he cares about just one number in his last run in Coral Gables.

"I'm not necessarily trying to stand out. I'm really just trying to win as many games as I can," said Lykes, who got a taste of the NCAA tournament as a freshman in 2018 before the Canes finished with losing records the past two seasons. "Yes, I've felt like I had a solid career here at UM, but I think careers are always defined by winning. Unfortunately, I

haven't won much here, so if that's standing out, then I'm going to do what it takes to stand out. But that's in tune with winning. I'm really just trying to win as many games as possible. That's how I'm going to end my career."

In the preseason poll, the Hurricanes were tabbed to finish seventh in the ACC.

While Larranaga leans on Lykes in the hopes of staying competitive in the always-stacked ACC, Canes women's coach Katie Meier hopes this is the year her team can translate its consistent regular-season success into a deep run in March.

"I think that we need to break through the second weekend, third weekend of March. That's obviously something that we're trying to do. But overall, I think the 100 percent graduation rate and 10 straight postseasons is pretty impressive. The culture is good," said Meier, who's run up a gaudy .610 winning percentage in 15 seasons at UM but has never guided the Canes past the second round of the NCAA tournament.

The senior guard duo of Endia Banks and Kelsey Marshall will try to help change that. They've got one more shot.

The Canes' chances took a blow Tuesday when it was announced fellow senior guard Mykea Gray was out for the season after suffering an ACL injury in practice.

Still, Meier has a truly international team with five players from France, Croatia, Spain and Sweden. The pandemic gave the group a chance to bond more than it would have in a normal setting.

And junior forward Destiny Harden turned the gym into her personal playground during the pandemic. Meier thinks that work will show once the season starts.

"She was hungry," said Meier. "When it was like, when can we come back, she was the one that was saying, coach, I need a place to work out, I want to lift. And that's when the university didn't make it mandatory but they made the facilities and everything available in July for the basketballs, and a lot of people couldn't get back yet, but Destiny was the first up, like, let's go.

"She was frustrated not having anywhere to work out. And it shows. She's just really active and she's playing really well."

Men's and Women's Basketball: How High Are Their Hardwood Ceilings This Winter?

Wyatt Kopleman
State of the U
Nov. 24, 2020

The Miami Hurricanes men's and women's basketball programs have worked relentlessly in their own bubbles at the Watsco Center, while everything both inside and outside their controlled environment appears a tad different.

Coaches wear masks in practice, players sit so distant from each other that they appear separated, and an on-campus march in light of the ongoing Black Lives Matter and voter registration movements have all been on the minds of all.

"I think (given) the flexibility we saw in the football schedule this week in the changes, I'm guessing we're going to have to make those same type of changes in basketball," said Miami's Director of Athletics Blake James, who has already endured a scheduling change for the school's final three football games due to COVID-19 cases.

James also noted that basketball could potentially be one of the university's most difficult athletic programs offered this school year, given the close contact

Aside from simmering concerns over potentially rescheduled games and how Canes fans will perceive social justice advocacy approaches, preseason preparation has remained in full swing as both teams will begin competition in an empty Watsco Center later this week.

"For us, the energy needs to come within the team," said UM women's basketball coach Katie Meier. The former AP National Coach of the Year will officially begin her 16th season coaching the program on Wednesday against Jacksonville of the Atlantic Sun Conference.

"We have got to play with joy, and we have got to play without feeling burdened. It's an unburdened time in the two and three hours that we're together in practice. When we have a chance to share our joy (throughout the season), people are going to want to see us being so grateful and happy to be playing."

Men's basketball coach Jim Larrañaga and his team conducted an intrasquad scrimmage on Saturday as a way to prepare his unit for the silence of the Watsco Center, as opposed to the rambunctious crowd of an opponent's arena like Duke's or North Carolina's.

"There will be an adjustment for the players," Larrañaga told the media last Wednesday. "I

do think it can impact the homecourt advantage. But every player on both teams will be dealing with the same thing. You have to be self-motivated; you can't wait for the crowd to get you going. I'll also be very curious about the creativity that we see around the league."

But when both the men's and women's programs do in fact step on the hardwood, what will their ceilings resemble for the season? Both teams lost to Clemson in the early frames of the ACC Tournament, after beating both Tigers teams during the regular season.

Meier's crew lost forward Beatrice Mompremier to the WNBA Draft this spring, while coach Jim Larrañaga's program saw sharpshooter guard DJ Vasiljevic return to Sydney, Australia, to play professionally in the NBL (National Basketball League) and Keith Stone to compete overseas in Luxembourg.

What both teams do also share is returning talent, however. The men's team has seven returning players (not including an injured forward in redshirt senior Sam Waardenburg), while the women's program returns 10 players from last season.

Senior guards including Chris Lykes and Mykea Gray have not trekked past the quarterfinals of the ACC Tournament since 2018, when Larrañaga's team lost to North Carolina and Meier's fell to Florida State.

Veteran leadership will likely carry both teams to a further finish line than they've been accustomed to in recent years, should incoming talent need a full season to adjust to the college level. If you take a look back to that season, men's basketball had Ja'Quan Newton, Bruce Brown, and Dewan Hernandez, while the Lady Canes retained forwards Keyanna Harris and Erykah Davenport, plus a junior in Beatrice Mompremier.

A similar level of that experience will potentially serve both squads well heading into another season loaded with an additional concentration of ACC games. Women's basketball opens their season Wednesday with four non-conference teams in Jacksonville, Stetson, North Florida, and Florida Atlantic visiting Coral Gables, Fla. Men's basketball will face the first of those three opponents, too, with the additions of Stetson and Purdue (ACC/Big Ten Challenge).

Some believe the men's team will look stronger than what the women will have to offer this winter. Four-star recruits in guard Earl Timberlake and forward Matt Cross have plenty of athleticism and shot-making abilities to potentially help lift the Canes into the up-

per echelon of the ACC. Such success has not been witnessed since Lonnie Walker and Bruce Brown departed in 2018, when Miami finished in third place (11-7) in the conference.

Though that perception may prove to be valid, Meier's team has no reason not to believe that their talent infusions can thrive as well. Freshman forward Nyayongah Gony and junior college transfer Naomi Mbandu, a forward originally from France, have brought their work ethic to the gym thus far, and have received praise from the veterans. Miami's last glimpse of success in March Madness time arose when they hosted the No. 5 seeded Arizona State Sun Devils at the Watsco Center and lost by two points.

Each team's thirst for regained success in both the ACC and NCAA Tournaments realistically could come to fruition in March, should they be able to finish no lower than fifth in the conference and receive at-large bids. 11 wins (or even an additional one or two) each should do the trick, and remaining healthy will remain of utmost importance, per usual with Miami as the two teams battled injuries last year.

Miami Hurricanes men's basketball projected record: 17-8 (12-8 ACC)

Miami Hurricanes women's basketball projected record: 13-11 (9-11 ACC)

Comparing Nysier Brooks to former Miami C Tonye Jekiri

By Chris Stock
Inside The U
Nov. 24, 2020

Cincinnati transfer center Nysier Brooks is expected to make an instant impact for the Hurricanes this season as they open up Sunday (6:00 p.m., ACCN) against North Florida. The 7-footer is known for his defensive prowess and has also been praised by teammates and coaches for his leadership—two key areas missing on last year's team.

With Brooks bringing a defensive game to the frontcourt, he could have a similar impact as former Miami center Tonye Jekiri, a reserve as a freshman on the Hurricanes' ACC championship team in 2013 who went on to be a two-time member of the All-ACC Defensive Team.

Here's how the two compare in various categories in their careers:

DEFENSIVE RATING

Jekiri had a career-best 94.7 defensive rating during his junior season in 2014-15 when he played the most minutes (30.3 a game) and had his best statistical season. The defensive rating is an estimate of how many points a player allowed in 100 possessions. Jekiri had a rating of under 100 each of his four seasons and finishing his career with a 96.7.

Brooks has a lower career defensive rating at 92.4 over his three seasons at Cincinnati. He had a 94.6 rating in his lone season as a starter in 2018-19, averaging 22.9 minutes a game. His lowest rating came as a sophomore with an 85.3 as he averaged 9.7 minutes over 35 games.

BLOCKS AND REBOUNDS

Jekiri averaged a career-best 1.4 blocks per game as a junior and had 126 blocks in 139 games over his career as he ranks sixth on Miami's career list. He averaged 1.7 blocks per 40 minutes in his career with his best mark of 1.9 coming as a freshman. Three of his four seasons he had a block percent of at least 5.0.

Brooks averaged 1.5 blocks a game as a junior and has 93 blocks in 103 games. He has blocked more shots per 40 minutes at 2.6 over his career with a high of 3.2 as a freshman. He has had two seasons with a block percent over 8.0 including 8.4 as a junior.

While Brooks has been a better shot-blocker, Jekiri has the edge in rebounding. Jekiri led the ACC in rebounding as a junior, averaging

9.9 a game, and averaged 6.5 over his career, 11.8 per 40 minutes. His defensive rebounding percent of 25.7 as a junior ranked 24th nationally.

Brooks averaged 6.3 rebounds a game as a junior and has averaged 10.0 per 40 minutes over his career. His defensive rebounding percent was 19.4 as a junior.

FOULS

Jekiri was foul-prone as a freshman, averaging 6.0 fouls per 40 minutes, but he improved in that area lowering the mark to 4.9, 4.1, and 4.3 over his next three seasons as he finished his career at 4.5.

Brooks has cut down on his fouls each season and will need to make another drop as a senior especially if he intends to play closer to 30 minutes a game. Brooks averaged 5.7 fouls per 40 minutes as a junior, which was down from 7.9 as a freshman and 6.4 as a sophomore. He has averaged 6.3 fouls per 40 minutes over his career.

FINAL OVERVIEW

Both players have proven to be good defensive players in their careers, particularly in pick-and-roll situations and with switching in man-to-man defense. They were catalysts on good defensive teams. Jekiri was a better rebounder while Brooks has been a better shot-blocker with a better defensive rating.

Brooks has a chance to prove himself against better competition in the ACC and has his eyes set on being the ACC Defensive Player of the Year, something Jekiri fell short of as he finished second as a senior in 2015-16.

C Nysier Brooks aiming for ACC Defensive Player of the Year

By Chris Stock
InsidetheU
Nov. 24, 2020

Senior center Nysier Brooks is confident in his defensive abilities.

Brooks is a much-needed addition after the Hurricanes were one of the league's worst defensive teams last season. He hopes his rebounding, shot-blocking abilities, and vocal leadership will pay dividends in his first season with the Hurricanes after three years at Cincinnati.

"I plan on trying to get Defensive Player of the Year in this conference," said Brooks, who is slated to make his team debut with Miami in the opener on Sunday (6:00 p.m., ACCN) against North Florida.

The 7-foot center averaged 8.1 points, 6.3 rebounds, and 1.5 blocks a game with a defensive rating of 94.6 in his final season with the Bearcats in 2018-19. He believes there will be a transition to playing in the ACC compared to the AAC.

"I know a lot more people at this level will attempt to try me so I'm just focused on going vertical," Brooks said. "I know a lot of people aren't going through me to finish like that, but there will be a lot of people who have athletic abilities so I'm just waiting for them to come see me."

Brooks will be anchoring a defense that ranked 12th in the ACC in conference-only defensive efficiency (105.5) according to Kenpom.com and 13th in rebounding margin (minus-3.6) as the Hurricanes finished 15-16 for their second consecutive losing season.

"He's very vocal and I think that's going to really help us defensively," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "I was really counting on he and Sam (Waardenburg) because Sam's a good defender and I think Nysier is going to be a very good defender and rebounder for us. I think he'll block some shots. Because he's so big and strong I think he'll be a factor at both ends of the court."

When Brooks was at Cincinnati, the Bearcats were the most efficient defensive team in the AAC for two of the three seasons Brooks was on campus and third in the other year.

Brooks believes the Hurricanes will be a better defensive team this season compared to a year ago.

"I don't think a lot teams are going to really want to come in there like that, to come score,

to be honest with you because our rotations are getting a lot better," Brooks said.

Versatility will be a key as the Hurricanes have been working on being a team that can be effective in switching with all five positions while playing man-to-man defense, a key when facing teams that use a lot of pick-and-rolls and screens.

"We'll be real good at being able to adjust to different teams that have different play-styles like playing fast tempo or slow tempo," Brooks said. "I know that we'll be good to adjust to any type of game situation with the players we have. We can switch one through five if we need to or we can go small if we need to or go big if we need to. I think we'll be very versatile."

A key in being able to switch effectively is communication and that is an area of strength for Brooks as he has taken on a leadership role with the team on and off the court.

"I come from a big family so I know how to deal with a lot of different personalities or characters as I like to call it," he said. "It's not really that hard. I just try to treat everybody like brothers and make sure they know that how I say it doesn't really matter. I'm just trying to get my teammates to understand because I might see different stuff and they may see different stuff so I try to build different ways of communication between everybody so I try to communicate all of the time. You might say something with a meaner tone in the heat of the moment, but the guys know I'm very vocal and they can trust what I say. I wouldn't put them in the wrong spot. I just try to bring toughness to the team, leadership, and be a glue guy—somebody that everybody can play with and likes to play with. If there's a job one of my teammates needs me to do, I want them to know they can always count on me."

Senior point guard Chris Lykes has noticed the impact of Brooks.

"He's a very vocal guy, not afraid to insert his opinion," Lykes said. "Most of the time when he's inserting his opinion, it's the right way. He's not afraid to let guys know and that's something I kind of look up to him for."

Brooks is known for his defensive prowess, but he should provide a boost on offense as well. He shot 53.5 percent from the floor in his final season at Cincinnati and has made 52.4 percent over his career.

"I feel like I'll be a presence on the offensive side of the ball and the defensive side of the

ball," he said. "Teams will have to guard me so that will leave room for my teammates as we have a lot of guards who can go. I feel we can complement each other because you can't double any one of us, you have to play straight up."

Miller's Time

By Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Nov. 25, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Through his first two seasons with the University of Miami men's basketball team, Rodney Miller Jr., was a little-used backup.

The 7-foot center, despite his imposing physical presence, totaled just 32 points and 16 rebounds in 30 appearances for the Hurricanes.

"That was a big learning experience for me, really just to figure out what I could do to perform and be a valuable asset to the team. And it came [down] to being patient with myself and the coaching staff being patient with me, as well, and working on myself to get better," Miller said. "Really, having the mindset to get better every single day. That really pushed me to excel and work my butt off. It was a challenge, it was a struggle, but with the faith that the coaching staff and I had in myself, [as well as that from] my parents and family, I was able to just put my head down and work. I feel like that's what you really need to do if you really want something bad enough."

Miller wanted so much to get better that he did something quite rare in his sport; he took a mid-career redshirt.

Unlike football, redshirts in college basketball are not overly common and most are due to injury or transfer. Many players who do take elective redshirts do so at the start of their career, not in the middle.

After conversations with the coaching staff, Miller, however, willingly redshirted during the 2018-19 campaign. He understood that, even if the move was not one frequently done by others, it would be beneficial for him.

That was all that mattered.

"That was a huge decision in my life. One thing for me that I was sure about was my own conviction. Once I made the decision, I was going to stick with it. The decision I made, at the time, was solely based on ... the best interests of the team and myself," Miller shared. "...I was making the decision to redshirt just based off knowing my body, to figure myself out. I knew that year would help me become the player I'm coming into now. So, I think it was important for me to take that year off."

Soon after Miller and the coaching staff made the choice for him to redshirt, the team's roster began to shrink for a variety of reasons, injury and otherwise.

The Hurricanes played nearly the entire season with just seven healthy scholarship players, as their three-year NCAA Tournament streak came to an end.

Nonetheless, even with numbers dwindling, everyone in the program remained steadfast in the initial call for Miller to sit out as a redshirt. That included by Miller and head coach Jim Larrañaga.

"He was working so hard to get his weight down and to really improve his conditioning," Larrañaga said. "We didn't feel like he could do both, actually play in the games and keep himself in the kind of shape [he needed to be in]. That may sound contradictory, but it's not easy to lose 30 pounds and so that was really the focus: his diet, his conditioning. We kept it that way and it worked out very well because when Ebuka [Izundu] and Dewan [Hernandez] were gone, Rodney moved into the starting lineup and was very impactful last year."

It did indeed pay off, as Miller returned to action in 2019-20 and made his presence felt throughout the season. He averaged 7.2 points and 5.5 rebounds per game, appearing in 30 of 31 contests with 28 starts.

To get to that point, though, Miller had to put in a great deal of effort off the court. He totally reworked his diet, committing to eating three portioned, clean meals per day and not snacking at night. He also cut back on carbohydrates and sugars, as well as increased his water intake.

Beyond that, Miller, self-described as "not a morning person," began to wake up around 6 a.m. each day. He would run sprints, hop on the treadmill or just start moving around to be active and get his metabolism going.

It took a consistent commitment each and every day for Miller to get in the physical shape necessary for him to play the way he did when he returned to the hardwood.

"It's effort. It's a challenge. A lot of people don't know, it's an everyday thing," Miller said. "I have a great support system around me that supports me every day and during that redshirt year I needed it most and it was there. I had the whole coaching staff meeting with me every day and working with me every day, just consistently. Even when you don't see the numbers changing at that moment, [it is beneficial] just having them there supporting you, letting you know that [things] will change and everything you're doing is for the better."

After previously playing Miller for 109 total minutes in his career, Larrañaga started the skilled big man opening night against fifth-ranked Louisville last year. He retained his starting spot nearly all year, scored in double figures 10 times and finished top-20 in the ACC in both offensive rebounds and total rebounds per game.

In addition, Miller posted a 56.9 percent clip from the field in league play, good for the fifth-best single-season ACC-only mark in program history. He also picked up All-ACC Academic Team distinction for his performance both on and off the court.

To Larrañaga, seeing Miller's performance on the court validated all the effort put in by both the player himself and those around him.

"I feel like my assistant coaches are terrific at helping players identify the areas of their game that need to be improved and my assistant coaches worked with Rodney in every aspect of his game," Larrañaga shared. "As far as the weightlifting, the conditioning, the weight loss—our strength & conditioning coach did a great job there. His skill development—working on his free throw, working on [his play with] his back to the basket—Adam Fisher really devoted a lot of time to Rodney. You got to give Rodney a lot of credit because, quite frankly, it's exhausting. You ask anyone how difficult it is to lose 30 pounds, that's difficult enough. And then [you need to] get yourself in great shape and work on your skills and become the kind of player that can compete at the highest level. Rodney has done that."

The experience was, of course, rewarding for Miller, as well, after all the time he spent getting himself in a position to be able to perform at that level.

It also was not a surprise to Miller, as the Laurelton, N.Y., native felt he had the ability to make an impact all along.

"Honestly, last season was just a glimpse of what

I already knew I was capable of and what I had in me. It was just showing all the belief and everything that everybody has put into me," Miller said. "It really was a confidence booster, honestly. It was a payoff to see the coaches believing in me, seeing that they put their faith in me and they see their investment out there on the court."

"... It felt like my time, my moment to show the Canes fans who I am. It kind of felt like it was freshman year and this was my first time showing everybody what I can do. Honestly, that's really what it felt like," Miller continued. "I just had fun with it and I tried not to over-think it because I tend to do that. And I just went out there and had fun ... That was my goal, to have fun and enjoy myself and show these people what I can do. And that's what I did."

The next step for Miller, who is days away from beginning his redshirt senior campaign, is to continue his progression on the hardwood. Larrañaga would like to see his pupil improve as a defender and a rebounder, an expectation Miller is quite aware of.

Miami also has more depth in the low post this year and Larrañaga feels that will help Miller excel because, like many big men, he can produce better in shorter bursts than longer ones.

In addition, Miller also will be counted upon to help his team more in ways that do not show up in a box score. He is now only the lone healthy player who was a part of Miami's NCAA Tournament teams in both 2017 and 2018, but also has considerable experience of different kinds he can lean on.

"Rodney has always considered himself a leader and he's really progressed into that role in our program. Our players—his teammates—listen to him," Larrañaga said. "He is the voice of reason and logic. He's someone that's very bright and articulate and can send very simple messages to his teammates. And some of those messages will be from his own past experience as a player, whether it be as a starter or as a sub. He knows that these last two seasons have not been what we've wanted them to be, but he also knows we have far more experience and more talent than we've had in any of the two previous seasons."

Miller indeed enjoys having a leadership role and cites former teammates such as Kamari Murphy and Davon Reed as people who have shown him how to lead. He wants to help the younger players on this team just as Murphy and Reed did for him early on in his career.

Part of Miller's directive in the locker room will be to simply heed the message from Larrañaga. If the Hurricanes do that, Miller sees this talented Hurricane team getting where it wants to be.

"This season, I feel like we got all the pieces and I know our attitudes are great coming in. I feel like this team can be at the top of the ACC. Coach L knows how to get us there," Miller said. "We just got to buy in, go out and do it. I feel like we're going to really shock a lot of people this year and really show them what we're capable of."

Miami Hurricanes men's basketball preview: Player-by-player breakdown

David Furones
South Florida Sun Sentinel
Nov. 27, 2020

Miami Hurricanes men's basketball is set to return on Sunday evening, a 6 p.m. tip at Watsco Center against North Florida.

Here is a player-by-player look at the UM roster, composed of a solid combination of experienced seniors and upstart underclassmen in a season that the Hurricanes were picked to finish seventh in a tough Atlantic Coast Conference.

0 Chris Lykes, Sr. G, 5-7, 160: Lykes was a preseason All-ACC first-team selection after a junior campaign in which he averaged 15.4 points, 2.1 rebounds, 2.4 assists and 1.1 steals. Last year's leading scorer came off offseason knee surgery, and coach Jim Larrañaga has been pleased with the way he returned to practice.

1 Anthony Walker, So. F, 6-9, 210: He is one of the forwards that will be in the mix to replace the minutes injured redshirt senior Sam Waardenburg would've played. An athletic 6-foot-9, Walker averaged 12.3 minutes in his 25 games played, pitching in 3.3 points and 2.1 rebounds per contest.

180: Wong got about 20 pounds stronger this offseason after he averaged 14.2 points over the final 13 games last season. Larrañaga likes Wong's ability to play both point guard and shooting guard and noted he has improved his 3-point shooting significantly in the offseason. If Wong can take another leap like he did midseason as a freshman, he'll be dangerous as part of a loaded backcourt.

3 Nysier Brooks, R-Sr. C, 7-0, 240: The Cincinnati transfer will provide the presence in the paint this team needed after he sat out last season due to transfer rules. The Philadelphia native is a vocal leader and is eager to produce for the Hurricanes after starting 35 games and averaging 8.1 points, 6.3 rebounds and 1.5 blocks per game last time he played as a junior at Cincinnati in 2018-19.

4 Elijah Olaniyi, Sr. G, 6-5, 205: Transferring from Stony Brook, Olaniyi will sit out this season and be prepared to be a veteran in the backcourt for the 2021-22 season.

5 Harlond Beverly, So. G, 6-5, 185: Larrañaga said Beverly has made vast improvements defensively, and he should continue to contribute as a sophomore after playing in all 31 games last season, averaging 7.2 points, 2.3 rebounds and 2.3 assists in 19.9 minutes.

10 Filippos Gkogkos, So. G, 6-3, 193: A walk-on guard.

13 Earl Timberlake, Fr. G, 6-6, 215: Larrañaga has no plans of easing the star recruit, who was ranked the No. 32 prospect nationally by Rivals, into the rotation. Timberlake's addition and ability to make an immediate impact gives UM five rotational players to utilize among three guards. Should Larrañaga opt to go to a small lineup, Timberlake can even play the 4 as a bigger, stronger guard that can defend.

14 Rodney Miller Jr., R-Sr. C, 7-0, 250: The addition of Brooks will give Miller the help he needs inside, especially if Deng Gak can also stay healthy to bring some frontcourt depth, to a team that has lacked in that department in recent years. Looking to build on his 7.2 points, 5.5 rebounds per game in 2019-20, Miller has worked on incorporating more post moves and a mid-range jump shot into his offensive game.

15 Willie Herenton, Sr. G, 6-2, 180: A walk-on guard.

21 Sam Waardenburg, R-Sr. F, 6-10, 225: Waardenburg was lost for the season after he sustained a left foot injury in an October practice. After starting 24 games last season, Waardenburg would likely have been Miami's starting power forward. The Hurricanes will be without last season's leading rebounder (6 per game), who also averaged 1.1 blocks per game and was a big who could stretch the floor and shoot from the outside.

22 Deng Gak, R-Jr. F, 6-11, 220: Last season, Gak had his season cut short due to a right knee injury. The year before, it was his left knee. Gak now hopes to stay healthy for a full season as another UM big man that can help replace Waardenburg. Larrañaga can use him at power forward or center.

23 Kameron McGusty, R-Sr. G, 6-5, 190: Larrañaga feels McGusty looks the most athletic he has looked since transferring from Oklahoma ahead of the 2018-19 season, which he had to sit out. With his back no longer an issue, McGusty is looking to build on a 19-20 season in which he was third on the team at 12.5 points per game and added 4 rebounds and 1.6 assists per contest.

33 Matt Cross, Fr. F, 6-7, 225: Of the forwards on the roster, Cross is the best shooter. It's one thing he was known for as a four-star recruit out of Brewster Academy in New Hampshire. Larrañaga has also touted Cross' hard-nose defense.

UM tops North Florida in basketball opener but loses freshman Earl Timberlake for multiple weeks

David Furones
South Florida Sun Sentinel
Nov. 29, 2020

Sophomore guard Isaiah Wong scored 20 points and the Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team topped North Florida 77-59 in its season opener on Sunday night at Watsco Center.

The victory, however, came after UM announced pregame that it will be without freshman guard Earl Timberlake, a star recruit from Washington, D.C., for three to five weeks due to a right ankle injury sustained in practice.

Sophomore guard Isaiah Wong scored 20 points and the Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team topped North Florida 77-59 in its season opener on Sunday night at Watsco Center.

The victory, however, came after UM announced pregame that it will be without freshman guard Earl Timberlake, a star recruit from Washington, D.C., for three to five weeks due to a right ankle injury sustained in practice.

Wong's ability to finish at the rim was on display as he went 9 of 14 from the field. He added seven rebounds.

"It's a good feeling for me and the team to have confidence up for the first game," said Wong, who picked up where he left off following a strong second half of his freshman season. "They were playing a zone defense, and I was just in the right position and scored."

North Florida (0-3) was within 3 points of Miami early in the second half, but UM went on a 10-0 run to pull away and later hold on down the stretch. Freshman forward Matt Cross scored 7 of his 10 points in the second half, knocking down a pair of 3-pointers in his college debut.

Sophomore guard Harlond Beverly had 11 points, 11 rebounds and three steals off the bench.

"I knew this year what I had to do to make sure that I was mentally locked in and focused prior to the game, during the game, while I'm not in the game," said Beverly after gaining experience as a freshman last season. "I feel like that just came with me being a little more mature than last year, getting a little bit older. I just go out there and try to play hard like Coach L wants me to.

"He, for sure, didn't ask me to go 2 for 9 from the free-throw line, but we're working on that."

Kameron McGusty had 10 points, seven rebounds and four assists. Fellow redshirt senior guard Chris Lykes, the preseason All-ACC first-team selection, scored 11 points on 3-of-13 shooting but added four rebounds, five assists and three steals.

UNF was led by junior wing Carter Hendrickson, who finished with 21 points, shooting 5 of 17 on threes.

The Hurricanes led, 42-34, at halftime. The Ospreys shot 9 of 21 on 3-pointers in the first half to keep themselves in the game after trailing by double digits from the start.

Miami began on an 11-0 run Sunday that saw four different starters score. Cross, who added seven rebounds, three assists and two blocks to his 10 points, became the answer to the question "Who will start in place of injured forward Sam Waardenburg?" He started alongside center Nysier Brooks and guards Wong, Lykes and McGusty.

"I thought he did a very good job of playing within himself. He didn't try to do too much," Larrañaga said of Cross. "He's able to make threes. He's a stretch 4. He can handle the ball a little bit, but very conservatively, which is good — no turnovers — and he can make shots."

Brooks, who also played his first game as a Hurricane after sitting out last season off his Cincinnati transfer, finished with 7 points, four rebounds and two blocks.

While Cross and Brooks made their UM debuts on Sunday, it will be several weeks before Timberlake, the consensus top-40 national prospect out of DeMatha Catholic in Maryland, will make his.

"Earl is a vital member of our team and we are disappointed for him that he will not be able to begin the season alongside his teammates," Larrañaga said in a statement. "However, we know Earl will be back in action shortly and look forward to him soon taking the court as a Hurricane."

Larrañaga added postgame that it was a second preseason ankle sprain for Timberlake after missing a week from a first one. He reaggravated the injury stepping on a teammate's foot in practice, and his foot is now in a boot.

Miami next hosts Stetson on Friday night, an 8 p.m. tip televised on ACC Network.

UM men win opener 77-59 over North Florida, but Coach Larranaga unhappy with defense

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
November 29, 2020

Their chairs on the bench were farther apart than usual. Coaches wore masks. And the only fans in the Watsco Center were a few dozen family members.

There were no cheerleaders. No pep band. No mascot. Just loud music and fake crowd noise pumped in through the loudspeakers.

Welcome to the 2020-21 college basketball season, coronavirus style.

The University of Miami Hurricanes managed to energize themselves in the cavernous arena Sunday night and win their season opener 77-59 against a University of North Florida team that led the nation in three-point shots taken and made last season.

The Jacksonville-based Ospreys launched 40 three-pointers Sunday night and made 12 of them, nine in the first half before the Hurricanes defense clamped down. By comparison, Miami took 15 shots from beyond the arc and made five. UNF provided a good test for a UM defense that was one of the poorest in the Atlantic Coast Conference last season.

Despite the victory and five players scoring in double figures, UM coach Jim Larranaga was displeased with his team's defense.

"It's always nice to win your first game, but we have some things that clearly need to be worked on and improved," Larranaga said. "We're a very good three-point shooting team and did not have a good three-point shooting game. We relaxed defensively after the first five minutes, gave them way too many threes, they were 9-of-21 at halftime from three."

The coach has been frustrated that his players are not employing the defensive principles he has been stressing since last season.

"It's very hard for me to understand, I've coached a very long time, I've used the same 10 commitments, practice them every day and the first is to get back and set the defense," Larranaga said. "Yet, despite all the emphasis since July, and all of last year, for some reason, our guys have yet to understand that is how you become a good team."

The Hurricanes showed no rust offensively. They opened with an 11-0 run and were shooting 71 percent well into the first half.

Sophomore guard Isaiah Wong exploited UNF's zone defense, going to the middle time

and again and led the Canes with 20 points on 9-of-14 shooting. He also grabbed seven rebounds.

Harlond Beverly, the other sophomore guard, had 11 points and 11 rebounds – 10 of them on the defensive end. Senior Chris Lykes, a Preseason All-ACC point guard, struggled with his shot going 3-for-13, but scored 11 points and had five assists. Kam McGusty added 10 points.

Freshman Matt Cross, starting in place of injured senior Sam Waardenburg, showed why UM coaches were so high on him. The 6-7 forward from Beverly, Mass., played like a veteran, moving well with and without the ball. He went 4-of-5 for 10 points with seven rebounds, three assists, two blocks, a steal and no turnovers in 26 minutes.

"Matt did a very good job of playing within himself, didn't try to do too much," Larranaga said. "He's someone who is really valuable to us because we're missing Sam. Matt has stepped into that starting job, is able to make threes, is a stretch four, can handle the ball, but very conservatively, which is good. No turnovers. He can make shots, layup, three or free throw."

Another new face in the starting lineup was Nysier Brooks, a 23-year-old 7-foot transfer from the University of Cincinnati who brings energy and leadership to the group. He had seven points and four rebounds.

"Nysier is going to be needed to be our rim protector and finishing around the basket," Larranaga said. "He needs to do a better finishing."

North Florida was led by Preseason All-Atlantic Sun guard/forward Carter Hendrickson, who had 21 points and made five three-pointers.

The season began with some bad news for the Hurricanes. Highly touted freshman guard Earl Timberlake will miss the next three to five weeks due to a right ankle injury sustained in practice. He re-sprained the ankle when he stepped on a teammate's foot.

"Earl is a vital member of our team and we are disappointed for him that he will not be able to begin the season alongside his teammates," Larranaga said. "However, we know Earl will be back in action shortly and look forward to him soon taking the court as a Hurricane."

Timberlake was the second key player to get injured before the season began. Waardenburg, a 6-10 senior forward from New Zea-

land, injured his left foot in late-October and is out for the season. He used a scooter to get around the court during warmups and cheered his teammates on from the sideline.

The Hurricanes play at home again on Friday night against Stetson, a game that was postponed from last week due to COVID-19 cases in the Stetson program.

North Florida, which went 21-12 last season, finishing first in the Atlantic Sun Conference with a 13-3 record, dropped to 0-3.

Hurricanes set for season opener against Ospreys

Chris Stock
Inside The U
November 29, 2020

Miami's mix of impactful newcomers and key returners have rejuvenated the program after successive losing seasons for the first time in 16 years.

The Hurricanes are set to open the 2020-21 season at home against North Florida on Sunday (6:00 p.m., ACCN).

"We've got a very good team when we're healthy, but we've already run into some injury problems that will impact us," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "Hopefully, our guys will recover from their injuries and we'll be at full strength before too long."

The Hurricanes will be without returning starting power forward Sam Waardenburg for the season, who tore ligaments in his foot in a preseason practice, which required surgery. A candidate for his replacement, Anthony Walker, sprained his knee going up for a 360 dunk in practice causing him to miss four weeks and highly-regarded freshman Earl Timberlake sprained his ankle earlier this month. Walker and Timberlake's availability for Sunday's game is unknown, but Walker did return to practice last week and Timberlake was "progressing" in the past week according to associate head coach Chris Caputo. (Link)

North Florida (0-2) began its season playing in the Wolfpack Invitational.

"I'm just hoping like crazy they don't show up with COVID and give it our guys," Larranaga said.

Miami, which went 15-16 last season, but was picked seventh in the ACC preseason poll, welcomes back two-time team leading scorer and preseason All-ACC point guard Chris Lykes.

"I felt like I've had a solid career here at UM, but I think careers are always defined by winning," Lykes said. "Unfortunately I haven't won much here. I'm really just trying to win as many games as possible and that's how I'm going to end my career."

Miami has won all five of its previous meetings against North Florida (0-2), which led the nation in 3-pointers last season, but is replacing four starters from last year's team. (Link)

"The best thing for us is that they played a couple games before us just because they have a lot of new faces," Caputo said. "Obviously their four-man (Carter Hendricksen) is back and is a very good player. The one thing

you know about Matt (Driscoll)'s teams is they are going to shoot 3s. You're going to have to defend the 3-point line at five positions and it presents challenges. Conversely we've got to understand that protecting the paint is usually the first step in 3-point line because if the ball gets in the paint it's more likely the 3s are going to come at higher shooting percentages."

UNF has made 37.0 percent (17 of 46) 3-point attempts in the first two games with 11 of its 12 players attempting at least one.

The Hurricanes will be looking at its own 3-point percentages this season after struggling a year ago, finishing last in the ACC in 3-point shooting during league games at 28.3 percent, their lowest since joining the ACC in 2004. (Link)

"I think Chris Lykes, Kam McGusty, and Isaiah Wong are shooting the ball better than ever," Larranaga said.

Lykes (38.1 percent), Wong (37.3), and McGusty (32.8) are the top returning perimeter shooters.

Another area of improvement the Hurricanes would like to see is their defensive efficiency and rebounding after ranking towards the bottom in the ACC in both categories last year.

Cincinnati transfer Nysier Brooks, who sat out last season after arriving, is projected to start at center and help in both categories. Junior forward Deng Gak, 2.6 blocks per 40 minutes in his career, returns after missing the final 24 games of last season with a knee injury and is also expected to help improve the team's defense.

Matt Cross and Timberlake, both top-100 recruits, are expected to have key roles for the Hurricanes this season and will be looking to make their debuts.

Lykes, Wong, McGusty, and Brooks are four of the projected starters with Cross and Walker competing for the final forward spot. Don't be surprised to see Cross earn the nod as he has been healthy throughout the preseason.

Five quick thoughts on Miami's 77-59 win over North Florida

Chris Stock
Inside The U
November 29, 2020

The Miami Hurricanes won their season opener 77-59 over North Florida on Sunday night.

Isaiah Wong scored 20 points, Harlond Beverly had 11 points and 11 rebounds, Chris Lykes added 11 points, Harlond Beverly scored 10, and Matt Cross chipped in 10 points in his collegiate debut

Here is a look at five quick thoughts on the game:

DOMINATED THE PAINT

The Hurricanes had an advantage in the paint going into the game and did a good job of dominating both ends of the floor in the paint, out-scoring the Ospreys 46-18.

Wong was aggressive all game long as he made nine shots from the floor with eight coming on layups to lead the Hurricanes in points in the paint. In comparison North Florida only made nine shots in the paint as a team.

Also, Miami out-rebounded North Florida 47-34.

HARLOND BEVERLY PROVIDED A SPARK

Beverly's first double-double was a great sign for him. He also had two assists and three steals. He provided good energy as the only guard off the bench. His rebounding was particularly beneficial to the team as it is an area of needed improvement from a year ago. Beverly is considered one of the most athletic players on the team so it was a good sign for him to use that to his advantage especially on the defensive end of the floor.

Beverly also knocked down his only 3-point attempt, which is a good sign after shooting under 30 percent last season. However, he made just 2 of 9 attempts from the free-throw line, which will be a focal point of improvement moving forward.

MATT CROSS LOOKED COMFORTABLE

Cross started at power forward in his debut and responded by scoring 10 points on 4-of-5 shooting, including 2 of 3 from behind the arc. He also grabbed seven rebounds, blocked two shots, and had a steal. He was a plus-10 in his 26 minutes of action.

He was a steady defender and it was good to see him grab rebounds the way he did con-

sidered it was one of his strengths at the prep level. His form looked great when he stepped into his 3-pointers on the wing and did not show any hesitation--something you want to see in a shooter.

CHRIS LYKES WAS OFF

Preseason All-ACC point guard Chris Lykes made just 3 of 13 shots from the floor and scored 11 points. Lykes missed his first six shots he attempted inside the arc as he just did not have the touch from mid-range as he has showed in his career.

Despite the disappointing shooting night, it is not a cause of concern this early into the season and not just because of Lykes's track record, but also because he has stated in the offseason he is not concerned with his personal stats and is primarily focused on winning more games. With that mindset he should have an easier time of bouncing back without added pressures to do so.

ASSISTS A POSITIVE

Miami had its lowest assist total per game last season since restarting the program in 1985 and it has been a point of emphasis to improve on this season. The team responded to the staff's pleas and surpassed the goal of reaching 16 assists, something the did only five times last year, and finished the game with 18.

Lykes led the way with five and McGusty had four while Wong and Beverly each had two as the staff would like to see the four guards increase their assist totals from a year ago, which in turn will help the offense be more dynamic so this was a positive start.

Isaiah Wong leads Miami in 77-59 win over UNF in opener

Chris Stock
Inside The U
November 29, 2020

After a pair of losing seasons, the Hurricanes are looking to bounce back.

It will be a process on improving in areas where they ranked towards the bottom of the ACC last season, but there were positive signs of an improved team in the season opener.

Isaiah Wong scored 20 points to lead Miami in a season-opening 77-59 win over North Florida on Sunday.

"It's always nice to win your first game," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "We have some things that clearly need to be identified, which they have been, to work on and improve, but at least tonight we come away with a victory."

Wong made 9 of 14 shots from the floor with eight of his field goals coming on layups. He also grabbed seven rebounds and was a plus-24 when he was on the court.

"Scoring 20 in the first game is a good feeling for me and the team," Wong said. "We have our confidence up from the first game and I feel like we played as a team today. They were playing a zone defense and I was just in the right position to score."

Harlond Beverly came off the bench and scored 11 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for his first double-double, Chris Lykes added 11 points, Kameron McGusty scored 10, and Matt Cross chipped in 10 points in his collegiate debut.

"I came off the bench last year so I knew this year what I had to do to make sure I was mentally locked in and focused prior to the game, during the game, and while I'm not in the game and I feel that just came with me being a little bit more mature than last year and getting older," Beverly said.

Miami (1-0) began the game on an 11-0 run and led by as many as 14 points in the first half. The lead was cut to 42-39 early in the second half, but went on a 17-5 run to extend the lead to 15 points with 12:30 left.

The Hurricanes maintained a double-digit lead until a 1-for-11 shooting slump helped North Florida (0-3) cut the deficit to 67-59 with three minutes left.

However, it would be as close as the Ospreys would get the rest of the way.

Miami shot 49.2 percent (29 of 49) from the floor including 5 of 16 from 3. A 14 of 23 shooting performance at the free-throw line was largely due to Beverly's 2-for-9 showing.

"We're a very good 3-point shooting team, but we did not have a good 3-point shooting game so I'm hoping we'll do better the next time out," Larranaga said.

While Lykes made just 3 of 13 shots from the floor, he dished out a team-high five assists as the Hurricanes finished with 18 as a team. The staff has set a team goal of reaching 16 assists for a game, something they did only five times last season as they finished with the lowest assist-per-game since they have relaunched the program in 1985.

"It's always good if we can get 16 or more," Larranaga said.

The Hurricanes held North Florida under 32-percent shooting for the game at 31.3 percent (21 of 67)--a feat the Hurricanes accomplished only twice in 31 games last season.

"As a team our defense was shaky, but I feel we had our moments," Beverly said. "It's a work in progress. Last year we weren't a defensive team so automatically that means we need to build and get better."

Miami also out-rebounded North Florida 47-34, which was a positive sign after being second-to-last in the ACC in rebounding margin last season.

Miami played without Earl Timberlake (ankle), who was ruled out 3-5 weeks shortly before the game, and Sam Waardenburg (foot), who had season-ending surgery.

Miami led 42-34 at halftime.

The Hurricanes are scheduled to play next on Friday (8:00 p.m., ACCN) against Stetson.

MBB Tops North Florida, 77-59, in Season Opener

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
November 29, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Playing its first game in 263 days, the University of Miami men's basketball team defeated North Florida, 77-59, Sunday night to begin the 2020-21 campaign.

Isaiah Wong scored a team-high 20 points and fellow sophomore guard Harlond Beverly logged his first-career double-double for Miami (1-0), which led from start to finish at the Watsco Center against its in-state foe.

"Well, obviously, we have a lot wrinkles to iron out, but it's good to get started. The guys were excited about finally playing games," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "North Florida presented the problems we knew they would with their 3-point shooting. We did a better job in the second half of making them miss, but we're going to experience some growing pains because we're missing a couple of key players in Sam Waardenburg and Earl Timberlake. We miss them in two major categories: defense and rebounding."

Miami quickly jumped out to an 11-0 lead in the first three minutes of the game. The teams played fairly even basketball the rest of the first half, with the Hurricanes upping their advantage as high as 14 and North Florida (0-3) cutting it as low as seven.

A buzzer-beating corner 3-pointer by the Ospreys made it a 42-34 edge for Miami entering the locker room. The Hurricanes shot 59.3 percent (16-of-27) from the field compared to North Florida's 35.3 percent (12-of-34) mark, but the Ospreys went 9-of-21 (42.9 percent) from 3-point range.

North Florida scored the first five points of the second half to pull within three, but Miami countered with a 17-5 burst to go in front by a then-game-high 15 points, 59-44, with 12:33 to play.

The Ospreys, who shot just 3-of-19 (15.8 percent) from deep after the break, got no closer than eight the rest of the way. Miami went on to earn the 77-59 victory, moving to 8-2 in season openers under Larrañaga, with the final margin proving to be the biggest of the night.

Wong's 20 points came on 9-of-14 shooting, with the nine makes setting a new career high. He added seven rebounds in his team-leading 35 minutes of action.

Beverly's opening double-double featured 11

points and 11 rebounds, the latter mark a career and game high. The Detroit native also tied a career best with a co-game-high three steals.

"I thought Isaiah was very effective getting in the middle of zone, making good decisions and scoring the ball," Larrañaga said. "I thought Harlond's rebounding was a huge key to us getting the lead in the first half. Both guys have shown signs of that in practice, so I'm glad they were able to capitalize."

Three other Hurricanes finished with double-digit points, giving Miami five total. Senior guard Chris Lykes registered 11, while freshman forward Matt Cross and redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty each logged 10 points and seven rebounds.

Meanwhile, junior forward Carter Hendrickson paced all scorers with 21 points for North Florida, but Miami held him to 7-of-22 shooting, including a 5-of-17 clip from deep. Freshman forward Jonathan Aybar chipped in 12 points for the Ospreys.

The Hurricanes, who recorded 11 steals, ended the night with a 49.2 percent (29-of-59) from the field, while limiting North Florida to a 31.3 percent (21-of-67) tally. Miami had a 47-34 edge on the glass and a 46-18 ledger in paint points after dominating down low.

Up next for the Hurricanes is a matchup with Stetson, also at the Watsco Center, Friday at 8 p.m., live on ACC Network.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2020-21 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

MIAMI HURRICANES POSTGAME NOTES

– The Hurricanes improved to 6-0 all-time against North Florida, including 5-0 at home and 4-0 in Larrañaga's tenure.

– Larrañaga, who entered the game with the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 661-447 in 37 years as a head coach, including 191-113 in 10 seasons at Miami.

– With 191 victories at Miami, Larrañaga moved into a tie for No. 17 on the list of most wins by a coach while leading an ACC program, tying NC State's Everett Case and Herb Sendek.

– For the season opener, Miami used a starting lineup of Cross, Lykes, McGusty, Wong and redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks.

– Cross became the third Hurricane freshman to start a season opener in the ACC era (since 2004-05), joining Manu Lecomte (2013-14) and Denis Clemente (2005-06).

– Since the program rebirth in 1985-86, Miami is now 83-7 against in-state non-Power Five programs, including 63-2 at home and 15-2 under Larrañaga.

– The Hurricanes moved to 56-14 all-time in season openers (31-5 since rebirth, 15-2 in ACC era, 8-2 under Larrañaga, 47-10 at home) and 58-12 in home openers (32-4 since rebirth, 15-2 in ACC era, 8-2 under Larrañaga).

– As announced prior to the game, freshman guard Earl Timberlake, a consensus top-40 recruit, will miss the first 3-5 weeks of the season with a right ankle injury.

– The last time five Hurricanes scored in double figures was 2/19/20 at Virginia Tech, a triple-overtime affair.

– Brooks scored Miami's first points of the season, on his first touch as a Hurricane, with a basket 25 seconds into the contest.

– North Florida's 21 first-half 3-point attempts tied for the second-most by a Miami opponent in the ACC era, trailing only the 22 Duke took in the second half on 2/7/09.

– This was just the sixth time since joining the ACC a Miami foe attempted at least 21 3-pointers in a half and only the second time before the break, along with Duke on 3/10/06 in the ACC Tournament.

– The Hurricanes snapped a four-game losing streak when recording 10-plus steals, recording a win when doing so for the first time since 2/23/19 against Georgia Tech.

– Wong went 2-of-2 at the line in the game and has now made 30 consecutive free throws dating back to last season.

– Wong, who logged the 11th double-digit point total and fourth 20-point performance of his career, eclipsed 250 points as a Hurricane.

– Beverly notched his 10th double-figure scoring performance at Miami.

– Lykes moved up one spot, passing Mike McCoy, on Miami's all-time scoring list and now sits No. 23 with 1,236 points.

– Lykes, who surpassed 1,000 field-goal attempts as a collegian, registered his 65th outing with 10-plus points and his 16th performance with five-plus assists.

– McGusty, who moved past 950 points in his career, posted his 50th double-digit point total.

Take II

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 3, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The University of Miami men's basketball team opened the 2020-21 season Sunday night with a 77-59 victory over North Florida.

The Nov. 29 start date was the program's latest since 1992. For the Hurricanes, it was a joy to once again experience a gameday.

"It's great to be back with all the guys. I know I missed the preparation, between shootaround and team meals," sophomore guard Harlond Beverly said. "I feel like those are great team bonding times. I really missed those. It just feels good to be playing against other people, too. We've played against each other since maybe August; it's been a long time coming."

In addition to the long wait and facing a team that already had two games under its belt, the Hurricanes had another adjustment to make in their opener and that was the new COVID-19 protocols.

From the lack of fans to the spaced-out benches to a variety of other behind-the-scenes differences, there is no doubt that games in 2020 have a different feel.

Once the game begins, though, it is just basketball.

"Honestly, I didn't think about it one time when I was playing," Beverly said. "Maybe before the game, during the national anthem, you kind of look around and there's nobody there. But once the ball goes in the air, it was game time. I wasn't thinking about the fans at all."

It was clear Beverly was locked in against the Ospreys, as he logged the first double-double of his college career. In fact, the Detroit native says it was the first time in his life he compiled a double-double that included rebounds.

Beverly, who finished with 11 points, a career-best 11 rebounds, two steals and three assists, feels his success came from his commitment on one particular side of the court.

"I was locked in on the defensive end and my effort was really good. So, that just led to a lot of effort plays, which usually come on the defensive end," Beverly explained. "That's just something they've been trying to instill in me since last year and I feel like I've made a lot of progress in that area of playing hard and making effort plays. I appreciate Coach L pushing me to try to do that better."

Fellow sophomore guard Isaiah Wong also turned in a strong game for Miami, totaling 20 points and seven rebounds, while senior guard Chris Lykes scored 11 points. Freshman forward Matt Cross and redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty each tallied 10 points and seven rebounds, helping their team finish with a 47-34 rebounding edge in the wire-to-wire win.

As a team, Miami did one thing particularly well in the victory that it hopes to repeat moving forward. It also showed one area where improvement is needed that it plans to work on.

The first chance to do both of those comes Friday at 8 p.m., when Miami (1-0) is set to host Stetson at the Watsco Center.

"We're trying to become a better team sharing the ball, which I feel like we did a good job [of doing] in the first game. I know we had more than 15 assists," Beverly said. "[In addition], we're trying to become a better team ... defensively. I feel like you can never be too good defensively. So, we're going to try to improve that. That's really what we're working on."

This will be the 83rd meeting between the Hurricanes and Hatters, good for Miami's second-most against any foe. The Hurricanes are 49-33 in the series, their most wins versus any team, in a series that dates back to 1927-28, the first year Miami played varsity foes.

The Hurricanes are 30-13 at home and 9-0 since the 1985-86 program rebirth against the Hatters, plus won their lone matchup of the Jim Larrañaga era, an 87-79 home triumph on Nov. 9, 2012.

Despite Miami's history of success against Stetson, the team knows it cannot overlook any opponent, especially one in-state.

"We try to take every game as if it's the biggest game of our lives," Beverly said. "So, we don't really look at if they're coming in trying to prove something to us. We know what we prepare for and we know what we're ready for. We take that preparation and try to go execute it against anybody on a nightly basis."

The Hatters are 0-1 on the young season after dropping a 64-61 home decision to Emmanuel (Ga.) College Monday night to begin the campaign.

Stetson is led by sophomore guard Rob Perry, a preseason all-league pick who totaled 26 points in the season opener. Sophomore forward/center Mahamadou Diawara also

earned preseason all-conference status for the Hatters, who were picked to finish third in the Atlantic Sun after going 16-17 (9-7) a year ago.

Friday's affair will be televised live on ACC Network HERE, with Anish Shroff and Paul Biancardi on the call. Joe Zagacki and Danny Rabinowitz will have the radio broadcast on 560 The Joe WQAM HERE, while action can also be heard on WVUM 90.5 FM HERE. Live stats for the contest can be found HERE.

After meeting Stetson, Miami will host Purdue in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge. The matchup is scheduled for Dec. 8 at 5 p.m., live on ESPN2.

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Freshman Matt Cross full highlights in Miami debut

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Dec. 2, 2020

Watch freshman forward Matt Cross in his first game as a Hurricane as he started and scored 10 points in a 77-59 win over North Florida.

Cross, a former four-star and top-100 recruit, made 4 of 5 shots from the floor including 2 of 3 from 3. He also grabbed seven rebounds, dished out three assists, blocked two shots, and had one steal in 26 minutes. He was a plus-10 when he was on the court.

"I thought he did a very good job of playing within himself," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "He didn't try to do too much. He's someone that is very valuable to us because we're missing Sam Waardenburg. Matt has stepped into that starting job and he's able to make 3s, he's a stretch-4, he can handle the ball a little bit, but very conservatively, which is good. No turnovers and he can make shots whether it's a layup, a 3, a free-throw, he can shoot."

Kenpom.com graded Cross with a 200.5 offensive rating, which ranks seventh nationally.

His defensive rating was 75.7, which is an estimate of points allowed per 100 possessions. It was tied for the second-lowest on the team.

Cross earned the starting nod over Anthony Walker and Deng Gak after returning starter Sam Waardenburg was lost for the season due to foot surgery.

Cross and the Hurricanes (1-0) return to the court on Friday (8:00 p.m., ACCN) against Stetson (0-1).

Chris Lykes scores 20 before leaving game with injury

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Dec. 4, 2020

Chris Lykes scored 20 points to lead the Hurricanes before exiting Friday's 82-60 win over Stetson early with an injury.

Lykes, a preseason All-ACC pick, sprained his left ankle when he went up for a 3-point shot and landed awkwardly on the foot of a Stetson defender.

"An ankle injury is always serious to me because a player like Chris relies so heavily on speed and quickness," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "An ankle injury can really slow you down."

Lykes stayed on the floor while a trainer came to his aid. He eventually walked off the court and into the locker room with a noticeable limp. He left the game with 11:50 remaining in the second half and Miami leading 57-41.

"It's always sad to see a teammate go down, but in the game we've still got to play a game, we've still got to win," guard Kameron McGusty said. "I was obviously devastated. I came and talked to him. He's doing good. He's feeling better. Hopefully we can get him next game. We will all keep him in our prayers and hope he comes back with a speedy recovery."

In addition to his 20-point game with 16 coming in the first half, Lykes also dished out five assists and four rebounds in 23 minutes. He made 5 of 9 shots from the floor including 3 of 5 from 3 and made all seven of his free-throw attempts.

"He got us off to a great start," Larranaga said. "He was probably upset with himself not making those shots in the first game because he had a lot of good looks. So he came out very focused offensively and really working hard defensively. I love the pressure he's putting on the ball, I just don't want him to gamble and get in foul trouble. He had a great all-around game until the sprained ankle."

The Hurricanes are already dealing with injuries as freshman guard Earl Timberlake (ankle) is out 3-5 weeks and senior forward Sam Waardenburg (foot) is out for the season. Freshman forward Matt Cross was held out of the final four minutes of the game with a foot injury. With Lykes out, Miami is down to eight scholarship players available and just three guards.

Isaiah Wong, who had 17 points and 12 re-

bounds in the win, Harlond Beverly, and McGusty have all been working at the point guard spot as backups to Lykes and will continue to do so if he remains out.

Lykes has been durable throughout his career at Miami, playing in 92 of 97 games. The Hurricanes were 2-3 when Lykes was out of the lineup last season.

Miami's next game is scheduled for Dec. 8 against Purdue in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

MBB Defeats Stetson, 82-60

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 4, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The University of Miami men's basketball team posted its second wire-to-wire victory in as many games to open the 2020-21 season, topping Stetson, 82-60, Friday night at the Watsco Center.

Despite departing midway through the second half with a left ankle injury, senior guard Chris Lykes paced Miami (2-0) with 20 points, while sophomore guard Isaiah Wong recorded a double-double.

"First of all, two areas that we've really concentrated on, we did very well in. We out-rebounded them, 49-29, and we had 18 assists and only 10 turnovers," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "Those categories are going to be keys for us all season long."

The Hurricanes jumped out to a 24-12 lead, but Stetson (0-2) countered with a 15-4 run that trimmed the edge to one, 28-27, with 3:48 to go in the half. The Hatters, though, went scoreless the rest of the frame, which Miami closed with a 12-0 burst to take a 40-27 advantage into the locker room.

Lykes came just three points shy of his top point total in a half by logging 16 before the break, eight of which came in the first 4:30. The Mitchellville, Md., native, who had more points than Stetson through nearly 12 minutes of play, shot 5-of-7 from the floor, 3-of-4 beyond the arc and 3-of-3 at the line in the half, adding three rebounds, four assists and one steal.

Miami scored the first nine points of the second half, making it a 21-0 run over 5:27 of play. The Hatters, meanwhile, went 6:56 without a point and fell behind, 49-27.

"They made some threes that got them back in the game and then we finished very well," Larrañaga said. "Basically, we were ahead by double digits the whole game."

Despite Lykes leaving the contest with 11:30 remaining, the Hurricanes extended their edge as high as 31 down the stretch, en route to the 22-point win.

Wong finished with 17 points and a game-high 12 rebounds, the latter mark matching his career high. He added three assists and committed just one turnover in 31 minutes.

Freshman forward Matt Cross and redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty both finished with 11 points, while redshirt senior center

Nysier Brooks had eight points and eight rebounds. Sophomore guard Harlond Beverly stuffed the stat sheet with five points, eight rebounds and a career-high-tying six assists, the latter mark leading Miami.

Redshirt freshman guard Chase Johnston paced the Hatters with 19 points, posting a 5-of-10 clip from long range. Sophomore forward/center Mahamadou Diawara added 14 points in the loss.

Miami held sophomore guard Rob Perry, a Preseason All-Atlantic Sun honoree who scored 26 points in Stetson's season opener, to one point on 0-of-8 shooting, while forcing him into five turnovers.

The Hurricanes finished the game 18-of-23 (78.3 percent) from the free-throw line, while Stetson went just 3-of-8 (37.5 percent). In addition, they had a 19-8 margin in fast-break points and a 32-18 advantage in paint points.

Miami returns to action Tuesday at 5 p.m., when it hosts Purdue, live on ESPN2, in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

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The 2020-21 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

MIAMI HURRICANES POSTGAME NOTES

– The Hurricanes moved to 50-33 all-time against Stetson, including 31-13 at home and 2-0 in Larrañaga's tenure.

– The Hatters are the first program Miami has defeated 50 times, good for 14 more wins than the Hurricanes have over any other team.

– Larrañaga, who entered the game with the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 662-447 in 37 years as a head coach, including 192-113 in 10 seasons at Miami.

– With 192 victories at Miami, Larrañaga passed NC State's Everett Case and Herb Sendek for sole possession of the No. 17 spot on the list of victories as a head coach in the ACC.

– Since the program rebirth in 1985-86, Miami is now 84-7 against in-state non-Power Five programs, including 64-2 at home and 16-2 under Larrañaga.

– For the second time in as many games, Miami used a starting lineup of Brooks, Cross, Lykes, McGusty and Wong.

– Miami has now recorded more 18-assist outings in two games in 2020-21 (two) than it

did in all of 2019-20 (one).

– The last time the Hurricanes had 18-plus assists in consecutive games was the first three games of the 2009-10 season, when they did so against NC Central (19 on 11/14/09), Nova Southeastern (26 on 11/16/09) and Tulane (19 on 11/19/09).

– Miami last finished with a rebounding margin of at least plus-20 on 12/22/15 at La Salle, when it had a 51-24 edge.

– Wong's streak of 32 consecutive made free throws, which dated back to his second attempt on 2/12/20 against Boston College, came to an end with his third attempt of the night.

– The lone prior double-double for Wong came on 2/19/20 in a triple-overtime affair at Virginia Tech when he had 27 points and an equal 12 rebounds.

– Wong, who moved past 100 rebounds at Miami, registered his 12th double-figure scoring performance as a collegian, including his second this season, as well his second double-figure rebounding total, including his first of the year.

– For the fourth time in his career, Lykes recorded 20-plus points and five-plus assists, doing so for the first time since 1/19/19 against No. 13/15 North Carolina.

– Lykes notched the 66th double-digit point total of his career (second of 2020-21), the 17th 20-point showing of his career (first of 2020-21) and the 17th five-assist outing of his career (second of 2020-21).

– Lykes eclipsed 1,250 points, 250 assists and 250 made free throws as a Hurricane, as well as reached 100 steals.

– Up to 1,256 points in his career, Lykes passed Dwayne Collins for No. 22 on Miami's all-time scoring list.

– McGusty, who surpassed 2,250 minutes played and 350 made field goals as a collegian, tallied the 51st double-digit scoring total of his career and second of the year.

– Beverly notched his fifth five-assist performance, including his first of the season.

– Redshirt senior center Rodney Miller Jr., reached 250 points at Miami.

Isaiah Wong posts double-double, Miami rolls past Stetson 82-60

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Dec. 4, 2020

Jim Larranaga has challenged his team in the offseason to improve its defense and increasing its assists after ranking near the bottom of the ACC last year.

It has only been two games, but the Hurricanes have been much better in those areas.

Isaiah Wong scored 17 points and grabbed 12 rebounds and Miami held its opponent to under 40-percent shooting for the second time in an 82-60 win over Stetson on Friday night.

"For 38 minutes I thought our defense was very, very good," Larranaga said. "We got back, didn't give them a lot of fast-break opportunities, and we guarded the ball very well."

The Hurricanes also recorded 18 assists for the second time this year on 28 made field goals with 64 attempts (43.8 percent). Last year Miami had its lowest assist-per-game total at 10.0 per game since relaunching the program in 1985 and they only had more than 16 in a game five times in 31 games.

"18 assists and 10 turnovers is a really good night for us," Larranaga said. "We did a much better job of not forcing a shot and finding an open man."

Chris Lykes led Miami with 20 points before exiting with a left ankle injury while Kameron McGusty and Matt Cross each added 11 points.

The Hurricanes (2-0) went on a 21-0 run to blow the game wide open. Stetson (0-2) pulled within 28-27 in the first half before Miami scored the final 12 points of the half and the first nine points of the second half.

"We had great energy coming into today and I felt real confident playing defense with the team," Wong said.

Miami led by double digits the rest of the way

Lykes, a preseason All-ACC pick, sprained his left ankle when he went up for a 3-point shot and landed awkwardly on the foot of a Stetson defender with 11:50 left in the second half with Miami leading 57-41. (Link) He also had five assists and four rebounds in 23 minutes.

"An ankle injury is always serious to me because a player like Chris relies so heavily on speed and quickness," Larranaga said. "An ankle injury can really slow you down."

Wong, who scored a game-high 20 points in Miami's 77-59 win over North Florida on Sunday, made 6 of 15 shots with a pair of 3-pointers. It was his second career double-double.

"Since day one we always knew Wong was a bucket," McGusty said. "He's just showing that now. He's finally gotten comfortable in our offense and comfortable being able to score and rebound."

Lykes started off hot with three 3-pointers in the first 10 minutes of the game. With the Hatters' looking to limit him from behind the arc, Lykes was fouled on a 3-point attempt. He hit all three free throws for a 24-12 lead.

"He had a great all-around game until the sprained ankle," Larranaga said.

Stetson responded with a 15-4 run, but the Hurricanes scored the final 12 points of the half with 3s by Wong and Cross and a dunk by McGusty to help Miami take a 40-27 lead into the break.

Wong hit another 3 to begin the second half and Brooks made a pair of layups to continue the momentum.

The 21-0 run only took 5 ½ minutes off the clock.

Stetson shot 39.0 percent (23 of 59) from the floor. Local product Chase Johnston led the Hatters with 19 points off the bench.

Facing a Challenge

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 6, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Two games. Two wins.

The University of Miami men's basketball team is off to a strong start to the 2020-21 season and head coach Jim Larrañaga is particularly pleased with what he has seen from his team in a couple of main areas.

"Well, the first thing is our improved rebounding in the first two games. That's a significant improvement over last year," Larrañaga said. Our guards are the primary reason. All of our guards are making a significant contribution in defensive rebounding. Isaiah Wong is even contributing with some offensive rebounds. So, that's a big step in the right direction.

"We've had 18 assists in both our first two games. So, that's a major plus, as well," he continued. "Now, one of the things that's different is both those teams played zone, which normally means you can get more assists because you shoot more shots off the catch. But hopefully that's a sign of things to come."

Even against a zone defense, it is an impressive feat Miami (2-0) logged 18 assists in consecutive games, something it had not achieved since November 2009.

The Hurricanes were also plus-20 on the glass in their Friday night win over Stetson, their top mark since December 2015.

In that Friday outing, an 82-60 decision at the Watsco Center, senior guard Chris Lykes paced Miami with 20 points to go along with four rebounds and five assists, before exiting with 11:30 left due to a left ankle injury.

Freshman forward Matt Cross and redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty each totaled 11 points, while Wong served as the secondary scorer behind Lykes with 17 points. He added a game-high 12 rebounds to tie his career best, giving him his second double-double as a Hurricane.

"I think Isaiah's just playing with a lot of confidence at both ends of the court," Larrañaga said of Wong's play through two games. "He's worked very hard. I'm most pleased with his defense and rebounding. Those are areas that we asked him to focus on. He's a high-octane scorer. He can score bunches of points, but we need him also to defend and rebound, and he's doing that."

Wong and the Hurricanes will have a tougher task in their upcoming affair. Purdue, a team that has played in each of the past five NCAA Tournaments and reached the Elite Eight in 2019, will come to the Watsco Center for Miami's next game.

The Hurricanes will tip off against the Boilermakers Tuesday at 5 p.m. in the annual ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

Given the caliber of program Matt Painter, in his 16th season as the head coach at his alma mater, has created at Purdue, there is no doubt this game will indeed be a challenge.

"I think Matt has built a culture at Purdue that is very, very consistent with the culture of Indiana basketball, in general," Larrañaga shared. "Tough, hard-nosed, physical, skilled, shooters and a team that the players know their role and know how to execute the role. They run more plays than any team we might face all season long, but they do it with such proficiency that it's very impressive."

On this Purdue team, which enters at 3-1 on the year, there are two big men who have caught the eye of Larrañaga during his game preparation.

One is a junior forward from Chicago, while the other is a freshman center out of Toronto who has made his presence felt immediately at the college level. However, Larrañaga knows they are not the only players his team needs to pay attention to Tuesday night.

"Purdue has a two-headed monster in Trevion Williams and Zach Edey. They combine for 24 points a game and they're very different with their skill set," Larrañaga said. "Williams is a horse; he's very skilled, he's got an assortment of offensive moves and he must weight like 260. Edey is 7-foot-4, probably weighs close to 300 pounds and can dunk everything around the basket. And that's a problem. Those two guys create a tremendous pressure on your interior and it opens up things for their 3-point shooting.

"I don't believe I've ever coached against a team that has two guys shooting over 70 percent from the field and another three guys shooting over 42 percent from three," he added. "So, their field goal percentage is very impressive and that's going to put a lot of pressure on our defense, both individual defense and team defense."

It is junior guard Sasha Stefanovic, one of the three players shooting a scorching clip from deep, who leads the Boilermakers in points

(14.0) and assists (3.8) per game on the young season.

As it attempts to slow down Purdue's talented inside-outside attack, Miami will be seeking its first victory over the Boilermakers. The Hurricanes are 0-3 in the all-time series, although they have never hosted Purdue in Coral Gables.

Miami last played the Boilermakers on Nov. 29, 2011, in Larrañaga's first season at the helm and in his first appearance in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge. The Hurricanes fell, 76-65, at Mackey Arena in West Lafayette, Ind.

It proved to be a rare setback in the Challenge for Miami, which is 6-2 in the event since then, including 5-1 over the past six years.

"We've had good players and good teams and we've had good matchups in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge," Larrañaga said. "...The last time we played Purdue, they handled us, at Purdue, and Robbie Hummel ... was the star player. And you can look at that team 10 years ago and look at this team today, and there's a ton of similarities. They just play very, very consistent man-to-man defense and run set plays throughout the game, making them very hard to guard."

Hummel, then a senior forward, led all scorers with 17 points in Purdue's victory on the way to a sixth straight 20-win season.

Tuesday's contest will be televised live on ESPN2 HERE, with Kevin Brown and Malcolm Huckaby on the call. Joe Zagacki and Danny Rabinowitz will have the radio broadcast on 560 The Joe WQAM HERE, while action can also be heard on WVUM 90.5 FM HERE. Live stats for the contest can be found HERE.

Following its outing against Purdue, Miami resumes play Saturday at noon against FGCU at the Watsco Center, live on ACC Network Extra.

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The 2020-21 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

Miami overcomes 20-point deficit in 58-54 win over Purdue

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Dec. 8, 2020

Nothing went right for the Hurricanes in the first half.

Their top player, Chris Lykes, was sidelined with an ankle injury and they struggled to find any sort of rhythm. They found themselves down 20 and facing an 18-point deficit at the break.

Led by Kameron McGusty's 15 points after the break, 18 for the game, the Miami Hurricanes pulled out a 58-54 win over Purdue on Tuesday.

"That was the tail of two halves," head coach Jim Larranaga said.

Isaiah Wong added 11 points while Lykes's replacement, Harlond Beverly, had nine points, nine rebounds, and six assists.

Miami (3-0) was down 32-12 just before half-time and went into the break, making just 5 of 22 shots from the floor, 0 for 10 from 3, and 4 of 8 from the free-throw line.

"The first half offensively we were totally out of sync," Larranaga said. "In the second half we did a much better job of sharing the ball, finding the open man, and getting some good looks."

Purdue (3-2) continued to hold a steady lead into the second half, leading 44-27 with 13 minutes left.

Reserve Anthony Walker helped get the comeback started for the Hurricanes with an emphatic dunk followed by hook shot. Matt Cross's added a layup in the 6-0 burst.

After Purdue's 7-foot-4 freshman Zach Edey made a shot, the Hurricanes reeled off another quick burst led by Isaiah Wong, who converted a 3-point play and knocked down three more free throws to pull Miami within 46-41 with 6:32 left.

Cross made layups on consecutive possessions to bring Miami within 51-50 with two minutes left.

"He's really a solid performer and he's only a freshman," Larranaga said.

"We are very, very pleased with how he's playing."

McGusty's free throws gave Miami its first lead of the game at 52-51 with 1:36 remaining.

A miss by Purdue's Trevion Williams resulted in a 3-point play by McGusty on the other end for a 55-51 lead with 42 seconds left.

McGusty also made a pair of free throws in the closing seconds to seal the victory for the Hurricanes, who ended the game outscoring the Boilermakers 25-8 over the final eight minutes.

"I felt like we were too stagnant in the first half, we were taking forced shots with two or three people in our faces," McGusty said. "We got on each other in the locker room, challenged each other, the coaches challenged us and we came out in the second half—we played hard on defense and shared the ball and trusted each other."

McGusty made 1 of 3 shots in the first half and was 1 of 3 from the line. Conversely, he went 4 of 7 from the floor in the second half and knocked down 6 of 7 free throws.

"Kam McGusty really struggled in the first half offensively, took some ill-advised shots, I really got on him in a timeout and then in the second half he was much more of a leader, much more under control, and making good decision," Larranaga said. "It's a huge difference when you play like that."

The Boilermakers shot 48.0 percent (15 of 31) in the first half, but just 20.7 percent (6 of 29) in the second half.

"We were pretty darn good defensively in the first half and I thought terrific in the second half," Larranaga said. "There was a big difference."

Purdue's centers Williams and Edey combined to score 23 points with Edey leading the Boilermakers with 15.

"Those big guys from Purdue are a handful," Larranaga said.

Miami won the game despite making 1 of 17 shots from behind the arc and 58.6 percent (17 of 29) of its free throws.

"I told the team we're probably going to have to make 10 3s to win this game and we just couldn't make a 3, couldn't make a free throw for a long time," Larranaga said. "We were very fortunate to win."

Miami will return to action on Saturday (12:00

p.m., ACCN Extra) against FGCU and continuing its six-game homestand to begin the season.

"This is a Tuesday night, 5 o'clock in the afternoon, great comeback win, but tomorrow we've got to move on to our next opponent, our next game," Larranaga said. "I think the guys will be energized with the victory and hopefully will learn something with how we shared the ball in the second half."

MBB Rallies to Stun Purdue, 58-54

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 8, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The University of Miami men's basketball team stormed back from an 18-point halftime deficit to shock Purdue, 58-54, Tuesday night at the Watsco Center.

Despite playing without injured senior guard Chris Lykes, a Preseason First Team All-ACC honoree, the Hurricanes outscored the Boilermakers by 22 in the second half, including by 17 in the final nine minutes, to earn the ACC/Big Ten Challenge triumph.

Miami (3-0) redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty led all scorers with 18 points, 15 of which came in the second half. His play aided the Hurricanes to their largest comeback win—Miami trailed by as many as 20 points in the first half—of the ACC era (since 2004-05).

"We only had eight scholarship players. They all played. I was very impressed with Deng Gak; he did a lot of good things to help us," Larrañaga said. "It's very, very easy when faced with adversity for a team to become unglued and fall apart. I was very, very proud of the fact that, at halftime, our guys pulled together, encouraged each other and said, 'We're much better than we played. We've got to pull together and play a much better second half.' And we did."

Purdue (3-2) sandwiched a 15-1 run to open the first half and a 17-4 run to close the frame around a 9-0 Miami burst in the middle. The Boilermakers, buoyed by stingy defense, took a 32-14 advantage into the intermission.

The 14 points at the break, which came on 5-of-22 (22.7 percent) shooting, was the lowest total in a half by Miami since it joined the ACC.

Following the sluggish start, the Hurricanes scored the first nine points of the second half, quickly slicing their deficit in half, to 32-23, with 16:21 on the clock. After Purdue pushed its lead back up to 17 with 13:12 to go, Miami went on a 14-1 run to cut it to five, 46-41, with 6:32 remaining.

"In the first half, we didn't share the ball very well, we took more difficult shots than we wanted and we missed those and didn't get any second-chance points. At halftime, everything changed," Larrañaga said. "We continued to play better and better defense, we rebounded the ball much better and we shared the ball on offense and got much easier shots."

The Boilermakers upped their lead to eight, 50-42, with 5:07 to play and then Miami took full control. McGusty drilled the Hurricanes' first and only 3-pointer of the game eight seconds later, sparking a 13-1 surge that put Miami ahead, 55-51, with 42.3 seconds left.

Included in that burst was an 8-0 spurt that featured a pair of McGusty free throws with 1:36 remaining that put Miami up for the first time since

it was 1-0 and gave the team a lead it would not relinquish. The Katy, Texas, native also iced the game from the stripe with two more makes in the closing seconds.

The lone Hurricane to join McGusty in double figures was sophomore guard Isaiah Wong, who totaled 11 points. That duo combined to draw 15 fouls on the night, helping Miami get to the line 29 times in the victory.

"When there is no crowd there and there is no energy in the building, your team has to create it themselves," Larrañaga said of how the Hurricanes closed the game. "You could really see that at each of the timeouts, that the guys were really encouraging each other and getting excited."

Sophomore guard Harlond Beverly, who stepped in to start with Lykes out, filled the stat sheet with nine points, nine rebounds, six assists, four steals and two blocks. The latter three marks all set or matched his career bests, aiding Miami to overcome its largest halftime deficit since the program rebirth in 1985-86.

For Purdue, freshman center Zach Edey led the way with 15 points, while junior guard Eric Hunter Jr., notched 11 points. The Boilermakers' leading scorer on the year, junior guard Sasha Stefanovic, totaled five points on 1-of-5 shooting.

Purdue entered the game shooting a blistering 43.6 percent mark from 3-point range through its first four games and Miami held it to a 4-of-25 (16.0 percent) clip. As a whole, Purdue shot 35.0 percent (21-of-60) in the contest, while Miami recorded a 42.6 percent (20-of-47) ledger.

Up next for the Hurricanes is a matchup with FGCU, set for Saturday at noon at the Watsco Center, with action televised live on ACC Network Extra.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CaneSHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2020-21 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

MIAMI HURRICANES POSTGAME NOTES

– The Hurricanes improved to 1-3 all-time against Purdue, including 1-0 at home and 1-1 in Larrañaga's tenure.

– Larrañaga, who entered the game with the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 663-447 in 37 years as a head coach, including 193-113 in 10 seasons at Miami.

– Miami is now 8-6 all-time in ACC/Big Ten Challenge play, including 5-2 at home, 7-3 under Larrañaga, 6-1 in the past seven years and 0-1 versus Purdue.

– For the first time this season, Miami used a starting lineup of Beverly, McGusty, Wong, redshirt senior Nysier Brooks and freshman forward Matt Cross.

– As announced prior to tip-off, the status of Lykes' is day-to-day moving forward due to a left ankle injury sustained in Friday's game against Stetson.

– Tuesday's victory was Miami's 14th under Larrañaga when scoring under 60 points, as the team moved to 14-52 in such affairs.

– Miami trailed by 20 with under one minute left in the first half, by 18 at halftime, by 17 with under 13 minutes left, by 13 with fewer than nine minutes to go, by eight with under five minutes remaining and by one in the final two minutes.

– The previous largest overcome deficit of Larrañaga's tenure at Miami was 18 on 3/24/15 at Richmond in the NIT quarterfinals.

– The Hurricanes last won a game when trailing at halftime on 2/13/19 against Clemson and last did so in non-conference play on 11/23/18 versus Fresno State in Fullerton, Calif.

– Miami's prior lowest mark for points in a half in the ACC was 15 in the first half at Virginia Tech on 2/15/14.

– The Hurricanes' five made field goals in the opening 20 minutes tied for their third-fewest in a half in the program's ACC era.

– Miami's 0-of-10 clip from 3-point range before halftime tied for its second-most misses without a make in a half in the ACC era.

– After registering 15 points in the first 5:25 of the game, the Boilermakers did not score in the next 6:19.

– The Hurricanes shot 1-of-17 (5.9 percent) from 3-point range and missed their first 15 attempts before McGusty's make with 4:59 remaining.

– The last time Miami did not make multiple 3-pointers in a game was 2/25/17, when it went 1-of-8 from deep in a 55-50 victory over No. 10/11 Duke.

– Miami made seven more free throws (17) than Purdue attempted (10) in the victory.

– The Hurricanes held Purdue to their lowest total in a non-conference game since 3/14/15 (51 against Wisconsin in the Big Ten Tournament in Chicago) and their lowest total against a non-Big Ten foe since 11/29/13 (54 versus Washington State in Orlando, Fla.).

– Three Boilermakers—Edey, redshirt freshman guard Brandon Newman and junior forward Trevion Williams—fouled out.

– Wong, surpassed 750 minutes played as a Hurricane, posted the 13th double-digit point total of his career and third of 2020-21.

– McGusty eclipsed 250 rebounds, 200 free-throw attempts and 150 made free throws as a collegian.

– McGusty, who set a career high with 10 free-throw attempts, scored in double figures for the 52nd time overall and third time this year.

– Beverly posed his sixth five-assist game at Miami, including his second this season.

– Brooks moved past 1,500 minutes played as a collegian.

– Sophomore forward Anthony Walker reached 100 points as a Hurricane.

– Gak grabbed five rebounds in the win, good for the second-highest total of his career, trailing only the seven he logged on 11/25/18 against La Salle in Reading, Pa.

UM, without Lykes, rallies from down 20 to beat Purdue 58-54 in ACC-Big Ten Challenge

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Dec. 8, 2020

The Miami Hurricanes faced their tallest task of the season without diminutive star guard Chris Lykes, fell behind by 20 before halftime, but rallied for a 58-54 win over visiting Purdue in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge.

UM scored just 14 first-half points, the worst scoring half for Miami since joining the ACC while Lykes watched from the bench. They shot a dismal 1-of-17 from three-point range for the night.

Despite the early struggles, the Hurricanes never panicked. They regrouped during intermission after a pep talk from freshman Matt Cross, transfer Nysier Brooks and injured seniors Lykes and Sam Waardenburg.

"It was a tale of two halves," UM coach Jim Larranaga said. "The first half, we pretty darn good defensively and terrific in the second half. But we were totally out of sync offensively in the first half."

They came out determined to share the ball better in the second half, chipped away at the lead, and pulled out the victory with clutch plays by Kam McGusty and Cross in the closing minutes.

McGusty, who got an earful from Larranaga during a timeout, led the Canes with 18 points, including a pair of free throws with 1:36 to go to give UM its first lead since the opening minute. Another pair of McGusty free throws sealed the win with three seconds to go.

"We were too stagnant in the first half, we didn't do a good job with our game plan, but we challenged each other at halftime to share the ball and trust each other," McGusty said. "Matt was the first to say something. I was proud of him, a young guy to step up like that. Then all the seniors put their two cents in. It was a big step for us as a team."

Cross started and came through for the third game in a row. He showed poise that belies his youth, following a layup with a critical tip in that got UM to within one point with two minutes to go. Cross finished with seven points and five rebounds.

"Matt didn't take a shot in the first half, didn't hit a three in the game, yet down the stretch I really like having him in because I think he knows how to win," said Larranaga. "He'll make a good defensive play, hit an open man for easy shot, got two layups. He's really a

solid performer, and only a freshman."

Harlond Beverly had nine points, nine rebounds, six assists and three steals. Isaiah Wong added 11 points.

Lykes, a Preseason All-ACC honoree, sat out with a left ankle injury sustained Friday against Stetson. In that game, the senior had the first 20-point, five assist outing of his career. His status going forward is day-to-day.

Even with Lykes, the Canes would been challenged against a Purdue team that features 7-4 and 285-pound freshman center Zach Edey and 6-10 forward/center Trevion Williams. As if there were not enough to deal with, Purdue junior point guard Eric Hunter returned to the lineup after missing the first four games due to a knee injury.

The Boilermakers dominated from the opening whistle, racing to a 15-1 lead – seven of the points coming from freshman Brandon Newman. Purdue made seven of its first 12 shots while Miami missed seven of its first eight.

UM had no answer for Edey, who made the Canes' big men look medium-sized. He came off the bench and scored six points in a row and ended the night with 15 points on 5-of-5 shooting. Hunter added 11.

The Boilermakers held Miami to 5-of-22 shooting from the field in the first half, including 0-for-10 from beyond the arc. Purdue also controlled the boards, outrebounding Miami 22-12.

Miami scored nine unanswered points after intermission, and Purdue went on a streak of its own to widen the lead.

But the Hurricanes offense came to life. They clawed back with an 14-2 run that cut the Boilermakers' lead to five points with seven minutes remaining and kept chipping away. UM went ahead 55-51 on a three-point McGusty play.

The Hurricanes (3-0) are back home Saturday against Florida Gulf Coast University.

Without Chris Lykes, Hurricanes rally past Purdue in ACC/Big Ten Challenge

David Furones
Sun Sentinel
Dec. 8, 2020

CORAL GABLES — No Chris Lykes? A 20-point deficit?

No problem.

The Miami Hurricanes rallied from down by as many as 20 to top Purdue, 58-54, in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge on Tuesday evening at Watsco Center.

"That was the tale of two halves," UM coach Jim Larrañaga said after a lackluster first half turned into his team winning the second half, 44-22. "In the second half, we did a much better job of sharing the ball, finding the open man and getting some open looks. We didn't shoot the ball well from three [1 of 17]. I told the team, 'We're probably going to have to make 10 threes to win this game, and we just couldn't make a three, couldn't make a free throw for a long time. Very, very fortunate to win.'"

Larrañaga added that Lykes, the preseason All-ACC guard who is out with an ankle injury, and fellow senior Sam Waardenburg, a forward who is missing the season with a foot injury, made their presence felt at halftime with impassioned speeches to their teammates.

Two Kameron McGusty free throws with 1:36 remaining gave Miami (3-0) its first lead since the score was, 1-0. After a stop, McGusty drove in, drew a foul and converted on the layup for a three-point play, putting the Hurricanes up, 55-51, with 42 seconds left.

Purdue's Mason Gillis scored on a put-back with 4 seconds left to get back within 2, but McGusty closed it out by hitting two free throws.

Miami, which was down by 17 with 13 minutes remaining, was led by 18 points from McGusty, the redshirt senior guard who took the reins with Lykes out. Fifteen of his points came after halftime as he made 6 of 7 free throws in the second half.

"I felt like we were too stagnant in the first half, taking forced shots with two of their people in our faces," McGusty said. "They play a pack-line defense, so the right play is always to drive and get it to somebody for an open shot."

Added Larrañaga of McGusty: "In the second half, he was much more of a leader and much more under control making decisions."

Isaiah Wong, who was key in first getting the second-half deficit to single digits, scored 11 points — but on 2-of-8 shooting — and fellow sophomore guard Harlond Beverly had nine points, nine rebounds and six assists.

Before UM took the lead, a Matt Cross put-back tip-in with 2:04 remaining after his layup on the previous possession got the Hurricanes within one, 51-50. The freshman forward had seven points and five rebounds.

"He didn't take a shot in the first half, he didn't take a three in the game, yet down the stretch, I really like having him in because I think he knows how to win," Larrañaga said of Cross. "He'll make a good defensive play. He'll hit an open man for an easy shot. ... He's really a solid performer when you think he's only a freshman."

Purdue 7-4 center Zach Edey led the Boilermakers (3-2) with 15 points, but Purdue finished shooting 35 percent from the field, stifled by UM's defense late.

Lykes, averaging 15.5 points, four rebounds and 5.5 assists through Miami's first two games, is considered day-to-day moving forward.

Locked in and Ready to Go

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 10, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Tuesday night's game at the Watsco Center was a tale of two halves.

The University of Miami men's basketball team trailed Purdue, 32-14, at the break before rallying for a thrilling 58-54 victory in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge. It was the largest halftime deficit the Hurricane have overcome since the program rebirth in 1985.

"It's a confidence booster. It goes to show if we play hard for 40, the sky's the limit for us, honestly," guard Kameron McGusty said. "That's how I feel. At the same time, it was also good that we had that adversity in the first half and we had it the third game into the season. I'd rather run into that now, as opposed to having to fight back from 20 when we're playing a critical ACC game."

McGusty was a vital cog in the comeback, as the redshirt senior led all scorers with 18 points, 15 of which came in the second half.

The Katy, Texas, native closed the game particularly strong, notching seven of Miami's final eight points over the last 100 seconds of the contest. Five of those seven came from the free-throw line and two of them clinched the win with three ticks to go.

McGusty, who spent the first two years of his career at Oklahoma, felt prepared for the moment for two reasons.

"Experience and trust. I've been in that situation to where we're up by two or up by one and I'm at the free-throw line and I miss a free throw and they come down and hit a three," McGusty shared. "That happened to me my freshman year when we played at Texas. So, every time I go to the free-throw line with under a minute left, I always think of that scenario and just learn from my experience."

"And also just the trust that the players and coaches have with me. Whenever I went to the free-throw line, I felt the energy," he continued. "I felt my teammates were relaxed and comfortable. They were fine with me being at the free-throw line and they were confident with me shooting those free throws."

The only other Hurricane to score in double figures was sophomore guard Isaiah Wong, who totaled 11 points in the victory. Miami struggled to move the ball in the first half, but improved in that area in the second frame,

leading to the offensive surge.

However, it was on the other side of the ball—the defensive end—where the Hurricanes won the game against Purdue. They played strong defense for nearly the entire game, limiting Purdue to its lowest point total against a non-Big Ten team since Nov. 29, 2013.

Saturday, when Miami hosts FGCU at noon, it will have its first chance to display it can continue to showcase that strong defense for 40 minutes, while also sharing the ball throughout.

"I feel like we're going to carry that on throughout the whole season and that's just going to be our identity," McGusty said. "[We will be] a team that moves the ball really well and gets all their teammates involved, and a team that's together on defense and plays super hard."

Miami is 84-7 since the program rebirth against in-state non-Power Five teams, including 16-2 under Larrañaga. One of those losses, though, came against FGCU.

The Hurricanes are 3-1 all-time versus the Eagles, including 1-1 in Larrañaga's tenure, but dropped a 63-51 road decision on Nov. 13, 2012, in the teams' most recent meeting. That proved to be a matchup of eventual Sweet 16 teams.

Miami prides itself on not overlooking any foe, but the recent loss to the Eagles might add just a bit more focus as the Hurricanes play their third Atlantic Sun opponent in a span of four games.

"We're definitely going to be locked in, we're definitely going to be ready to go," McGusty said. "We don't take any team lightly, whether it's Purdue, Florida Gulf Coast or Pitt, like we have coming up next week. So, every team, we're just looking to come out there, play our best, defend well, rebound the ball well and move the ball and share it with each other."

FGCU is 2-1 on the season and has not played since a 91-74 victory Dec. 5 against Florida National, giving the Eagles six days to recover between outings. Senior guard Jalen Warren is the team's leading scorer through three outings, averaging 14.0 points per game.

The Eagles went 10-22 (7-9) last year and were picked fifth in the Atlantic Sun preseason poll. The Hurricanes know, though, they need to do the opposite Saturday of what they did Tuesday when they fell behind the Boilermakers, 15-1, to open the game.

"These types of teams aren't the types of teams you want to let hang around because the more you let them hang around, the more confident they get and you never know what will happen," McGusty said. "You don't want to put the game up in the air. We want to come in there, set the tone early and let them know, 'Hey, this is the Watsco. This is our house. This is our home and we're protecting it and we're going to play hard for 40 minutes.'"

The contest between Miami and FGCU will be televised live on RSN—that channel is still to be determined locally—and FOX Sports GO, with Tom Werme and Grant Long on the call. A full affiliate is available HERE and it can also be seen on WatchESPN, subject to blackout, HERE. Danny Rabinowitz will have the radio broadcast on 70 The Ticket WAXY HERE, while action can also be heard on WVUM 90.5 FM HERE. Live stats for the game will be available HERE.

After playing FGCU, Miami returns to the hardwood Dec. 16 to open its ACC slate at 6 p.m. against Pittsburgh, with action at the Watsco Center set to be televised live on ACC Network.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2020-21 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

Shorthanded MBB Falls to FGCU, 66-62

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 12, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Playing nearly the entire game with just six scholarship players, the University of Miami men's basketball team dropped a 66-62 decision to FGCU Saturday afternoon at the Watsco Center.

Already down three injured players to begin the game, Miami (3-1) lost two more within the first 10 minutes. Meanwhile, sophomore guard Isaiah Wong's 20 points and redshirt senior Nysier Brooks' double-double were not enough to overcome the Eagles' scorching 3-point shooting.

"We're shorthanded. We don't have enough healthy bodies to play our game and until we get a group of guys that can function physically, it's going to be a challenge because of the number of injuries we have," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "...We only have 12 scholarship players and six of them can't play. So, it puts way too much of a burden on the guys who fought valiantly against Florida Gulf Coast, but they had no rest, no subs."

The entire first half was played within an eight-point window, as Miami's largest lead was five and its biggest deficit was three. The game went into the intermission deadlocked at 28, despite nine points and six rebounds from Brooks.

Redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty departed with 15:29 on the clock with a right leg injury and then redshirt senior center Rodney Miller Jr., did so with 10:04 to go with a left leg injury.

The second half was played within a six-point frame—the Hurricanes neither led by greater than nor trailed by over five—until the final minute. With 39.5 seconds left, sophomore guard Dakota Rivers gave FGCU (3-1) its largest lead of the day, 62-56, on the Eagles' 13th made 3-pointer.

Wong countered with a pair of 3-pointers sandwiched around two FGCU free throws, but it was not enough for the Hurricanes, who fell by four.

The two late 3-pointers from Wong came after Miami started the game 1-of-17 from beyond the arc. His 20 points came on 9-of-19 shooting, matching his career best in makes, and he added a career-high-tying three steals while playing all 40 minutes.

Brooks finished the game with 13 points and a career-high 15 rebounds, six of which came

at the offensive end. Sophomore forward Anthony Walker added 12 points, his second-highest total as a Hurricane, in a career-high 32 minutes.

Junior guard Caleb Cotto paced the Eagles with 18 points and went 4-of-7 from long range. Rivers tallied 15 points, while sophomore guard Cyrus Largie notched 12. Red-shirt senior forward Eli Abaev totaled 11 points and nine rebounds in the win.

Miami's logged a 40-8 advantage in paint points and 43-28 edge in rebounding, but FGCU went 13-of-30 (43.3 percent) on 3-pointers, while the Hurricanes posted a 3-of-19 (15.8 percent) clip from long range.

The Hurricanes return to action Wednesday at 6 p.m., when they host Pittsburgh at the Watsco Center, live on ACC Network, to begin their 2020-21 league slate.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2020-21 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

MIAMI HURRICANES POSTGAME NOTES

– The Hurricanes moved to 3-2 all-time versus FGCU, including 2-1 at home and 1-2 in Larrañaga's tenure.

– Larrañaga, who entered the game with the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 663-448 in 37 years as a head coach, including 193-114 in 10 seasons at Miami.

– Since the program rebirth in 1985-86, Miami is now 84-8 against in-state non-Power Five programs, including 64-3 at home and 16-3 under Larrañaga.

– For the second time this season, Miami used a starting lineup of Brooks, McGusty, Wong, sophomore guard Harlond Beverly and freshman forward Matt Cross.

– The Hurricanes once again played without senior guard Chris Lykes (left ankle) and freshman guard Earl Timberlake (right ankle), in addition to redshirt senior forward Sam Waardenburg, who is out for the season with a left foot injury.

– The last time Miami was tied at halftime in a non-conference game was on 11/25/18 in an 83-81 setback against Seton Hall in Fullerton, Calif.

– The Hurricanes' eight blocks were their most since 2/19/20 in a triple-overtime game at Virginia Tech.

– Senior guard Willie Herenton saw his first action of the season, playing two minutes for

Miami.

– Before Brooks, the last Hurricane to grab 15-plus rebounds in a game was Keith Stone, who pulled down 18 in the aforementioned 2/19/20 in a triple-overtime contest at Virginia Tech.

– Brooks' prior career high in rebounds was 12, which he recorded multiple times while at Cincinnati, most recently on 3/2/19 against Memphis.

– Brooks tallied his 15th double-digit point total, seventh double-figure rebounding total and fourth double-double, including his first of each this season.

– McGusty, who returned to the game with two seconds left to throw a long inbound pass, recorded the 50th start of his career.

– Beverly eclipsed both 250 points and 100 rebounds as a Hurricane.

– Wong surpassed both 300 points and 100 made field goals at Miami.

– Wong registered the 14th double-figure scoring performance and fifth 20-point outing of his career, including his fourth and second of this year, respectively.

– Walker, who tied his career highs in made field goals (five) and blocked shots (three), scored in double figures for the second time in his career and first this season.

Miami Hurricanes men's hoops coach Jim Larranaga blasts timing of potential transfer rule change

Steve Wine
AP
Dec. 12, 2020

MIAMI -- Miami coach Jim Larranaga responded angrily Saturday to the possibility the NCAA will ease its rules and grant all transfers immediate eligibility.

The change would benefit the Hurricanes because Elijah Olaniyi would be able to play for them this season. But Larranaga blasted the timing of a possible change, which could come next week.

"Why would you make a decision like this in the middle of December?" Larranaga said. "If you are going to make changes, why aren't you making them before the season starts?"

"If they pass the rule that Elijah can play, it would be sure nice to have him. But from what I understand, that decision is not going to be announced until like 5 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. Are you kidding me? That's a joke. We have to wait until the last minute. We play at 6."

Larranaga described the indecision by the NCAA as "ridiculous" amid a worsening coronavirus pandemic.

"We canceled the basketball season in March," Larranaga said. "We canceled the ACC tournament. We canceled the NCAA tournament. We don't know this is a serious matter and we've got people dying and that there are spikes all over the place and that kids are going to get sick?"

Miami (3-1) is scheduled to host Pittsburgh on Wednesday. Larranaga made his comments shortly after the Hurricanes' 66-62 loss to Florida Gulf Coast.

FGCU upsets injury-plagued Miami Hurricanes 66-62

Steve Wine
ASSOCIATED PRESS |
DEC 12, 2020 AT 3:19 PM

CORAL GABLES — Caleb Catto scored 18 points, Dakota Rivers 15 and each hit key baskets as Florida Gulf Coast upset injury-plagued Miami 66-62 on Saturday.

Catto and Rivers combined on nine 3-pointers as FGCU (3-1) poured in 13. Rivers finished with a career-high five 3s and the Eagles beat Miami for the first time since the 2012-13 season when both were Sweet 16 teams.

Miami (3-1) lost guard Kameron McGusty and center Rodney Miller Jr. to leg injuries early in the game, leaving the Hurricanes with six healthy scholarship players.

Neither returned to the court, though McGusty threw in an inbounds pass with two seconds remaining. Miami begins Atlantic Coast Conference play against visiting Pittsburgh Wednesday.

Chris Lykes (ankle), Earl Timberlake (ankle) and Sam Waardenburg (season-ending, foot) were already out.

Eli Abaev added 11 points and nine rebounds for the Eagles (3-1). Luis Rolon, playing in place of point guard Jalen Warren, who was suspended one game for a violation of team rules, scored five points, dished eight assists and was 5-for-7 at the line, four in the last 1:30.

Even short-handed, Miami maintained control through the first half until Catto hit a 3 to tie it at 28 at the break. Catto opened the second half with a jumper and another 3 and the Eagles led 35-32.

Miami would tie six times but FGCU never fell behind. Rivers' final 3 was a dagger at 42 seconds that gave FGCU its biggest lead, 62-56.

Isaiah Wong led Miami with 20 points, a block and three steals. The Hurricanes were 1-for-17 from distance before Wong hit back-to-back 3s in the last half-minute, trying to over-

come FGCU's two-possession lead.

Nysier Brooks added 13 points and 15 rebounds, Anthony Walker scored 12 and had three blocks.

Miami prepares to add Elijah Olaniyi on 'ridiculous' NCAA change

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Dec. 14, 2020

Help is expected to be on the way for the injury-riddled Hurricanes.

Miami lost two more players to injuries in Saturday's 66-62 loss to FGCU as they played the second half with six scholarship players.

While guard Kameron McGusty (pulled right hamstring) and center Rodney Miller (left leg) were sidelined, joining Chris Lykes (left ankle) and Earl Timberlake (right ankle) who did not dress, the Hurricanes (3-1, 0-0 ACC) are preparing to receive a boost from the NCAA, which is expected to rule all transfers eligible this season as opposed to sitting out for the season.

This means former Stony Brook standout guard Elijah Olaniyi, who averaged 18.0 points and 6.5 rebounds last season earning All-America East First Team honors, would be eligible to play this season and possibly as soon as Wednesday (6:00 p.m., ACCN) in Miami's ACC opener against Pittsburgh (4-1, 0-0) following a decision by the Division I Council expected before tip-off.

"I don't know how it will be on Wednesday, but right now he is healthy," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "That's a major plus for us. He's been practicing very hard and very well. He hasn't missed any practices. He is similar to other guys we have had that are 6-5 like Kam McGusty, Sheldon McClellan, Davon Reed—he's in that category, but he hasn't played a single game for us so you have to wait and see how he's going to do."

In addition to providing a much-needed boost to the backcourt, which only features two healthy players in Isaiah Wong and Harlond Beverly, with his scoring ability, but he would also provide solid defensive ability as well after averaging 1.6 steals per game last season with a defensive efficiency rating of 92.9.

"With the injuries right now he would be a nice fit into a role because he can do a lot of different things besides just scoring," center Nysier Brooks said. "He's a very on-point defender and he plays the weak side for steals. I guess you could say he gambles a little bit and knows where to help at."

While Larranaga would be glad to add Olaniyi at a much-needed time, he voiced his displeasure with the process in a rant following Saturday's game.

"I want to say it in such a way that everybody understands. I'm being a little bit sarcastic, but I'm also very, very concerned about decision-making at the NCAA level. Why would you make a decision like this in the middle of December when the season started—it should have started November 10. If you are going to make changes, why aren't you making them before the season starts? Why all of a sudden on December 16 some committee making the decision whether players who transferred should be eligible or not? We had so much information about COVID, guys being sick, people having to sit out and others opting out.

"I would have liked to have seen us be at full strength and if they make the rule and pass the rule that Elijah can play. It would be sure nice to have him for Wednesday, but from what I understand that decision is not going to be announced until 5 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. Are you kidding me? That's a joke. What people don't have cell phones? They don't have Zoom meetings? We have to wait until the last minute. We play at 6. Can you imagine if I'm telling Elijah, 'Hey you can play, go get a uniform on and it's 10 to 6? This stuff is ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous.

"You can say, 'Well we have a lot more information about COVID now.' That's garbage. We canceled the basketball season in March, we canceled the ACC Tournament, we canceled the NCAA Tournament, we don't know this is a serious matter that we've got people dying, that there's spikes all over the place, that kids are going to get sick, and that you need to be as close to full strength as possible? So the answer to the question is, 'Hey I won't be surprised they say oh no they can't play.' That would be true to—'We're going to make this decision, but we're not going to make it when the season starts. We're going to wait until mid-December and then tell coaches and players, OK we changed our mind.'

"Then the next step is in January they're going to pass the rule that transfers can be eligible right away for next year. How ridiculous."

The NCAA has already ruled that all players would receive an extra year of eligibility meaning Olaniyi could still return next season.

Olaniyi scored 1,135 points in three seasons at Stony Brook. He was named to the All-America East First Team last season. In addition to leading the team in points and rebounds, he also averaged a team-best 2.1 assists per game and averaged 1.6 steals a game. He shot 43.5 percent from the field

and 36.1 percent from 3, which could give the Hurricanes a needed shooter on the perimeter as they are shooting 22.7 from 3 this season.

No Rest for the Weary

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 14, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – For any team in any sport, health is of the utmost importance. To the University of Miami men's basketball team, it is also quite scarce.

Of the Hurricanes' 12 scholarship players, just six of them were available for the final 30-plus minutes of Saturday's 66-62 setback against FGCU at the Watsco Center.

"Right now, my main concern is about the health of our team," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "...We have a lot of guys that are not available to practice or play."

Miami (3-1) entered Saturday without a trio of injured players in senior guard Chris Lykes (left ankle), freshman guard Earl Timberlake (right ankle) and redshirt senior forward Sam Waardenburg (left foot).

It was the second straight missed game for Lykes, a Preseason First Team All-ACC honoree, and the fourth for Timberlake, a consensus top-40 recruit who has yet to play this year. Waardenburg, the Hurricanes' leading returning rebounder and shot-blocker, is out for the season after getting hurt in late October.

Miami lost redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty, a near 1,000-point career scorer, under five minutes into the contest due to a right hamstring injury. Just a few minutes later, redshirt senior center Rodney Miller Jr., who started 28 games last year, went out with a left groin injury.

Meanwhile, senior guard Elijah Olaniyi was unavailable to compete, as he is sitting out in accordance with NCAA transfer rules.

Of the six remaining scholarship players Miami did have left against the Eagles, two starters competed through other ailments. Sophomore guard Harlond Beverly has sciatica and freshman forward Matt Cross has a right arm injury.

That left redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks, redshirt junior forward Deng Gak, sophomore forward Anthony Walker and sophomore guard Isaiah Wong. Even of those four, Gak is consistently limited in practice after suffering knee injuries each of the last two years, while Walker missed four weeks of preseason practice due to right knee injury.

"When you only have four scholarship players left, you can't really practice. Maybe do some skill work, but certainly can't practice," Larrañaga said. "You can't work on your defense or your offense and you can't work on your shooting, which clearly missing Chris and Kam and Matt makes a huge difference in because those are our top 3-point shooters."

The 3-point shooting, paired with the bevy of injuries, proved pivotal for the Hurricanes against the Eagles. Miami went 3-of-19 (15.8 percent) from

deep and FGCU finished 13-of-30 (43.3 percent), good for its most long-range makes ever against a Power Five foe.

Two of Miami's made triples came from Wong, who finished with 20 points, in the final minute. Brooks totaled a 13-point, career-high 15-rebound double-double, while Walker added 12 points in the defeat.

With the statuses of the injured players to be determined, the Hurricanes will once again be counting on those same players, as well as walk-on Willie Herenton, a senior guard who played two minutes against FGCU.

The Hurricanes, though, might get one welcome addition before their next game, a matchup with Pittsburgh Wednesday at 6 p.m. at the Watsco Center to begin ACC play. According to multiple reports, the NCAA is expected to clear all sit-out transfers for immediate eligibility sometime Wednesday.

"We are hoping—keeping our fingers crossed—that Elijah will be able to play because that would give us not only a healthy body," Larrañaga said, "but a very good player to step in and try to help fill the void left by Kam McGusty's injury."

The Panthers head into the ACC-opening affair at 4-1 on the year, winning four in a row after dropping their season opener.

Sophomore forward Justin Champagnie leads the team in points (19.4) and rebounds (13.0) per game. The Brooklyn, N.Y., native is the reigning ACC Player of the Week after logging 20-plus in both categories in each of his last two games.

"Their major strength is three players who are really dynamic offensively: Xavier Johnson, Justin Champagnie and Au'Diese Toney. That's their big three and the other guys that they play really know their role well and stay within it," Larrañaga shared. "So, it allows Xavier Johnson to really control the game with his ball-handling and scoring ability. And he gets the ball to Toney and Champagnie in such a way that those guys get a chance to play at their best. When the three of them are playing as well as they are right now, they've got enough support from the other five or six guys that they play to win a lot of ballgames."

Miami is 23-19 all-time against Pittsburgh, including 14-7 at home and 7-2 under Larrañaga. Although the Hurricanes dropped their last game versus the Panthers—a 62-57 road setback on Feb. 2, 2020—they are 7-1 in the last eight meetings, with four straight home wins.

As Miami, which owns a 6-10 mark in ACC openers, looks to continue its trend of recent success against the Panthers, it will have to do so under through unique circumstances due to its limited number of available bodies.

"We will be meeting with our team, watching video and trying to prepare mentally more than physically. Because even if we wanted to prepare physi-

cally, there's not enough guys to do it," Larrañaga said. "...The preparation is going to be more walking through our opponent with the guys who are healthy, working on skills, such as shooting and ball-handling, and maybe some dummy offense. But we can't compete; there is no competition in practice right now."

Wednesday's matchup will be televised live on ACC Network HERE, with Anish Shroff and Paul Biancardi on the call. Joe Zagacki and Danny Rabinowitz will have the radio broadcast on 560 The Joe WQAM HERE, while action can also be heard on WVUM 90.5 FM HERE and in Spanish on WMYM 990 AM HERE. Live stats for the contest can be found HERE.

After facing the Panthers, Miami resumes play Dec. 19 at 3:30 p.m., live on RSN from the Watsco Center, against Jacksonville to conclude its non-conference slate.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CaneShoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2020-21 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

Hurricanes injury-riddled ahead of ACC opener vs. Pitt, but help could be on the way

By DAVID FURONES
SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL |
DEC 15, 2020 AT 3:39 PM

The Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team is reeling as it opens Atlantic Coast Conference play against Pittsburgh in a 6 p.m. tip at Watsco Center on Wednesday night.

Miami is significantly shorthanded, as it was in Saturday's stunning 66-62 loss to Florida Gulf Coast.

Preseason All-ACC guard Chris Lykes is set to miss his third consecutive game with an ankle injury. Guard Kameron McGusty and center Rodney Miller are out after exiting in the first 10 minutes against FGCU with leg injuries. This for a roster that still doesn't have freshman guard Earl Timberlake ready to make his college debut off an ankle injury and also has forward Sam Waardenburg out for the season.

Even forwards Matt Cross and Deng Gak sat out Tuesday's practice, but UM coach Jim Larrañaga is hopeful he will have them ready for tip-off Wednesday.

"I told him that I'm very, very hopeful, that I have my fingers crossed, I hear rumors that all transfers in men's and women's basketball are going to be eligible starting 5 o'clock [Wednesday]," Larrañaga said. "In all likelihood, he will be in uniform, he will be in the starting lineup and he will play as many minutes as he can possibly play. It's very conceivable he can possibly play all 40 minutes [Wednesday]."

"I'm hoping that he brings a lot of points, rebounds, assists, defense. He's a good player. He's a lot like guys who we've had, like a Kam McGusty, like a Sheldon McClellan. Those guys are pretty athletic, can score the ball pretty well. Elijah's a very good cutter. He'll probably get some baskets just moving without the ball."

Olaniyi, who led Stony Brook in points (18), rebounds (6.5) and assists (2.1) last season, has practiced with the scout team thus far, so he hasn't had much time working with Miami's starting lineup.

"It'll be interesting to see how he makes the transition from being the opponent to being Miami," Larrañaga said. "We're very, very pleased with the way he's practiced. ... He's in good shape. He can make a 3. He's very good at going to the basket. He's athletic, and I think he'll be a very significant contributor."

Larrañaga only wishes the decision would've

been made earlier, allowing Olaniyi to play against FGCU on Saturday.

Redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks, who sat out last season due to his transfer from Cincinnati, wishes the ruling would've come down much earlier than that.

"I wish they would've done it when I was sitting out," said Brooks, who is Olaniyi's roommate. "I believe that, if an athlete needed to sit out for a health reason in their transfer year, then that would be cool, but I don't really feel that we should have to sit out."

Cross and Gak's availability will be a game-time decision.

"We won't know until late [Wednesday] afternoon," Larrañaga said. "I have my fingers crossed that Deng Gak will be available. He did actually practice a little [Tuesday], but his knees are bothering him today. We can't afford him to practice today and those knees get worse."

Gak has had each of his past two seasons end prematurely due to injuries on opposite knees.

Larrañaga described Cross as day-to-day with a shoulder ailment.

Larranaga pleased transfer Olaniyi might play vs. Pitt, but blasts timing of NCAA ruling

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Dec. 15, 2020

A last-minute NCAA ruling might be just what the doctor ordered as the hobbled University of Miami men's basketball team plays Pitt on Wednesday night in their Atlantic Coast Conference opener.

The UM home game is scheduled for 6 p.m., one hour after the NCAA Division I Council is expected to rule that all transfers are eligible immediately rather than requiring them to sit out the season as they normally do.

If that happens, Stony Brook transfer guard Elijah Olaniyi would be eligible to play for the Hurricanes (3-1), who had only six scholarship players healthy enough to participate in Monday's and Tuesday's practices, according to coach Jim Larranaga.

Chris Lykes and Earl Timberlake remain out with ankle injuries, guard Kameron McGusty pulled his right hamstring in Saturday's 66-62 loss to Florida Gulf Coast, and center Rodney Miller injured his left groin dunking during warmups before the FGCU game. Freshman forward Matt Cross sat out of practice with a shoulder injury and is "day to day."

"I spoke to Elijah and I told him that I'm very, very hopeful," Larranaga said. "I have my fingers crossed. I hear rumors that all transfers in men's and women's basketball are going to be eligible starting 5 o'clock Wednesday. So, in all likelihood, he will be in uniform, will be in the starting lineup and will play as many minutes as he can possibly play. It's very conceivable he could play all 40 minutes."

Olaniyi averaged 18 points and 6.5 rebounds last season and was named All-America East First Team.

Asked what Olaniyi brings the squad, Larranaga replied: "I'm hoping he brings a lot of points, rebounds, assists, rebounds. He's a lot like guys we've had — Kam McGusty, Sheldon McClellan — pretty athletic, can score. Elijah's a good cutter, can move without the ball, has worked very hard defensively. But he has been on the scout team. This will be first time he is with our starters."

UM faces a tough team in Pitt (4-1), which is led by guard Xavier Johnson and forward Justin Champagnie, who is coming off back-to-back 20 points/20 rebounds games. He scored 24 points and grabbed 21 rebounds against Gardner-Webb and had 20 and 20 against Northwestern. It is just the third time in the past 25 years a Power 5 player has had consecutive 20/20 games.

Although Larranaga said he is in favor of letting the transfers play immediately, he expressed dismay that the NCAA decision was not made earlier.

"We could have had Elijah over the weekend and he would have made a significant difference," Larranaga said. "The way I look at rules is, the rule is either good or not good. If they make all the transfers eligible right now, I look at it two ways. I'm very, very happy because it's a good thing, but they should have done it before the season began.

"I don't know why you wait so long to make those decisions. I'm not an administrator. I don't know how those things work. In my mind, the decision was already made that transfers are going to be eligible starting next year. Well, if it's good next year and from now on, why isn't it good now? That doesn't make any sense to me at all."

He stressed that in the past four or five years, there have been over 1,000 transfers per season, which is an average of three per team.

"That means three guys are sitting on somebody's bench on scholarship, not playing basketball. Again, that doesn't make any sense financially, or the player having to waste a year not competing. Why are we waiting?"

Larranaga first criticized the timing of the ruling after Saturday's loss.

"I would have liked to have seen us be at full strength and if they make the rule and pass the rule that Elijah can play. It would be nice to have him for Wednesday. From what I understand that decision is not going to be announced until 5 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. Are you kidding me? That's a joke. What people don't have cell phones? They don't have Zoom meetings? We have to wait until the last minute. We play at 6. Can you imagine if I'm telling Elijah, 'Hey you can play, go get a uniform on and it's 10 to 6? This stuff is ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous.'"

Injury updates ahead of Pitt game to open ACC competition

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Dec. 15, 2020

The Hurricanes are expected to receive a boost to their lineup on Wednesday when the NCAA is expected to make all transfers eligible to play this season, which would add Stony Brook guard Elijah Olaniyi to the mix.

Olaniyi's addition is much-needed as head coach Jim Larranaga has ruled out starting guards Chris Lykes and Kameron McGusty and back-up center Rodney Miller when the Hurricanes host Pittsburgh on Wednesday (6:00 p.m., ACCN) in the ACC opener for both schools.

"In all likelihood we'll have six scholarship players and Willie Herenton, our walk-on, available for play tomorrow," Larranaga said. "We're going to have to change the warm-up because we don't have enough guys to even do a two-line layups."

Lykes, McGusty, Miller, Earl Timberlake, Deng Gak, and Matt Cross will be held out of practice on Tuesday due to injuries. Gak was limited in Monday's practice.

"We won't know until late tomorrow afternoon if any of them are available," Larranaga said.

"I am concerned about it," Larranaga said. "We've had so many weird injuries. It is what it is. Whoever is dressed and in uniform is going to play. Hopefully we play really well."

Olaniyi, if cleared, is expected to start.

"In all likelihood he will in uniform, be in the starting lineup, and he will play as many minutes as he can possibly play," Larranaga said. "It's very conceivable that he could play all 40 minutes tomorrow."

Olaniyi averaged 18.0 and 6.5 rebounds last season.

"I'm hoping he brings a lot of points, rebounds, assists, defense," Larranaga said. "He's a good player. He's pretty athletic, can score the ball pretty well. Elijah's a very good cutter. He'll probably get some baskets just moving without the ball. He's worked very defensively and he's been on the scout team. He's not played with the returning players so it will be interesting to see how he makes the transition from being the opponent to actually being Miami."

Miami (3-1) has played its last two games without Lykes, who injured his left ankle in the second half against Stetson on Dec. 4. Lykes

is averaging 15.5 points, 5.5 assists, and 4.0 rebounds a game.

"I think he is as dynamic of a guard as there is in college basketball," Pittsburgh head coach Jeff Capel said. "He is fast and quick. He has a really, really good handle. He can shoot it, he can shoot it with range, he can shoot it off the bounce, he can get to the basket, he knows how to draw fouls, he is dynamic in transition. I think his speed and ability to change speeds and his ability to shoot the basketball, that's what makes him elite. He is elite. When he's right, when he's healthy and when he's going, there's not a better guard in college basketball."

McGusty, who is averaging 10.5 points with a season-high 18 in Miami's 20-point comeback win over Purdue, injured his right hamstring in Saturday's 66-62 loss to FGCU and only played five minutes.

"He turned quickly and pushed off to prevent back-door layup, which he did, but he strained a hamstring muscle," Larranaga said. "I think that can happen to anyone at any time no matter what kind of shape you're in, how much stretching you do, or how much weight-lifting you do."

Freshman forward Matt Cross has started all four games and has averaged 7.5 points and 28.0 minutes a game, but has been ailing with a shoulder injury, which has affected his shooting ability.

"He's been dealing with that shoulder and the way I would describe it would be day-to-day," Larranaga said.

Highly-touted freshman guard Earl Timberlake has yet to make his season debut due to re-injuring an ankle injury before the season began could be close to returning after being ruled out 3-5 weeks on Nov. 29. It has been 16 days since that forecast released by the team.

Miller, who averaged 7.2 points as a starter last season, but has only scored two points this year, only played two minutes against FGCU due to a left groin injury.

"He dunked a ball in warm-ups and strained his groin," Larranaga said. "He tried to go during the game, but as soon as he started running he knew he couldn't go."

Harlond Beverly, who has filled in as a starter for Lykes, has been playing through back pain to start the season, which could explain his 35.3-percent shooting from the floor and making 1 of 11 from behind the arc.

If Lykes and McGusty are unable to play against the Panthers, Olaniyi could be thrust-ed into the starting lineup to maintain their three-guard lineup or forward Anthony Walker could start at the 3-spot after playing a number of minutes there against FGCU.

Aside from the aforementioned ailing players, this leaves the Hurricanes with guard Isaiah Wong, who leads the team in scoring at 17.0 points a game, and center Nysier Brooks, who is averaging 8.5 points and 7.5 rebounds, as healthy starters with reserve forward Deng Gak, who has been limited in practices at times after recovering from his second season-ending knee injury, as the other three available players along with Walker.

"I have my fingers crossed that Deng Gak will be available," Larranaga said. "He did practice some yesterday, but his knees are bothering him today. We can't afford him to practice today and those knees get worse so he's going to sit out today and hopefully that rest will prepare to at least be functional tomorrow at 6 o'clock to be able to contribute something."

Miami has won seven of its last eight meetings against Pittsburgh (4-1), but dropped the last contest 62-57 in February.

The Panthers are led by sophomore 6-foot-6 forward Justin Champagnie, the reigning ACC Player of the Week after consecutive 20-20 games. Champagnie is averaging 19.4 points, 13.0 rebounds, 1.8 assists, 1.2 blocks, and 1.0 steals per game.

"We played Pitt last year twice and they were two close, hard-fought contests and I'm expecting it to be the same tomorrow, but one of the differences is Justin Champagnie has just raised his level of play," Larranaga said. "He's had 20 points and 20 rebounds the last couple of games, he's averaging almost 20, almost 14 rebounds, he's playing at a very high level like you would expect a veteran player to do. He's a handful for us, but Pitt really functions best when Xavier Johnson is playing great. He's a point guard who can score the ball, deliver the ball to the other players, very athletic, and he's a handful for anybody. Their top three scorers--Champagnie, (Au'Diese) Toney, and Xavier Johnson--I think we match up decent with them and hopefully we can keep everybody out of foul trouble. That would be a big part of it and hopefully we shoot better than 1 for 17 on our first 3-pointers. I'm so shocked that's the case."

How Chris Lykes, Miami's 5-foot-7 scoring machine, has transfixed the ACC the past three years

Craig Meyer
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Dec. 16, 2020

For years, as his basketball profile rose and thousands of people across the country began seeing him play, Chris Lykes has heard the question in any number of forms. At this point, he expects it.

How do you do what you do?

It's a loaded query.

At 5-foot-7, the Miami guard exists as an anomaly, a short player who has excelled at every level of a sport seemingly designed so that people like him don't excel, at least not to the extent he has. But even on a court with players who tower over him, Lykes has stood tall.

A handful of games into his final season with the Hurricanes — should he not use the extra season of eligibility the NCAA has granted winter-sport athletes in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic — Lykes remains one of the most exciting, captivating players in the country. Last season, he finished among the top 10 scorers in the ACC at 15.4 points per game and he was ninth in the conference in field goal percentage. The shortest player to finish ahead of him in the latter category was 6-foot-5, a full 10 inches taller than Lykes.

Lykes won't be playing Wednesday against Pitt, bothered by a left ankle injury he suffered earlier in the month. It's undoubtedly a hit for Miami, which lost to Florida Gulf Coast over the weekend without its star guard. Beyond that, though, it deprives Pitt fans of what is very likely the last chance they'll get to see their team face off against one of the more enthralling ACC players of the past several years.

"I've always been on the shorter side in terms of when we're playing basketball," Lykes said. "I've always had to figure out ways to do what I wanted to on the court. I feel like I'm a really determined person. That's kind of what guided me into how I play today. My game hasn't really changed. I've just adapted to each level."

Lykes' achievements can be appreciated beyond his height.

An ACC all-conference honorable mention inclusion last season, Lykes has a captivating set of skills. His handle is remarkable. His speed and quickness are as good as anyone's in the country. He's a three-level scorer, someone who can catch-and-shoot, shoot effectively off the dribble and from deep, which is to say nothing of his abilities once he gets to the free throw line, where he shot

81.4% last season. If he scores 493 points this season, which isn't a guarantee with an abbreviated schedule in perpetual danger of being interrupted, he'll finish among the top five scorers in program history.

"When he's right and healthy and he's going, there is not a better guard in college basketball," Pitt coach Jeff Capel said.

Lykes' relatively small stature, however, is inseparable from his excellence. It's at the root of his legend, the thing that makes it so difficult, if not outright impossible, to keep one's eyes off him when he's on the court. He shoots strong percentages from the field even as virtually any player that marks him is at least a few inches taller. That same disparity exists on the other end of the floor, where he is disruptive defensively and fouls at a low rate. Oh, and he can dunk, too.

It's not just that Lykes puts up the numbers he does; it's that he does so at what would, for many, be an insurmountable disadvantage.

"If he were 6-5 or 6-6, he'd be Michael Jordan," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said in Dec. 2017, early in Lykes' freshman season.

What Lykes has been able to do, while rare, isn't unprecedented. Even in his own league, there have been figures like 5-foot-3 Muggsy Bogues at Wake Forest and 5-foot-6 Spud Webb at N.C. State.

In his time with the Hurricanes, he has added to those stories, showing a new generation of college basketball fans what can be accomplished with the right combination of skills and physical gifts, regardless of height.

"It's definitely a big part of the reason why I play, just to inspire others to pursue their goals no matter what limitations people try to put on you," Lykes said. "But that's only a part of it. As I've gotten older, it's more that I just want to be the best player I can. That comes from believing in myself. If I put those two together — being motivated to prove others wrong and believing in myself — that's a great combination for me to move forward."

His story isn't quite that of a traditional underdog. He arrived at Miami as a four-star recruit, ranked among the top 100 players nationally in his class. At Gonzaga College High School in Washington, D.C., where he's the program's career scoring leader, he was a two-time Washington Catholic Athletic Conference (WCAC) player of the year and was the Washington Post All-Met player of the year as a senior in 2017.

For all the accolades he collected, there was still a feeling that he was discounted, that, as his college coach said, he would be viewed more as a potential NBA superstar than an

endearing oddity if he were a more traditional size. It has, in some ways, made him more determined, a character trait Lykes said borders on stubbornness.

Those qualities have shaped him as a player, allowing him to lean heavily on his strengths to maximize his on-court effectiveness. His size has its perks, too, allowing him to get lost in the coordinated chaos of games and get low when pestering a player he's defending. It has worked for him throughout his career, giving him a remarkable level of consistency. Whatever level he's playing at, and no matter who he's playing against, he's the guy constantly capable of scoring 20 on any given night.

"To me, he's the same player," said Pitt guard Xavier Johnson, who played against Lykes for two seasons in high school. "He's always been the same player. He's always been him."

Johnson estimated that he and Lykes have played against each other about 20 times, the most memorable of them being a 2017 meeting when the two baby-faced high-schoolers combined for 57 points — Johnson had 32, Lykes 25 — while matching up against one another in Gonzaga's win over Johnson's Bishop O'Connell team.

With Lykes a senior this season, Wednesday's game between the Hurricanes and Panthers could very easily have been the last matchup between the two speedy guards. It's a moment that fate in the form of an ailing ankle prevented, but, as Johnson sees it, there are more that await them.

"Honestly, it feels real, but I feel like it was supposed to happen," Johnson said of the upcoming matchup, before Lykes was ruled out. "We both work hard. We both beat the odds. I'll see him at the next level when he's there."

Given the odds Lykes has overcome to get to this point, it's hard to bet against him. Questions inevitably persist for a 5-foot-7 player hoping to make it in professional basketball, especially in the NBA, where anyone below 6-foot-1 is considered diminutive.

If Lykes is used to anything, though, it's questions about his height.

"It's expected," he said. "A lot of people have questions. Sometimes, I don't really have the answer other than it's just what God blessed me with."

Miami Hurricanes men's hoops coach Jim Larranaga blasts timing of potential transfer rule change

George Michalowski
Pittsburgh Sports Now
Dec. 16, 2020

Just one day before their ACC-opener against Pitt, Miami was forced to practice without seven of their players, including star guard Chris Lykes.

Ahead of Tuesday's practice, head coach Jim Larranaga spoke on his injury-ridden team.

"Well, pretty simply, yesterday and again today we will not have Chris Lykes, Kam McGusty, Rodney Miller, Sam Waardenburg, Earl Timberlake, and today Deng Gak will be out. Oh, and Matt Cross. Those guys did not practice yesterday and will not practice today."

The team will have to deal with all of these recent injuries as well as the season-ending injury to Sam Waardenburg, a 6-foot-10 red-shirt senior forward.

"In all likelihood, we'll have six scholarship players and Willie Herenton, our walk on, available for play tomorrow. We're going to have to change our warmup because we don't have enough guys to do even two-line layups," Larranaga said.

Although he will not practice today, Gak still may play against Pitt. The 6-foot-11 redshirt junior forward has only scored eight total points this season, but his height and length could still pose a problem for Pitt.

"We won't know until later tomorrow afternoon if any of them are available," said Larranaga. "I have my fingers crossed that Deng Gak will be available. He did actually practice a little yesterday, but his knees are bothering him today. We can't afford for him to practice today and those knees get worse, so he's gonna sit out today and hopefully that additional rest will prepare him to at least be functional tomorrow and at least contribute some minutes."

Gak also spoke with the media before practice, saying that his team will be ready despite all of the injuries.

"We're going to be fine," he said. "One of the biggest things Coach L emphasizes to us is his philosophy, which is attitude, commitment, and class. As long as we have the right attitude about things that happen on our team such as injuries, we're good. It's next man up with us. We have people ready to play."

According to Larranaga, incoming transfer Elijah Olaniyi, who is still awaiting an eligibility waiver from the NCAA, will likely start against

Pitt and play a large role if granted eligibility before the game.

"I told him I'm very very hopeful, I have my fingers crossed," Larranaga said about his conversation with Olaniyi. "I hear rumors that transfers, that all transfers in men's and women's basketball are going to be eligible starting at five o'clock tomorrow. So in all likelihood he will be in uniform, he will be in the starting lineup, and he will play as many minutes as he can possibly play. It's very conceivable he could play all 40 minutes tomorrow."

If the rumors that Larranaga is hearing are true, Pitt will also head into the game with some good news. Guard Nike Sibande will look to make his debut in the blue and gold after sitting out the first few games waiting for his eligibility to be granted. For now, both teams will head into conference play not knowing whether or not their wishes will be granted.

With Lykes and McGusty out tomorrow night, Miami will turn to Isaiah Wong to lead the team offensively. Through four games, Wong has averaged 35.25 minutes, 17 points, and 6.25 assists per game. The 6-foot-3 sophomore guard will be tasked with defending Pitt's strong guards and carrying the scoring load for the Hurricanes.

Hobbled Hurricanes lose ACC opener 70-55 to Pitt despite debut of transfer Olaniyi

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Dec. 16, 2020

Au'Diese Toney (15), and Justin Champagnie (10 points, 9 rebounds), who was coming off back-to-back 20-point, 20-rebound games. The Panthers are 5-1.

An NCAA ruling that granted instant eligibility for transfer players could not have come at a better time for the University of Miami men's basketball team.

It came at 5 p.m. Wednesday, exactly one hour before tipoff for the Hurricanes' Atlantic Coast Conference opener against Pitt. Five Miami players – four starters -- were injured and unavailable, leaving just six scholarship players. The new rule allowed Stony Brook transfer guard Elijah Olaniyi to make his debut, but that wasn't enough.

Miami struggled from the perimeter and free throw line and lost 70-55 to the Panthers.

The Hurricanes went 5-of-24 from three-point range (21 percent) and made just 52 percent of their free throws. Over the past three games UM has shot 9-of-60 (15 percent) from three-point range. They were also out-rebounded 43-29.

"We're struggling so bad in every category," said a dejected UM coach Jim Larranaga. "We can't make shots. Can't make free throws, threes. You just can't win games not making open threes and free throws."

Larranaga said with all the injuries, players are taking on bigger roles than usual and putting too much pressure on themselves.

The five players who sat out were Chris Lykes (left ankle), Kameron McGusty (right hamstring), Rodney Miller Jr. (left groin), Earl Timberlake (right ankle), and Sam Waardenburg (left foot, out for season).

Olaniyi started and played 37 minutes. He went 2-for-12 – missed all seven of his three-point attempts – and finished with seven points. He had three assists and two steals.

Isaiah Wong led Miami with 21 points. Anthony Walker added 12 points and 10 rebounds. Harlond Beverly had nine points but went 3-for-11.

"We just have to get back to the gym and shoot better," said Walker.

Larranaga said he hopes to get Lykes and Timberlake back in practice after Christmas. In the meantime, the shorthanded Canes (3-2) face Jacksonville on Saturday in a non-conference game.

Pitt was led by Ithiel Horton (18 points),

Horton, Toney Help Pitt Basketball Beat Short-Handed Miami Hurricanes

AP
Dec. 16, 2020

Audise Toney and Ithiel Horton combined to score 29 of their 33 points in the second half as Pittsburgh pulled away for a 70-55 win over short-handed Miami on Wednesday night.

Horton, a sophomore transfer who averaged 13.2 points and shot 41% from 3-point range at Delaware, had a season-high 18 points — all in the second half — and Toney finished with 15 points. Justin Champagnie had 10 points and nine rebounds for Pitt (5-1, 1-0 ACC).

Harlond Beverly, in a 70-second span, sandwiched a 3-pointer and a layup around a 3 by Isaiah Wong to give Miami a 35-34 lead, its first lead since the game's opening minutes, with 15:45 to play. Horton answered with a 3-pointer to spark a 19-2 run that gave the Panthers a 16-point lead midway through the second half.

Isaiah Wong scored 21 points on 6-of-10 shooting, including 3 of 5 from 3-point range for the Hurricanes (3-2, 0-1). Anthony Walker had 12 points, a career-high 10 rebounds and two blocks. It was the 6-foot-9 sophomore's first career double-double.

Miami went into the game with only seven healthy scholarship players and Matt Cross left the game with about 12 minutes left and did not return. Elijah Olaniyi, a senior transfer from Stony Brook, was granted eligibility about an hour before tipoff. The 6-5 guard had seven points, three assists and two steals in 37 minutes but was 2-of-12 shooting, missing all seven 3-point shots.

The Hurricanes, who went into the game plus-10.2 (No. 36 nationally) in rebound margin, were outrebounded 43-29, shot a season-low 32.7% (17 of 52) from the field and made just 16 of 31 from the free-throw line.

Struggles mounting, Hurricanes fall 70-55 to Pitt to begin ACC

Chris Stock
Inside The U
Dec. 16, 2020

The Hurricanes' shooting struggles resulted in a loss to begin conference play.

Isaiah Wong scored 21 points to lead the Hurricanes, who shot 32.7 percent from the floor and came up short in a 70-55 loss to Pittsburgh on Wednesday.

"We are struggling so bad in every category of the game," head coach Jim Larranaga said.

Anthony Walker scored 12 points and grabbed 10 rebounds in his first career start while Stony Brook transfer Elijah Olaniyi started and scored seven points on 2-of-12 shooting in 37 minutes in his team debut after the NCAA ruled earlier in the day all transfers would be eligible to play this season.

"Elijah missed some shots early that I think he'll make," Larranaga said. "He was 2 for 12 from the field in 37 minutes and until we get guys back healthy, we're going to count on him a lot."

Miami (3-2, 0-1 ACC) played without injured starters Chris Lykes, for the third straight game, and Kameron McGusty along with reserve center Rodney Miller. Earl Timberlake was also out and has yet to make his debut.

The Hurricanes made just 5 of 24 (20.8 percent) from behind the 3-point arc, which was close to their season mark entering the game as they are now shooting 22.2 percent (22 of 99) on the season. They have made 9 of 60 (15.0 percent) over their last three games.

"All I can say is we've got to get in the gym and get better and shoot a better percentage, shoot with more confidence," Walker said. "We'll get better."

Their free-throw shooting was also sub-par at 51.6 percent (16 of 31) and at 62.2 percent on the season are the ACC's worst.

"We just can't make any shots," Larranaga said. "Can't make any free throws, can't make 3s. We ended up 5 of 24 from 3, 20 percent. You just can't win games when you can't make open 3s and free throws."

Wong made 6 of 10 shots from the floor and seemingly kept the Hurricanes in the game at times. The rest of the team combined to make 11 of 42 shots.

After Olaniyi, who averaged 18.0 points a game last season, missed his first six shots

he came up with a steal and a dunk for his first points as a Hurricane and pulled Miami within 25-18 shortly before halftime. The dunk helped ignite a burst as the Hurricanes only trailed 27-25 at the break after falling behind by nine points earlier.

Pittsburgh (5-1, 1-0) blew the game open in the second half behind a 19-2 run after Harlond Beverly's layup gave Miami its first lead at 35-34 since the opening minutes of the game.

Trailing 53-37 after the run with nine minutes left, the Hurricanes never recovered and trailed by double-digits the rest of the way.

"We're putting pressure on ourselves that we don't need to put pressure on," Wong said. "Sometimes it affects our game, but in reality we all have a role to fill and sometimes our role is to play defense and hope that can win us games."

It was the second consecutive loss to Pittsburgh after winning the previous seven.

Miami has just one game scheduled in the next 12 days and will look to get back on track on Saturday (3:30 p.m., FSSUN) against Jacksonville.

MBB Drops ACC Opener to Pittsburgh

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 16, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Down five scholarship players, the University of Miami men's basketball team, fell to Pittsburgh, 70-55, Wednesday night at the Watsco Center to begin ACC play.

Miami (3-2, 0-1 ACC) opened the game with just seven healthy scholarship players, yet still managed to take a second-half lead before the Panthers closed the contest in strong fashion for the win. Sophomore guard Isaiah Wong paced the Hurricanes with a game-high 21 points.

"I thought Pittsburgh did a good job. They got into some early foul trouble, but they had some guys come in off the bench and really help them," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "They're a very good rebounding team. They outrebounded us, 43-29. That's always an issue when a team is able to get on the glass that way. Part of it, though, is we're missing so many shots. We're not shooting the ball well at all."

Both teams had sluggish offensive showings in a back-and-forth first half that saw each team go on a late 7-0 run. The Hurricanes scored nine of the final 11 points of the frame to cut their deficit to two, 27-25, at the intermission.

Miami turned in a strong defensive showing in the opening 20 minutes, including drawing a charge on Pittsburgh (5-1, 1-0 ACC) sophomore forward Justin Champagnie, the team's leading scorer and rebounder, just 3:55 into the game that gave him two fouls and sent him to the bench the rest of the half.

However, the Hurricanes shot 7-of-24 (29.2 percent) from the floor, 0-of-8 from 3-point range and 11-of-20 (55.0 percent) from the stripe before the break.

After the Panthers extended their lead to 34-27 to begin the second half, Miami scored eight points in 70 seconds to go in front, 35-34, with 15:45 left, its first lead since the score was 4-2. The spurt started with back-to-back 3-pointers, the team's first long-range makes of the game.

Pittsburgh, however, countered with a 19-2 run to go in front, 53-37, with 9:14 to go. During that burst, Wong went out briefly with cramps and freshman forward Matt Cross, who did not return, departed with a left leg injury.

The shorthanded Hurricanes were unable to claw their way back and dropped a home game to the Panthers for the first time since Feb. 15, 2014, the teams' first meeting as ACC foes.

"Well, the moment Isaiah went out, we lost the one guy that was putting pressure on them and scoring," Larrañaga said. "He ends up with 21 points; he probably could've had 25 or 30 had he stayed in there. But once he went down, we completely became unglued. Someone had to step up and no one was able to do it."

Wong's season-high point total came on 6-of-10 shooting from the floor, a 3-of-5 clip from deep and a 6-of-9 mark at the line. The three made 3-pointers set a new career high for the Piscataway, N.J., native.

Sophomore forward Anthony Walker, in the first start of his career, logged his first collegiate double-double, notching 12 points and career-high 10 rebounds, the latter number leading all players. He also blocked two shots in a career-best 35 minutes.

Redshirt sophomore guard Ithiel Horton led the Panthers with 18 points, while junior guard/forward Au'Diese Toney scored 15. Miami limited Champagnie, who came in as the reigning ACC Player of the Week after back-to-back 20-20 performances, to 10 points and nine boards.

Despite posting the same number of made free throws as Pittsburgh had attempts, Miami finished plus-five from the line after shooting 16-of-31 (51.6 percent) compared to the Panthers' 11-of-16 (68.8 percent) clip.

Up next for the Hurricanes is their non-conference finale, a matchup with Jacksonville Saturday at the 3:30 p.m. at the Watsco Center, televised live on RSN.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The 2020-21 Miami Hurricanes men's basketball season is presented by First National Bank.

MIAMI HURRICANES POSTGAME NOTES

- The Hurricanes moved to 23-20 all-time against Pittsburgh, including 14-8 at home and 7-3 in Larrañaga's tenure.
- The Hurricanes are now 6-11 all-time in ACC openers, including 4-6 at home and 4-6 under Larrañaga.
- Miami dropped to 11-6 in ACC home open-

ers, including 5-5 in Larrañaga's tenure.

– Larrañaga, who entered the game with the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 663-449 in 37 years as a head coach, including 193-115 in 10 seasons at Miami.

– For the first time this season, Miami used a starting lineup of Walker, Wong, sophomore guard Harlond Beverly, redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks and senior guard Elijah Olaniyi.

– Wednesday marked not only the first start and appearance as a Hurricane for Olaniyi, who was granted eligibility one hour before tip-off following a blanket NCAA waiver for all four-year transfers.

– Senior guard Chris Lykes (left ankle), redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty (right hamstring), redshirt senior center Rodney Miller Jr. (left groin), freshman guard Earl Timberlake (right ankle) and redshirt senior forward Sam Waardenburg (left foot) all missed the game due to injury.

– Cross missed the final 12:09 of action after going down with a left leg injury on fast-break layup attempt.

– Miami missed nine of its first 15 free-throw attempts through the first 18 minutes, before making all five of its attempts in the final two minutes of the opening half.

– The Panthers committed 15 fouls in the first half, while Miami logged just seven.

– Beverly surpassed both 750 minutes played and 50 made free throws at Miami, as well as reached 100 made field goals.

– Brooks reached 100 blocked shots as collegian.

– Wong moved past 250 field-goal attempts and 100 free-throw attempts in his career.

– Wong scored in double figures for the 15th time, including the fifth this season, and scored 20-plus points for the sixth time, including the third this season.

– Olaniyi surpassed four made field goals as a collegian.

– Walker, who set a career high with eight free-throw attempts, scored in double figures for the third time in his career and the second game in a row.

– Redshirt junior forward Deng Gak eclipsed 250 minutes played as a Hurricane.

Shorthanded Hurricanes fall 70-55 to Pittsburgh

Kayson Davis
The Miami Hurricane
Dec. 17, 2020

The shorthanded University of Miami Hurricanes men's basketball team lost their ACC opener, 70-55, to the Pittsburgh Panthers, Wednesday night at the Watsco Center.

Despite entering the game with only seven available scholarship players, Miami (3-2, 0-1 ACC) were able to keep the game close before a late Pittsburgh (5-1, 1-0 ACC) run put the game away.

The Hurricanes were without regular starters Chris Lykes, Kam McGusty and Rodney Miller, all out with injuries, in addition to Sam Waardenburg, who is out for the season, and freshman Earl Timberlake.

Sophomore guard Isaiah Wong led the Canes with 21 points on 6-of-10 shooting from the field. Sophomore forward Anthony Walker also added 12 points and 10 rebounds in his first start of the season for Miami.

The Canes offense struggled to score for most of the night though. Miami finished the game shooting only 32.7 percent from the field, 20.8 percent from 3-point range, and 51.6 percent from the free-throw line.

"Our man to man defense was solid for most of the game. We just can't make any shots, can't make free-throws, can't make threes," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said after the game. "We ended up going 5-for-24 from three, 24 percent. You just can't win games when you can't make open threes and free throws."

Miami is still down five scholarship players due to injuries. The absences of these players have hurt the team's ability to practice, which coach Larrañaga said could be the reason the team is having a hard time finding their shot.

"I would say some of it has to do with the lack of practice, Like legitimate practice. Monday, we did not have six guys and then yesterday Matt Cross had to have this shoulder looked at, so he was not in practice," Larrañaga said "If you think about our team coming into the season, we had five starters returning and four of them are injured; not playing and haven't played in the last several games"

It was a back-and-forth first half as both teams struggled to find their shot. After falling down by nine with just over three minutes to play in the first half, Miami went on a 9-2 run to cut the Panther's lead to 27-25 at halftime.

The Panthers came out strong to start the second half, going on a 7 to 2 run to open their lead back up to seven points but again Miami responded with an 8-0 run to take a 35-34 lead. The Canes didn't hold on to that lead for long though as the Panther went on a 19-2 run to take the lead back. During that run, Miami was without freshmen forward Matt Cross who left the game with a leg injury and did not return. Wong also left the game briefly with cramps before returning to close out the game.

Miami tried to fight their way back into the game the rest of the way but ultimately came up short losing 70-55.

"I feel like as a team we put more pressure on our self that we don't need to put pressure on," Wong said after the game. "Sometimes it affects our game but in reality, we all have a role to fill and sometimes that role is just play some defense and hope that we could win games and make shots and just play good defense as a team, it's all about team effort."

The Hurricanes next game will be a non-conference match-up with the Jacksonville Dolphins Saturday at 3:30 p.m. at the Watsco Center.

On to the Next Opportunity

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 17, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Bruised and battered, the University of Miami men's basketball team is not only missing numerous key players due to injury, but also coming off consecutive defeats.

The Hurricanes played with just six scholarship players for most of their 66-62 setback against FGCU last Saturday and then with only seven for their 70-55 loss against Pittsburgh Wednesday night.

While the last several days have been difficult for Miami (3-2, 0-1 ACC), it is important the team finds a way to remain upbeat.

"We've just got to keep our spirit. We've got to battle. [We have to] figure out game by game—really, day by day—what we can do at practice to prepare," Miami assistant coach Adam Fisher said. "But our focus is, how do we put ourselves in a great position Saturday to play 40 minutes and play Miami basketball? I think nobody feels sorry for us; we can't feel sorry us. We're happy to be able to even play. A lot of teams haven't been able to play games at all. So, for us, we've got to seize the moment and just keep everybody positive and kind of reinforce the positive things that we've seen and not harp on some of the negatives."

To Fisher, even with all four returning starters and a top-40 recruit injured, there are indeed still positives.

Some of those were on display against the Panthers in a game Miami led by one in the second half before a 19-2 Pittsburgh run.

"I think we've seen each guy's ability to rebound. Harland Beverly averaging over seven rebounds a game at his position is great," Fisher shared. "We've seen Isaiah Wong be able to score the ball more efficiently; I think he was 6-of-10 the other night. That's the stuff we've got to harp on. Anthony Walker [had a] double-double, showing that he can go get 10 rebounds. Nysier Brooks had a double-double two games ago. So, I think, showing the guys their positive stuff and telling them, 'Hey, we know you can do this' and just keeping everyone together [is pivotal]."

Wong indeed shot 6-of-10, including posting a 3-of-5 mark from deep, to finish with a season-high 21 points against the Panthers. Walker's double-double featured 12 points and a career-high 10 rebounds.

For Walker, it was the first start of his career, but he was not the only player getting his first opening nod as a Hurricane.

Senior guard Elijah Olaniyi started and played 37 minutes for Miami in a game he was ruled

eligible for just an hour before tip-off when the NCAA issued a blanket waiver for all four-year transfers serving a year of residence. To a Miami team missing so many talented players, his addition could not have come at a better time.

"I think he brings a great sense of leadership; he's played college basketball for three years. He really has a great ability to rebound and share the ball," Fisher said. "I think the number one thing you saw last night was his ability to defend at a high level. It's his first game. No exhibitions for him, no scrimmages, hasn't played probably since March and he had an ankle injury then.

"So, for us, I think it's all about getting him comfortable, getting him playing with our guys. And that will come," Fisher continued. "The shooting will come, we know he can make threes. But I loved his ability to get to the rim; I want to see him finish those. But his defense was really, really good last night. Again, focus on the positives for him."

The first time Olaniyi will head into a game knowing well in advance he is cleared to play is Saturday afternoon. The Hurricanes are set to host Jacksonville at 3:30 p.m. at the Watsco Center to conclude non-conference competition.

Even coming off two losses and with a lengthy layoff preceding Miami's next game, the team's coaching staff is not putting any more emphasis on this contest than it would on any other.

"I think it's just the most important because it's the next game on the schedule. It's another opportunity. Like I said, a lot of teams aren't having that opportunity to play or games get canceled," Fisher explained. "So, for us, it's that opportunity to play and I think our guys know that. So, there's not more pressure because of the 10-day layoff, it's not who we're playing. It could be anybody. It's, 'Hey, this is our next opportunity to get better.' That's why it's a big game, because it's that next game for us."

The Hurricanes are 26-7 all-time versus Jacksonville, but just four of those meetings—all wins—have come since the program rebirth in 1985-86.

Miami is 15-2 all-time at home against the Dolphins and won the teams' lone matchup of 10th-year head coach Jim Larranaga's tenure, a 73-57 triumph in Coral Gables on Nov. 16, 2012.

As much as the Miami coaches not going out of their way to not put extra pressure on this game, they also are not overlooking the Dolphins and feel confident their players will not do so either.

"We didn't overlook Gulf Coast, we didn't overlook Stetson, we didn't overlook Purdue. I think, for us, it is, we've got to play Miami basketball for 40 minutes or however long it takes and, I

think, figure it out with the guys and the bodies that we have," Fisher said. "So, I don't think we overlook anyone. The preparation is the exact same for this game as it was for Purdue. It's the exact same as it would be for Duke and Louisville. Nothing changes with Coach L and that's what makes him so great. Everything is so routine. So, we don't get too high, we don't get too low, we kind of stay stoic.

The Dolphins have already played eight games this year, one of the higher totals in the country, and own a 6-2 record. Those eight outings came in a span of 19 days and then they had five days without a contest before the game at Miami.

Junior forward Dontarius James is Jacksonville's leading scorer thus far, averaging 17.5 points per game. He and his team were picked seventh in the Atlantic Sun preseason poll after posting a 14-18 (7-9) mark last year.

"We've got to limit him. He's a really good player," Fisher said. "They've got guys that can make threes, they've got guys that can drive the ball. They've got three guys, I think, with 30 attempts from the foul line already. So, we've got to defend without fouling, especially since we're limited. They're really well coached ... They've been in some tight games. We know they can score. I think they're averaging 75 points a game, right around there. So, we've just got to defend and try to limit them and just keep getting better."

The meeting between Miami and Jacksonville will be televised live on RSN—that is FOX Sports Sun locally—and FOX Sports GO, with Bob Rathbun and Grant Long on the call. A full affiliate is available [HERE](#) and it can also be seen on WatchESPN, subject to blackout, [HERE](#).

Joe Zagacki and Danny Rabinowitz will have the radio broadcast on 560 The Joe WQAM [HERE](#), while action can also be heard on WVUM 90.5 FM [HERE](#) and in Spanish on WMYM 990 AM [HERE](#). Live stats for the contest can be found [HERE](#).

After playing Jacksonville, Miami has 10 days before its next contest, a Dec. 29 outing at Virginia Tech at Cassell Coliseum in Blacksburg, Va., set for 6 p.m. on ACC Network to begin the Hurricanes' road slate.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CanesHoops on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

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