

Miami Men's Basketball Clips

2020-21

Six Weeks of Work

By Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Oct. 13, 2020

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.

Hurricanes' shooting woes lead to 66-62 loss to FGCU

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Dec. 12, 2020

Perimeter shooting was a concern heading into the season and has been an issue through four games.

Nysier Brooks scored 13 points and grabbed 15 rebounds, but the Miami Hurricanes fell short in a 66-62 loss to FGCU on Saturday.

"A very frustrating game for us," head coach Jim Larranaga said.

Miami (3-1) was plagued by poor shooting from behind the arc, making just 3 of 19 attempts a game after hitting just 1 of 17. The Hurricanes are shooting 22.7 percent (17 of 75) from deep this season.

"We really didn't shoot the ball well at all," Larranaga said. "I think what's happened to us mentally is when we miss a few shots guys hesitate and when you're a shooter it's basically like tying your shoe. You don't think about it, you're just tying your shoe and move on. Shooting is the same way and if you think about if I should shoot it or shouldn't I shoot it then it's very hard to make that shot. Shooting is rhythm. Right now we've got nobody making 3s."

Isaiah Wong led all scorers with 20 points and Anthony Walker added 12 for the Hurricanes, who lost for only the third time at home in 67 games since 1985 against Florida non-power five conference schools.

Despite the poor outside shooting and starting the game 1 of 17 before a pair of late 3s by Wong, the Hurricanes continued to hoist up shots against a zone they were having success with inside the paint with 40 points and making 55.0 percent (22 of 40 shots) inside the arc.

Larranaga defended the outside shooting attempts.

"Our big guys are not the kind of skilled players that you can just pound it inside," Larranaga said. "Nysier Brooks I thought perhaps played his best offensive game and we did try to go to him to start the second half because the zone is so packed in, the 3-point shots are available. It's very hard to tell someone when you're wide open from 3 not to shoot it."

Wong (2-7), McGusty (1-1), Beverly (0-5), Walker (0-3), Cross (0-2), and Willie Herenton (0-1) combined for the 3-for-17 shooting performance.

The Hurricanes played without Chris Lykes (ankle) for the second straight game and Kameron McGusty, Tuesday's star with 18 points in the comeback win over Purdue, only played the first five minutes before sustaining an apparent right hamstring/quadricep injury, leaving the Hurricanes with only two scholarship guards available the rest of the way. McGusty did return gingerly for the game's final two seconds in case they needed a 3.

"With Kam it just happened tonight and all I know is he pulled a hamstring," Larranaga said. "To me that impacts whether you can run and obviously the game of basketball is like a race track and you've got to be able to run up and down. Unfortunately he's probably out a while. Chris Lykes is making some progress. Whether he can make it back by Wednesday--the issue is if you haven't even practiced, how effective can you be when you haven't been on the court for 10 or 12 days."

Backup center Rodney Miller (left leg) only played two minutes in the first half and Matt Cross was playing through an injury.

"Matt Cross really couldn't function," Larranaga said. "His right arm has been bothering him for the last 10 days and because of that he's not been able to shoot the ball and he's been very hesitant to shoot the ball because of the pain that it causes."

The injuries left the Hurricanes with six scholarship players and a pair of walk-ons for the second half.

"We're a little short-handed," Brooks said. "Don't get me wrong, they played very well, compliments to them, but we started off not sharing the ball as much as we like as a team and we shot 16 percent from 3. It's very hard to win like that."

Miami will hope to have the injured players back for their ACC opener on Wednesday (6:00 p.m., ACCN) against Pittsburgh.

The teams were knotted at 28 at halftime. FGCU (3-1) pulled ahead 39-34 with 13 minutes left after a 3-pointer by Franco Miller Jr., the Eagles' ninth 3 of the game.

The game was tied at 52 with 3:25 left after Walker made a layup.

Walker also hit a pair of free throws to pull Miami within 57-56 with two minutes left, but with a chance to take the lead on the following possession he turned the ball over in the lane.

FGCU's Luis Rolon then hit a pair of free

throws with 1:30 left for a 59-56 advantage.

Walker had a chance at 3-point attempt, but drove hard into the lane instead and picked up a charge with 1:04 left.

On cue, FGCU's Dakota Rivers followed with a 3-pointer for a 62-56 lead. It was his fifth 3 of the game and the 13th for the Eagles.

Needing a 3 more than ever, Wong delivered with 29.8 seconds left to cut the deficit to 62-59.

Colon hit two more free throws and Wong hit another 3 with 3.2 seconds left to pull within 64-62.

Cyrus Largie hit two free throws with two seconds left to seal the win for the Eagles.

FGCU shot 13 of 30 (43.3 percent) from behind the arc

"A lot of credit goes to Florida Gulf Coast with the way they shot the 3, outscoring us by 30 points from the 3-point line," Larranaga said.

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.

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

MBB Defeats Jacksonville, 73-64

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 19, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Behind the outstanding player of a pair of sophomores, the University of Miami men's basketball team topped Jacksonville, 73-64, Saturday afternoon in its non-conference finale.

Guard Isaiah Wong and forward Anthony Walker combined for 43 points for Miami (4-2, 0-1 ACC), which led nearly wire-to-wire at the Watsco Center.

"Well, a number of things became very important. Number one, we went 21-of-25 from the free-throw line. That's what allowed us to win the game," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "We outrebounded them significantly; that was critical. We got a lot of help from guys off the bench."

The Hurricanes controlled play for the majority of the first half and did not trail after the first three minutes. Back-to-back right-corner 3-pointers by freshman forward Matt Cross and sophomore guard Harlond Beverly to close the frame gave Miami a 37-26 edge at the intermission.

Wong scored 15 points, tied for his second-most in any half, in the opening 20 minutes, while Walker added 10, his most in a half as a collegian. Additionally, as a team, Miami went 10-of-10 at the stripe in the opening session.

The Hurricanes' strong play to open the second half helped them build a 52-38 lead, but Jacksonville (6-3) countered with 15-4 spurt in just 4:28 of play to pull within three, 56-53, with 9:02 to go.

Miami, though, did not let the Dolphins draw any closer and extended its lead back up to eight with 3:01 remaining, en route to the victory, which snapped a two-game skid.

Wong scored a season-high 25 points on 9-of-18 shooting, including a 3-of-7 mark from deep, tying his career best in makes in both categories. He added nine rebounds to finish just shy of a double-double.

Walker tallied a career-high 18 points and a career-high-tying 10 boards, the latter mark leading all players, to post his second consecutive double-double after logging none in his first 29 collegiate appearances. The Baltimore native went 8-of-8 from the stripe, setting a new top mark in makes, and recorded a career-high-tying three blocks.

"Anthony Walker had perhaps his best game

as a Hurricane ... and was a real factor at both ends of the court," Larrañaga said. "Isaiah was also terrific on both ends of the court ... and played outstanding defense on the ball. He's really a hard guy to guard; he can really score the ball."

Making his Miami debut after missing the first five games with a right ankle injury, freshman guard Earl Timberlake totaled 12 points, five rebounds, two assists and one steal in 26 minutes of action. He went 5-of-6 from the free-throw line in the victory and scored 10 of his points in the second half.

Junior forward Dontarius James finished as the lone Dolphin in double figures, as he scored 19 points before fouling out with 7:55 to play.

The Hurricanes, who made their first 12 free throws through 24 minutes, 84.0 percent from the line, while Jacksonville posted just a 40.0 percent (4-of-10) ledger. They also finished with a 49-26 edge on the glass, good for a plus-23 margin that is the team's highest total in nearly five full years.

Miami now has nine days without a game before heading to Blacksburg, Va., for its road opener, a Dec. 29 matchup with Virginia Tech, set for 6 p.m. on ACC Network, live from Cassell Coliseum.

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 27-7 all-time against Jacksonville, including 16-2 at home and 2-0 in Larrañaga's tenure.

– Larrañaga, who entered the game with the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 664-449 in 37 years as a head coach, including 194-115 in 10 seasons at Miami.

– With 664 career victories, Larrañaga moved into a tie with 10-time national champion John Wooden for No. 36 on the all-time Division I wins list.

– Since the program rebirth in 1985-86, Miami is now 85-8 against in-state non-Power Five programs, including 65-3 at home and 17-3 under Larrañaga.

– For the second game in a row, Miami used a starting lineup of Beverly, Walker, Wong, redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks and senior guard Elijah Olaniyi.

– The Hurricanes once again played without senior guard Chris Lykes (left ankle), redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty (right hamstring) and redshirt senior forward Sam Waardenburg (left foot, season).

– Timberlake entered the game 3:56 into Saturday's affair, scored his first points just under two minutes later and hit his first field goal, a 3-pointer, with 14:27 remaining in the affair.

– Redshirt senior center Rodney Miller Jr., who missed Wednesday's contest against Pittsburgh with a left groin injury, departed 5:48 into the game with a right leg injury and did not return.

– The Hurricanes' 10-of-10 mark from the free-throw line in the first half marked the 12th time since joining the ACC (2004-05) they had at least 10 makes in a frame without a miss, doing so for the first time since 2/19/20 at Virginia Tech when they did so in both halves.

– The Hurricanes have now logged a rebounding margin of plus-20 or greater in two of their first six games after going without doing so since 12/22/15 at La Salle (51-24).

– Walker not only finished 8-of-8 at the stripe, but went 6-of-6 in the first 8:01 of play to already pass his prior top mark in makes, which was five, set on 1/25/20 at North Carolina.

– Walker, who eclipsed 50 made field goals at Miami, finished with double figures for the fourth time in his career, including the third consecutive game, and with 10-plus rebounds for the second time, doing so in back-to-back games.

– Walker's prior top point total in a game was 14, registered on 1/25/20 at North Carolina, while his previous best in a half was eight, recorded in the second half of each of the last two games (12/12/20 vs. FGCU and 12/16/20 vs. Pittsburgh).

– Wong tallied double-digit points for the 16th time, including the sixth in as many outings this year, and posted 20-plus points for the seventh time, including the fourth in 2020-21.

– The prior times Wong, who surpassed 350 points in his career, scored at least 15 points in a half were in the first session on 2/8/20 at eighth-ranked Florida State (15) and the second frame on 1/25/20 at North Carolina (17) in his first collegiate start.

Isaiah Wong scores 25, Earl Timberlake sparks in 73-64 win

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Dec. 19, 2020

The Hurricanes built a 14-point lead in the second half, but had to hold on down the stretch to avoid their third straight loss.

Isaiah Wong scored 25 points, Anthony Walker added 18 points and 10 rebounds, and the Miami Hurricanes won 73-64 over Jacksonville on Saturday.

"I think we're very fortunate to come away with the victory," head coach Jim Larranaga said.

Freshman Earl Timberlake made his debut and scored 12 points in 25 minutes off the bench. He also grabbed five rebounds and dished out two assists.

"We got a nice contribution in his first game as a Miami Hurricane," Larranaga said. "His presence on the court, some of his passes, his ball movement, his athletic ability I thought was very helpful."

Miami (4-2) played without Chris Lykes (left ankle) for the fourth straight game and Kameron McGusty (hamstring) for the second straight game, but they could return when Miami plays its next game on Dec. 29 at Virginia Tech when they play on the road for the first time this season.

"I'm very confident about that if they don't re-injure themselves," Larranaga said. "One of the things about being injured and sitting out for two weeks, you're anxiousness to come back and get in shape when you're not quite in the kind of shape you were before the injury. If we could have on the 26th and 27th two really good hard practices and guys felt good heading up to Virginia Tech, that would be a good sign."

The win concluded the Hurricanes' non-conference schedule and stopped a two-game skid.

"Coming into this game we were all hyped," said Wong, who is averaging a team-best 19.0 points per game. "It showed yesterday. We were moving the ball in practice, getting open looks, dunking the ball, and I felt like it translated to this game."

Harlond Beverly hit a 3 to cap a 9-2 run to end

the first half as the Hurricanes took a 37-26 lead into the break.

"I think our defense in the first half was very good, but we really struggled to start the second half in defending the 3-point shot," Larranaga said. "They played a great second half."

Miami pushed its lead to 14 at 52-38 in the second half, but the lead was cut all the way down to three on a 15-4 run by the Dolphins.

A layup by Timberlake and a three-point play by Wong halted Jacksonville's run and gave Miami a 61-53 advantage.

"In the last couple of minutes we gave the ball to Isaiah Wong and he delivered in almost every opportunity," Larranaga said.

Jacksonville pulled within 68-64 with 1:23 left after a layup by Bryce Workman, who scored all 14 of his points in the second half.

Timberlake made 3 of 4 free throws, recorded a steal, and had a put-back layup to seal the win for the Hurricanes.

"Down the stretch we made some free throws," Larranaga said. "At least we were able to stay out in front. We never fell behind, which we were very much in danger of late in the game."

The Hurricanes made 21 of 25 free-throw attempts. They entered the game last in the ACC at 62.2 percent.

"I was very happy to see our guys go 21 of 25 from the foul line," Larranaga said.

Miami shot 38.3 percent (23 of 60) from the floor, 30.0 percent (6 of 20) from 3.

"We've still got some things to work on," Walker said. "It was a battle towards the end, but we pulled it out."

Freshman Earl Timberlake makes debut, helps lead UM to 73-64 win over Jacksonville

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Dec. 19, 2020

The Miami Hurricanes got an early Christmas gift on Saturday. Freshman swingman Earl Timberlake, who missed the first five games of the season with an ankle injury, made his highly anticipated debut a week earlier than expected.

Timberlake gave the hobbled Hurricanes a big boost and helped lead UM to a 73-64 victory over Jacksonville at the Watsco Center. He played 25 minutes and scored 12 points, including the final five points of the game. He also grabbed five rebounds, had two assists, and made numerous slick passes — a few of which his teammates were not ready for.

Sophomore guard Isaiah Wong led the Canes with 25 points on 9-of-18 shooting and had nine rebounds. Entering the game, Wong was averaging 17.8 points per game, fifth best in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Anthony Walker recorded his second consecutive double-double. He went 5 of 10 for a career-high 18 points with nine rebounds, three blocks and a steal.

Timberlake is known for his ball handling, slashing style and defense, and the 6-6 Washington, D.C.-area native showed flashes of that every time he was on the floor.

He entered the game in the fourth minute, and got a quick introduction to college basketball when Jacksonville's leading scorer Dontarius James — an Xavier transfer — shot a three-pointer over Timberlake's outstretched arms.

But it wasn't long before Timberlake showed why he was such a coveted prospect out of powerhouse DeMatha High School. Two minutes later, he drove the lane without hesitation, drawing a foul, and calmly sank two free throws. Early in the second half, he made a three-pointer to give Miami a 50-37 lead.

UM coaches clearly trust Timberlake, as they left him in the game when Jacksonville closed to within three late in the game, and he responded with a layup. With one minute remaining and the Dolphins closing the gap again, he drew another foul and made a pair of free throws to give UM a six-point cushion.

He ended the afternoon with an exclamation point. With 34 seconds to go, he stole the ball, dribbled across the court, drove the lane and unselfishly made an around-the-back pass to Elijah Olaniyi under the basket. Olaniyi

missed the layup, Timberlake grabbed the rebound and put the ball in.

"We got a nice contribution from Earl in his first game as a Miami Hurricane," UM coach Jim Larranaga said. "His presence on the court, some of his passes, his ball movement, his athletic ability were very helpful.

"He is a great competitor and is going to do everything possible to win the game. He is involved in almost every situation, defense, rebounding, handling the ball, shooting, getting other guys involved. He's very, very active at both ends of the court. He's rusty. It's not like you've seen the best of Earl Timberlake. He's a high-octane player."

Walker said Timberlake brought "a lot of toughness and energy" to the team.

Wong added: "Earl is great to play with. He passes the ball, can shoot, can lay the ball in. He's a big stocky guard who can guard any position, which really helps us."

The Canes had been struggling from three-point range, going 9-of-60 (15 percent) in the previous three games. But they found their shooting touch against the Dolphins. Miami made four three-pointers in a row to close out the first half — two by Wong, one by freshman Matt Cross and one by sophomore guard Harlond Beverly.

Miami also improved at the free-throw line, going 21 of 25. UM, which improved to 4-2, has a 10-day break before its next game Dec. 29 at Virginia Tech. Larranaga said he hopes to have guards Chris Lykes (ankle) and Kam McGusty (hamstring) back by then.

James led Jacksonville with 19 points (7-of-10 shooting) before fouling out with seven minutes left in the game. Bryce Workman added 14. The Dolphins dropped to 6-3.

Wong, Walker Lead Miami Basketball Over Jacksonville

AP

Dec. 19, 2020

Isaiah Wong scored a season-high 25 points, Anthony Walker added career highs with 18 points and 10 rebounds, and Miami beat Jacksonville 73-64 on Saturday.

Jacksonville (6-3) cut a 14-point deficit early in the second half and pulled to 68-64 with 1:23 remaining, but then missed its last two shots and committed a turnover.

Wong hit three 3-pointers and scored 15 points in the first half, and finished 9-of-18 shooting with nine rebounds. Walker made 5 of 10 field goals and all eight of his free throws, and matched a career best with three blocks. Walker also had a double-double (12 points, 10 rebounds) in Wednesday's loss to Pittsburgh.

Highly touted freshman Earl Timberlake returned from an ankle injury to make his season debut and scored 10 of his 12 points in the second half for Miami (4-2).

Dontarius James, a junior transfer from Xavier, made five 3-pointers and scored 19 points to lead Jacksonville, but fouled out with 7:55 remaining. Bryce Workman added 14 points. The Dolphins were outrebounded 49-26 and made just 4 of 10 free throws.

Miami coach Jim Larranaga is now tied with John Wooden with 664 career victories, 36th on the all-time wins list. The Hurricanes are 112-37 (.752) at the Watsco Center in Larranaga's nine seasons.

Larranaga said he expects injured starters Chris Lykes and Kameron McGusty to return for the Hurricanes' next game Dec. 29 at Virginia Tech.

Shorthanded Hurricanes lose senior center Miller for season ahead of second ACC game

Wyatt Kopleman
InsideTheU
Dec. 27, 2020

The Miami Hurricanes men's basketball program has lost yet another scholarship player due to injury just six games through the 2020-2021 season.

This time the arrow points to redshirt senior center Rodney Miller Jr., who started in 28 of the team's 31 games last season while averaging 7.2 points and five and a half rebounds per game. The Oak Hill Academy (Va.) graduate was looking to have a sound impact from a leadership standpoint this season, despite relinquishing his starting center role to Cincinnati transfer center Nysier Brooks.

"We're disappointed for Rodney, who has worked so hard, both on and off the court, to improve his game over the past few seasons," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "He's in good hands with our medical staff and we look forward to seeing him make a full recovery."

Miller has remained one of five players to have missed one or more games this season, despite Miami (4-2) having played six games total with only one of them against an ACC opponent (Pittsburgh). The team has also lost redshirt senior forward Sam Waardenburg, their leading rebounder from last year (six rebounds per game), during the preseason due to a foot injury suffered in practice.

"Right now, we're just beat up," said Larrañaga prior to the team's current, nine-day layoff. "We're shorthanded and it's hard to prepare when you don't have enough guys to really practice correctly."

The hobbled Hurricanes have also been without starting guards Chris Lykes (ankle sprain) and Kameron McGusty (leg), two of their three leading scorers from last season. UM's 10-year head coach hopes to see his seasoned backcourt duo return sooner or later, as the program takes their first road trip of the season to Virginia Tech (Blacksburg, Va.) on Tuesday.

With another frontcourt contributor absent, Larrañaga and the team will have to rely heavily on Brooks, the team's rebounding leader with seven per game, as well as red-shirt junior Deng Gak, in order to pass a critical test against the No. 24 Hokies (7-1, 1-0 ACC).

"We've always approached every game exactly the same way, whether we're home or away," Larrañaga said. "We don't put much

credence into that [being] different. You need to be prepared. The most important thing is to put together a really good game plan and be able to execute it. The players have to know the game plan, understand the game plan, and execute the game plan as well as possible, whether you're at home or away."

Miami defeated Virginia Tech for the 14th time under Larrañaga on Feb. 19, 2020, after a triple-overtime duel in which the Canes scored 102 points. Sophomore guard Isaiah Wong, who had then just begun to see his first glimpses of consistent action, willed his team on an 11-2 run to force the game into overtime. Lykes and McGusty combined for 44 points, as they seek to get back on track at Cassell Coliseum.

Miami and Virginia Tech's matchup will be broadcasted on the ACC Network at 6:00 p.m on Tuesday.

Back in Action

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 27, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – For a team dealing with myriad injuries, nine days without a game is a welcome change of pace.

Five members of the University of Miami men's basketball team have missed at least one contest this season due to injury, while several others have played through pain.

"Right now, we're just beat up," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "...We're shorthanded and it's hard to prepare when you don't have enough guys to really practice correctly."

After the holiday respite, though, the Hurricanes are hoping to have more healthy bodies heading into the ACC gauntlet, but it remains to be seen exactly who will take the court Tuesday when Miami faces No. 24/RV Virginia Tech.

One Miami (4-2, 0-1 ACC) player who has already returned to the hardwood is freshman guard Earl Timberlake, a consensus top-40 recruit who missed the first five games of the year with a right ankle injury.

The Washington, D.C., native made his collegiate debut Dec. 19 against Jacksonville, finishing with 12 points, five rebounds, two assists and one steal in 26 minutes of action, helping the Hurricanes to a 73-64 victory at the Watsco Center.

"Earl is a guy who can be a major contributor at both ends of the court," Larrañaga said. "He plays multiple positions. He is very good at attacking the defense. He's very good at defending multiple positions and he can rebound."

Timberlake, who went 3-of-5 from the floor and 5-of-6 at the line, was one of three Hurricanes in the double figures for Miami against the Dolphins.

Sophomore guard Isaiah Wong, the ACC's second-leading scorer, tallied 25 points and nine rebounds in the win. Sophomore forward Anthony Walker notched his second consecutive double-double by posting a career-high 18 points and career-high-tying 12 rebounds, aiding Miami to a plus-23 margin on the glass.

Up next for Miami, though, is a different type of game than its last one. Rather than a non-conference outing at home, it is an away contest against a league foe.

Despite hitting the road for the first time in 2020-21, the Hurricanes will not change much about how they get ready for their next game, which is set for 6 p.m. at Cassell Coliseum in Blacksburg, Va.

"We've always approached every game exactly the same way, whether we're at home or away. We don't put much credence into that [being] different. You need to be prepared," Larrañaga said. "...Right now, there are no fans or very few fans in the arenas, so that shouldn't be a factor. The most important thing is to put together a really good game plan and be able to execute it. The players have to know the game plan, understand the game plan and execute the game plan as well as possible, whether you're at home or away."

For Miami, this matchup with Virginia Tech is the first of 19 straight contests against conference opponents. That equals the mark set just last year for the longest consecutive streak of league games in program history.

Now in his 10th year coaching in arguably the best conference in the country, Larrañaga knows what it takes to win in the ACC.

"Well, the first thing you need is talent at almost every position. You have to have a point guard, you have to have bigs, you have to have shooters," the two-time ACC Coach of the Year said. "Secondly, you need experience. That comes in several different forms. It can be someone who has played a ton of minutes or it can be someone who's transferred in who's got experience from another school.

"...You need talent, you need experience, you need good game preparation and you need some intelligence of how to use your talent," Larrañaga added.

One of the most memorable wins of Larrañaga's tenure coaching in the ACC actually came last season at Cassell Coliseum against the Hokies.

Miami registered a 102-95 triple-overtime triumph on Feb. 19, 2020, battling back from a late deficit in regulation and each of the first two extra sessions. The Hurricanes went 29-of-32 (90.6 percent) at the line after making their first 25 attempts, plus set a program record in ACC play with 55 rebounds.

It was the first triple-overtime game in program history and the first by any teams in ACC competition since Dec. 20, 2003. It was also, Larrañaga says, the first in his entire coaching career, which dates back to 1971.

"We played very, very well for a long time and got a substantial lead, double figures. And then Virginia Tech played really well, came back and took the lead late. We were behind by seven points with just a few minutes to go," Larrañaga recalled. "Our guys responded very well at both ends of the court. We were able to stick together and grind it out in each of the overtimes. Several of our players had career highs. Isaiah Wong had 27 points, a career high. Keith Stone had 18 rebounds, a career high.

"In a game like that, you need people to step up and every one of our guys did," Larrañaga continued. "Kam McGusty made a game-tying three-point play ... a drive, got fouled and still made the shot to put the game into overtime. Chris Lykes made a driving left-hand layup to keep us ahead in the third overtime. There were just a lot of great plays."

That meeting was the 41st all-time between Miami and Virginia Tech, with the Hurricanes holding a 24-17 edge. Miami, which owns an 8-9 mark on the road versus the Hokies, is 14-7 in the series during Larrañaga's tenure, including 11-5 in the last 16 meetings.

As for this iteration of Virginia Tech, Larrañaga knows his team has a lot to contend with when it takes the court Tuesday night.

"They're a very well-disciplined, very experienced team," he said. "They have their starting point guard back, who's a veteran. They've got their two wings back from last year. Their leading scorer and five-man is a returner who [sat out last year and has] been given a lot of responsibility as a starter now and is living up to all that responsibility. He's having a very good year."

That talented big man is redshirt junior forward Keve Aluma, who is averaging team bests in points (14.8) and rebounds (6.8) per game for the Hokies, who enter at 7-1 (1-0).

Virginia Tech, the first ranked foe Miami has faced this year, was picked No. 11 in the ACC preseason poll after going 16-16 (7-13) during the 2019-20 campaign.

The Hurricanes' final contest of 2020 will be televised live on ACC Network HERE, with Jay Alter and Paul Biancardi on the call. Danny Rabinowitz will have the radio broadcast on WKIS-HD2 99.9 FM HERE. Live stats for the contest can be found HERE.

Following Miami's outing at Virginia Tech is a Jan. 2 matchup with Clemson at the Watsco Center to open the 2021 slate, with action set to be televised on RSN, beginning at 2 p.m.

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MBB Comeback Bid Falls Short, 80-78, at No. 24 Virginia Tech

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 29, 2020

BLACKSBURG, Va. – The University of Miami men's basketball team trimmed a 17-point second half lead down to one in the final minute Tuesday night at Cassell Coliseum, but could not rally all the way back.

Miami (4-3, 0-2 ACC) dropped an 80-78 decision to No. 24/RV Virginia Tech in a game it played without four injured returning starters, two of whom are out for the year. Five Hurricanes scored in double figures, led by 16 apiece from freshman forward Matt Cross and sophomore guard Isaiah Wong, whose 3-pointer in the final seconds went halfway down before bouncing out.

"I thought that was a very well-played college basketball game between two serious competitors," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "Our players fought back from a double-digit deficit and had a shot to win the game. A lot of guys stepped up."

Both teams had 30 points through the first 15:45 minutes, but Virginia Tech (8-1, 2-0 ACC) went on a 12-0 run in the next two minutes. Wong hit a 3-pointer at the other end that was the final basket of the half, as the Hokies took a 42-33 edge into the locker room.

Virginia Tech got 19 first-half points from redshirt junior forward Keve Aluma and posted a 9-2 edge in second-chance points.

The Hokies scored 14 of the first 20 points of the second half, taking a 56-39 lead with 16:05 to play. Their lead sat at 13, 66-53, with under 10 minutes to go, but Miami went on an 8-0 run, capped by an alley-oop dunk and 3-pointer by Wong, to make it 66-61 with 5:44 to play.

The Hurricanes trailed by seven with under 50 seconds left, but continued to storm back and cut the deficit to one, 79-78, on a 3-pointer by sophomore guard Harlond Beverly with 28 ticks to go. After the Hokies split a pair of free throws, Wong took a 3-pointer with five seconds left that rattled in and out, as Virginia Tech held on for the win.

"We never hung our heads. We had a good plan," Larrañaga said of the near comeback. "Last year, we were down seven [here with 4:26] to go, came back and won the game in triple-overtime. I reminded our players of that and told them, 'There's plenty of time. Don't look at the clock; play the game. Force turnovers, foul them and force them to make

some pressure-packed free throws. Matt Cross stepped up and hit some critical shots, we got a couple of good steals. It was a very well-played game."

Cross' career-high point total came on 6-of-8 shooting from the floor, including a 4-of-6 mark from 3-point range. Wong, meanwhile, connected on three 3-pointers for the third game in a row after never previously reaching that total.

Beverly totaled a season-best 14 points, a career-high nine rebounds and career-high-tying six assists, the latter mark leading all players. Senior guard Elijah Olaniyi notched a season-best 11 points and redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks added 10, while redshirt junior forward Deng Gak scored a career-high eight.

Aluma finished with a game-high 26 points on 9-of-16 shooting for the Hokies, adding six rebounds, four assists and a game-best three blocks. Redshirt junior forward Justyn Mutts logged 15 points and nine boards, while redshirt sophomore guard Tyrece Radford had 13 and nine, respectively. Sophomore guard Jalen Cone chipped in 12 points for the home team.

"Keve Aluma, the Virginia Tech big man, really had himself a great game," Larrañaga said. "He was very, very hard to stop."

Miami dished out 20 assists, as well as shot 53.6 percent (30-of-56) from the floor, 40.0 percent (10-of-25) from 3-point range and 80.0 percent (8-of-10) at the line, each mark better than it allowed. However, it committed a season-high 19 turnovers and forced just 11.

The Hurricanes now open their 2021 slate Jan. 2 at 2 p.m. against Clemson at the Watsco Center, 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 24-18 all-time against Virginia Tech, including 8-10 on the road and 14-8 in Larrañaga's tenure.
– Larrañaga, who entered the game with the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 664-450 in 37 years as a head coach, including 194-116 in 10 seasons at

Miami.

– The Hurricanes are now 29-40 all-time in road openers, including 6-4 in Larrañaga's tenure, 10-7 since joining the ACC in 2004-05 and 3-8 versus ranked foes (2-1 under Larrañaga).

– Miami moved to 6-11 all-time in ACC road openers, including 4-6 under Larrañaga and 1-9 against ranked teams (1-4 in Larrañaga's tenure).

– For the third game in a row, Miami used a starting lineup of Beverly, Brooks, Olaniyi, Wong and sophomore forward Anthony Walker.

– The Hurricanes once again played without senior guard Chris Lykes (left ankle), redshirt senior center Rodney Miller Jr. (right knee, season), redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty (right hamstring) and redshirt senior forward Sam Waardenburg (left foot, season).

– Miami posted 20 assists in a game for the 15th time in Larrañaga's 10-year tenure, including the sixth in ACC, and did so for the first time since 2/23/19 against Georgia Tech and for the first time on the road since 1/21/18 at NC State.

– The Hurricanes dropped to 68-9 (30-8 ACC) when recording 15-plus assists under Larrañaga and suffered their first setback when tallying at least 20.

– Miami fell to 78-9 (26-4 ACC) in Larrañaga's tenure when shooting at least 50 percent from the floor.

– The Hurricanes shot 50 percent from the field in both halves for the first time since 2/12/20 versus Boston College.

– Olaniyi, who surpassed 1,150 points as a collegian, registered double-figure points for the 60th time and first at Miami.

– Beverly, who eclipsed 100 assists in his career, logged double-digit points for the 11th time, including the second this year, as well as recorded five-plus assists for the seventh time, including the third in 2020-21.

– Beverly set a new career best for rebounds in an ACC game and connected on multiple 3-pointers in a league play for the first time.

– Gak's prior career high in points was five, registered 12/1/18 against Yale at American Airlines Arena in Miami.

– Cross, who moved past 50 points in his young career, scored in double figures for the third time, including the first as a reserve.

– Wong tallied his 17th double-digit scoring performance, including his seventh in as many games this season.

– Brooks, who surpassed both 500 points and 400 rebounds as a collegian, notched his 16th double-figure point total and second of the year.

– Guard Earl Timberlake posted his first five-assist outing, the first by a Miami freshman since Beverly logged six on 2/12/20 against Boston College.

UM basketball team rallies from 17 points down, but falls short 80-78 to Virginia Tech

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Dec, 29, 2020

While the University of Miami football team was playing in the Cheez-It Bowl Tuesday night, the Hurricanes men's basketball team lost a heartbreaker 80-78 on the road at 24th-ranked Virginia Tech.

The Canes rallied from a 17-point second-half deficit and had a chance to win in the closing seconds, but Isaiah Wong's three-point attempt from the top of the key bounced in and out.

"That was a great college basketball game," said UM coach Jim Larrañaga. "Our guys gave it everything they had. Virginia Tech is a very good team, top 25 team, well-deserved... All in all, if you get a kind of open three-point shot at the top of the key to win on the road against a Top 25 team, you take that."

Wong and freshman forward Matt Cross led Miami with 16 points apiece, including a pair of three-pointers at critical moments in the second half. Wong's three cut the Hokies' lead to five with under nine minutes to go, and Cross hit a three from the corner to trim the lead to 77-73 with 49 seconds to go.

Cross went 6-of-8 on the night with four three-pointers and managed an off-balance assist on a Harlond Beverly three pointer that closed the gap to one point with 26 seconds to go. Beverly ended the night with 14 points, nine rebounds and six assists with five turnovers. Elijah Olaniyi scored 11, and center Nysier Brooks added 10 points on 5-of-5 shooting. But UM committed a season-high 19 costly turnovers and got to the free throw line just 10 times.

"We never hung our heads. We had a good plan," Larrañaga said. "Last year, we were down seven (to Virginia Tech with 4:26 to go), came back and won the game in triple-overtime. I reminded our players of that and told them, 'There's plenty of time. Don't look at the clock; play the game. Force turnovers, foul them and force them to make some pressure-packed free throws. Matt Cross stepped up and hit some critical shots, we got a couple of good steals. It was a very well-played game."

The Hurricanes had no answer for Keve Aluma, who led the Hokies (8-1, 2-0 ACC) with a career-high 26 points. His free throws in the final minute sealed the win for Virginia Tech. "Aluma was a stud, he made so many big shots," Larrañaga said. The Hokies will enter 2021 atop the conference standings.

Miami (4-3, 0-2 ACC) has lost three of its past four games and is missing key players. Pre-season All-ACC guard Chris Lykes missed his fifth game with an ankle injury. Guard Kam McGusty has missed three games with a hamstring injury but has resumed limited practices. The Hurricanes are back home Saturday against Clemson.

No. 24 Virginia Tech holds off Miami Hurricanes 80-78 in ACC battle

AP
Dec. 29, 2020

BLACKSBURG, VA. — Picked to finish 11th in the ACC in the league's preseason poll, upstart Virginia Tech will enter 2021 with at least a share of the top spot in the conference standings.

Keve Aluma scored a career-high 26 points and No. 24 Virginia Tech made crucial free throws in the final minute on the way to an 80-78 victory over Miami on Tuesday night.

Aluma hit 9 of 16 shots from the floor and 7 of 10 from the line for the Hokies (8-1, 2-0 Atlantic Coast Conference), who won their fourth straight game. Aluma added six rebounds and four assists.

"I don't really know if I'm surprised," Aluma said of the Hokies' hot start. "I don't think anyone is really super worried about rankings. I think we're all just trying to come out and take each game one at a time."

Justyn Mutts added 15 points for Virginia Tech, which made three free throws in a sloppy final 37 seconds to hold off the 'Canes (4-3, 0-2). Tyrece Radford finished with 13 points, and Jalen Cone had 12 for the Hokies, who turned the ball over twice and missed four free throws on their final six possessions. "Fortunate to win," Virginia Tech coach Mike Young said. "Sometimes, I've played well and lost. I'd much prefer to play poorly and win the game, and we did that."

Isaiah Wong and Matt Cross paced Miami with 16 points apiece.

The 'Canes trailed by as many as 17 points in the second half, but rallied in the closing seconds. Wong missed a 3-pointer with five seconds left that would have given Miami the lead. Mutts then missed two free throws for the Hokies with 3 seconds left, but Tech's Wabissa Bede stole an outlet pass after the second miss, closing out the game.

"All in all, if you get kind of an open 3-point shot at the top of the key to win on the road against a Top 25 team, pretty much you'd take that," Miami coach Jim Larranaga said.

BIG PICTURE

Miami: The 'Canes have lost three of their last four, and injuries continue to plague them. Preseason All-ACC guard Chris Lykes missed his fifth consecutive game with an ankle injury, and guard Kameron McGusty has missed three straight with a hamstring injury. The 'Canes missed both, too, as they

committed a season-high 19 turnovers, which contributed mightily to their demise.

Virginia Tech: Behind Aluma and Mutts, the Hokies played well until the final 1:30, but two turnovers and shoddy free-throw shooting — 3 of 7 in that span — nearly led to them squandering a huge second-half lead. They will need to get that cleaned up, as they get set to take a step up in competition Saturday, when they play at No. 23 Virginia in their first true road game of the season.

"I know Tony (Bennett, Virginia's coach) well enough to know there's not a bunch of wholesale changes," Young said. "I know what we're going to see. We look forward to the competition."

POLL IMPLICATIONS

The length of the Hokies' second stint in the Top 25 will be determined Saturday in Charlottesville. A win there should propel them several spots in the poll.

MAKING A POINT

The Hokies weren't complaining about the officiating following their two-point win — after all, they made more free throws (13) than Miami attempted (10). But Young wants to see officials lighten up on bench warnings. Virginia Tech received several during the course of the game, but Young encourages his bench players to be enthusiastic during the game, mainly because an empty arena leaves game energy up to the players instead of the fans.

"We've got to stand down with that sort of thing right now," Young said. "Our first three games in here, we weren't very good. The energy level was not what we needed, and here we are in league play, and we're certainly not embarrassing anyone. We're pulling for our teammates. We've got to generate that kind of emotion from the unit."

UP NEXT

Miami: The 'Canes host Clemson on Saturday.

Late surge not enough, Miami falls 80-78 at No. 24 Virginia Tech

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Dec. 29, 2020

Isaiah Wong nearly had another memorable game against Virginia Tech.

Wong, who scored a career-high 27 points in a triple-overtime win last year in Blacksburg, put together a strong second half to help lead the Hurricanes.

Wong scored 13 of his 16 points after the break before his go-ahead 3-point attempt missed with five seconds left and Miami lost 80-78 at No. 24 Virginia Tech on Tuesday night.

"I thought that was a very well-played college basketball game between two serious competitors," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "Our players fought back from a double-digit deficit and had a shot to win the game. A lot of guys stepped up."

Matt Cross also scored 16 points with four 3-pointers and Harlond Beverly added 14 points and nine rebounds for the Hurricanes (4-3, 0-2 ACC) who trailed by as many as 17 points in the second half before losing their 18th consecutive game to a ranked opponent.

Elijah Olaniyi chipped in 11 points and Nysier Brooks had 10 points.

Chris Lykes (left ankle) missed his fifth consecutive game while Kameron McGusty (right hamstring) missed his fourth straight as both were expected to return after the Hurricanes had nine days between their last game.

Virginia Tech (8-1, 2-0) was led by Keve Aluma's 26 points

It was a collective effort down the stretch to give the Hurricanes a chance to win.

"We never hung our heads, we had a good plan," Larranaga said. "Last year, we were down seven (here with 4:26)

to go, came back and won the game in triple-overtime. I reminded our players of that and told them, 'There's plenty of time. Don't look at the clock; play the game. Force turnovers, foul them and force them to make some pressure-packed free throws. Matt Cross stepped up and hit some critical shots, we got a couple of good steals. It was a very well-played game.'"

After Earl Timberlake missed a layup with 1:15 to play, the Hurricanes trailed 77-68 and needed a stop. Cross came up with a steal and Brooks hit a shot to begin the quest back into the game. Wong recorded a steal on the next possession and despite another close miss by Timberlake, the Hurricanes regained possession and Cross drilled a 3 to pull within 77-73 with 49 seconds left.

Virginia Tech's Wabissa Bede missed the front end of a one-and-one and Wong responded with a pair of free throws to cut the deficit to 77-75 with 38 seconds left.

Then Nahiem Allen went to the line and calmly sank two free throws for the Hokies for a 79-75 advantage with 37 seconds remaining.

Needing another big bucket to stay close, Beverly knocked down a 3 to bring the Hurricanes within 79-78 with 28 seconds left.

Bede split a pair of free throws leaving the door open for the Hurricanes, but Wong's 3 missed.

Miami shot 53.6 percent (30 of 56) from the field, 40 percent (10 of 25) from 3, and 80 percent (8 of 10) from the free-throw line, but were plagued by 19 turnovers.

Virginia Tech shot 46.8 percent (29 of 62) from the field as all three of their shooting marks were lower than Miami's. The Hokies made 9 of 23 from 3 and 13 of 21 from the free-throw line, but only had 11 turnovers.

The Hokies led 42-33 at halftime and stretched their lead to 56-39 with 16 minutes left.

Crossing into a New Year

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Dec. 31, 2020

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The year 2020 has been an unquestionably difficult one for people all across the world. With 2021 beginning Friday, there is a sense of hope for a return to some normalcy in day-to-day life.

The University of Miami men's basketball team is also hoping for a new slate come 2021, as well over half the team has dealt with injury over the past few months. Five Hurricanes, including all four returning starters, have missed at least three games as a result.

The Miami (4-3, 0-2 ACC) players know, however, that they can still recover and turn in a strong campaign when the calendar changes. Their narrow setback, 80-78, on the road Tuesday at No. 24/RV Virginia Tech was proof of just that.

"People are getting down right now just because of the losses, but at the same time ... with everyone healthy, we all think that we can be a top 10-15 team in the country," freshman forward Matt Cross said. "... It's not good to lose, but it's also a good sign if that's the score with some of our best players out."

Miami still has 18 league games on the docket come 2021, giving it ample time to get back in the ACC race.

In fact, the team plans to discuss just that in a meeting Thursday after practice, as it looks toward a successful new year.

"I honestly think that's the biggest reason why we're having the meeting now," Cross shared. "We need to figure out now, like, 'Those two losses are gone for the conference, but now we can't be losing games like that in the conference moving forward. We need to get this thing rolling, get it together.'"

If Cross' play against the Hokies is any indicator, he will be a big part of Miami's hopes for improvement moving forward.

The Beverly, Mass., native scored a season-high 16 points to co-lead the Hurricanes. He shot 6-of-8 from the floor and connected on 4-of-6 shots from long range.

"My shoulder has just been bothering me, so that was the first game it's been feeling well," Cross explained. "I've been getting shots up at practice and actually [been able to fully] practice. Just being able to feel good with my shoulder, get my shots up and not worry

about it, I think was the biggest difference."

Although he had the confidence to believe he would perform well with his improved health, it still felt good for Cross to see it actually play out that way on the road against a top-25 foe.

"When your shoulder feels good again, that's a good thing, but it's a whole different thing to see it go in now," Cross said. "It kind of confirms, 'Alright, now I'm good again. Now I can take these shots again.' Because before I was kind of not really taking shots that I would normally take, just because I was so concerned with my shoulder."

Four teammates joined Cross in double figures in Blacksburg, Va., with sophomore guard Isaiah Wong matching his 16-point performance and adding a season-high-tying three assists. Sophomore guard Harlond Beverly had 14 points, nine rebounds and six assists, while senior guard Elijah Olaniyi notched 11 points and redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks had 10.

The Hurricanes turned in 20 assists, their most since Feb. 23, 2019, against the Hokies. Their ball movement nearly helped them rally all the way back after trailing by 12 late in the first half, by 17 early in the second half and by seven in the final minute.

"Similar to the Purdue game, we got down a decent amount in the first half and I think we realized what we were doing just isn't working," Cross explained. "We came out in the second half really moving the ball and I think that was really the biggest change. The second half from the first half, I thought was a big difference."

Cross would also like to see Miami continue to distribute the ball better moving forward, in particular when it comes to finding "the hot hand."

The next chance the Hurricanes will have to do that is Saturday at 2 p.m., as they are set to host Clemson at the Watsco Center.

According to KenPom, the Tigers are the No. 18 team in the nation and their defense ranks third-best in the country. Thus, there is no question the Hurricanes have their work cut out for them in their first game of 2021.

Clemson is 7-1 (1-1 ACC) on the year and already has six wins over Power Five foes, including most recently topping No. 18/19 Florida State, 77-67, Tuesday night.

"We know that they play tough and their bigs

are very versatile. They can shoot the ball a little bit and stuff like that," Cross said. "I think it should be a big game defensively for people like Anthony [Walker] and Deng [Gak], who can [display versatility and] guard bigs outside the 3-point line. I also think it's going to be a big game for Nas because his game is that he loves to play physical ... I think if Clemson plays physical and we hit back with physicality, that's just kind of how the game is. I think that's where Nas will excel."

The Tigers are led by senior forward Aamir Simms, a Preseason First Team All-ACC honoree, who is averaging team highs in points (11.6) and rebounds (5.5) per game.

Miami is 13-15 all-time against Clemson, including 8-3 at home and 7-4 under 10th-year head coach Jim Larrañaga. In the most recent meeting, which came March 11, 2020, at the ACC Tournament in Greensboro, N.C., the Tigers posted a 69-64 victory.

This will be the 22nd all-time meeting between Larrañaga and Clemson head coach Brad Brownell, including their time as CAA foes. The former holds a 13-8 edge and is a perfect 9-0 at home against Brownell.

Saturday's game will be televised live on RSN—that is FOX Sports Sun locally—and FOX Sports GO, with Evan Lepler and Mike Gminski 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 game can be found HERE.

After facing the Tigers, Miami plays North Carolina Tuesday at 8 p.m., with action set to be televised live on ESPN from the Watsco Center.

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.

MBB Drops 66-65 Heartbreaker to Clemson

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Jan. 2, 2021

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The University of Miami men's basketball team fell to Clemson, 66-65, Saturday afternoon at the Watsco Center.

Miami turned a 12-point first-half deficit into a six-point second-half lead and led by four with under 70 seconds left, but the Tigers scored the final five points to earn the road win. Sophomore guard Isaiah Wong scored a team-high 13 points for the Hurricanes, who once again played without senior guard Chris Lykes, a Preseason First Team All-ACC honoree.

"I thought we gave a great effort today. I thought our guys executed the game plan very well," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "The difference in the game was that Aamir Simms is a very hard matchup for us ... I'm very proud of the guys, the way they fought and played a very good game right up until the last possession."

Clemson (8-1, 2-1 ACC) connected on five of its first six 3-pointers and raced out to a 21-9 lead in the first 8:13 of action. However, Miami (4-4, 0-3 ACC) outscored the Tigers by 14 the rest of the half, including closing the frame on a 12-2 run over the last five minutes to take a 34-32 lead into halftime.

After its hot start from deep, Clemson made just one of its final six 3-pointers of the frame. At the other end, Miami freshman forward Matt Cross connected on all three of his first-half shots from beyond the arc.

The Hurricanes pushed their lead to six, 40-34, early in the second half and the rest of the game was played within a 10-point window the rest of the way. Both sides faced offensive draughts in the middle portion of the half, including Miami going six minutes without a field goal.

Trailing by three down the stretch, Miami evened the game on a three-point play by redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty with 3:02 left. Senior guard Elijah Olaniyi put the Hurricanes in front on a layup with 2:12 to go and sophomore guard Isaiah Wong doubled the advantage from the stripe with 1:36 remaining.

Miami forced a miss at the other end, but after Clemson grabbed the offensive rebound, redshirt sophomore guard Nick Honor hit a 3-pointer to trim the deficit to one with 1:05 on the clock. The Hurricanes then turned the

ball over at the other end, after which Simms banked in a midrange shot in the lane with 19 ticks remaining.

The Hurricanes committed another turnover on their final offensive possession and fell one point shy of their first ACC victory.

Six Miami players scored between nine and 13 points, with freshman guard Earl Timberlake (11), sophomore guard Harlond Beverly (10), Olaniyi (10), Cross (nine) and McGusty (nine) all following just behind Wong.

Cross logged seven assists in the game, the most by a Miami player since Lykes had nine at Virginia Tech on March 8, 2019. It was also the most by a Hurricane freshman since Lykes recorded seven on March 3, 2018, against Virginia Tech. Additionally, Wong tied a career high with four assists, while Timberlake led all players with eight rebounds.

The lone Tiger to score in double figures was Simms, a senior forward who scored the team's first eight points and finished with 25, adding seven rebounds, four assists and four blocks. He went 10-of-14 from the floor, 2-of-2 from deep and 3-of-4 at the line.

"When we played a big man on him, he stepped out and hit threes," Larrañaga said. "When we played a smaller man on him, he went inside and posted up. That created matchup problems for us."

The teams posted nearly identical numbers in all shooting categories, with Miami logging a 46.9 percent (23-of-49) clip from the floor and a 41.2 percent (7-of-17) mark from deep compared to Clemson's 44.1 percent (26-of-59) and 42.9 percent (9-of-21) respective ledgers. The Hurricanes also shot 66.7 percent (12-of-18) at the line, while the Tigers had a 71.4 percent (5-of-7) mark.

Up next for Miami is a Tuesday night matchup with North Carolina, with tip-off set for 8 p.m., live on ESPN from the Watsco Center.

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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MIAMI HURRICANES POSTGAME NOTES

– The Hurricanes fell to 13-16 all-time against Clemson, including 8-4 at home and 7-5 in Larrañaga's tenure.
– Larrañaga, who entered the game with the

10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 664-451 in 37 years as a head coach, including 194-117 in 10 seasons at Miami.

– Saturday marked the 22nd all-time meeting between Larrañaga and Clemson head coach Brad Brownell, including their time as CAA foes, with Larrañaga moving to 13-9 overall, including 9-1 at home.

– For the first time this season, Miami used a starting lineup of Beverly, Cross, Olaniyi, Wong and redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks.

– McGusty returned to action after missing the last three-plus games with a right hamstring injury.

– The Hurricanes fell to 178-13 in Larrañaga's tenure when leading with 2:00 left and to 78-8 in such games in ACC play.

– Miami dropped to 17-2 when leading at halftime since the start of the 2019-20 season, with both setbacks coming against Clemson, as it previously lost such a game on 3/11/20 in the ACC Tournament in Greensboro, N.C.

– The last time Miami lost at home when leading at halftime also came in the first game of a calendar year, as it fell to NC State in such fashion on 1/3/19.

– The Hurricanes outscored Clemson by 18 points, 31-13, over the final 11:06 of the first half and first 1:35 of the second half, a total span of 12:41.

– After hitting five of their first six 3-pointers, the Tigers connected on just three of their next 14 before Honor's make with 1:05 to play.

– Olaniyi, who surpassed 350 free-throw attempts in his career, recorded double-figure points for the 61st time, including the second as a Hurricane.

– Beverly has connected on multiple 3-pointers in back-to-back ACC games after never previously doing so even once in league play.
– Beverly notched his 12th double-digit scoring performance, including his third this season.

– Wong scored in double figures for the 18th time, including the eighth in as many games this year.

– Timberlake, in his third collegiate game, tallied double-digit points for the second time.

Hurricanes fall 66-65 to Clemson on late basket by Aamir Simms

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Jan. 2, 2021

The Hurricanes had another chance to win a tight game late, but came up short.

Isaiah Wong paced the Hurricanes with 13 points in a 66-65 loss as Aamir Simms scored a go-ahead basket with 19 seconds left to lift Clemson past Miami on Saturday.

"I thought that was an extremely well-played game," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "Very exciting game. They got themselves off to a terrific start and it forced us to make a lot of adjustments.

Earl Timberlake added 11 points while Harlond Beverly and Elijah Olaniyi each scored 10 for the Hurricanes, who have started ACC competition 0-3 and dropped to 4-4 overall.

Kameron McGusty returned after missing the last four games with a right hamstring injury. He came off the bench and scored nine points in 28 minutes.

"I just saw him in the hallway and asked how his hamstring was and he said it was very sore, but he gave us a lot of productive minutes," Larranaga said. "He made some critical plays for us when we were behind, he was a plus-7 at halftime so we knew he was playing well, but you ask a guy to come in a high-pressure, full-court intense game for 40 minutes when he hasn't practiced in almost three weeks. He practiced only half-court on Thursday and his first full-court practice was yesterday so I'm sure that hamstring is pretty sore."

Chris Lykes (left ankle) missed his sixth straight game and has not played since Dec. 4.

"I really don't have any information on Chris Lykes," Larranaga said. "He's trying to rehab his sprained ankle and there's no projected date for him to come back."

Clemson (8-1, 2-1) was led by Simms who scored a game-high 25 points on 10-of-14 shooting. Simms entered the game averaging a team-high 11.6 points a game.

"Aamir Simms was just terrific," Larranaga said. "When we played a bigger guy on him he took us out on the perimeter and made 3s, when we put a smaller guy he took us in the post and scored, and when we denied

him well inside he stepped out and drove the ball to the basket. He had a terrific game. He more than doubled his scoring output so he was clearly the MVP of the game."

Olaniyi's three-point play gave the Hurricanes a 40-34 lead early in the second half.

Miami used a small-ball lineup for large stretches of the game, but Simms was able to take advantage down low and helped the Tigers take a 59-55 lead with 5:31 left.

"(The small lineup) was Clemson's direct ability to stretch the defense out and Aamir Simms making 3s," Larranaga said. "He's done that throughout his career. We had to make the adjustment and go small. We put Earl Timberlake on him because Earl can guard bigger players or smaller players. While he was guarding Simms we played him at the point, that made them make some adjustments as well."

Timberlake said: "It was a tough challenge. I was undersized, but I tried to play as hard as I can and play tough. Front him when he's in the post. He's a very good player. He's a preseason First Team for a reason."

McGusty converted a three-point play on a reverse layup to tie the game at 61 with three minutes left.

Olaniyi gave the Hurricanes a 63-61 lead moments later on a dish from Wong, who knocked down a pair of free throws for a 65-61 advantage with 1:36 left.

Nick Honor's 3 pulled Clemson within 65-64 with 1:05 following an offensive rebound. The Tigers benefited from a turnover by Olaniyi on the ensuing possession and Simms drove to the lane and banged in a go-ahead bucket with 19 seconds left.

Jim Larranaga elected to not call timeout after the basket and McGusty turned the ball over in the closing seconds. The loose ball eventually made its way out of bounds and Miami received possession underneath the Clemson basket with 0.3 seconds left. A long throw from the baseline by Cross to Wong was attempted, but missed off the backboard to seal the win for Clemson.

"We actually called a play at the last timeout because we felt like we have plenty of time, it was a full timeout, we set up our defense, we told them what we wanted to run," Larranaga said. "Unfortunately we didn't run it. We ended up getting to Kam McGusty who I thought

had a great situation on the side of the court, but they defended it well and forced a turnover. Our last two turnovers were the difference in the game. We just need to be a little more calm and poised down the stretch."

The turnover by McGusty was a tough way to end an overall productive performance as he was a team-best plus-8 when on the court and included the three-point play to keep the Hurricanes in it minutes prior.

"I was trying to get my rhythm back, I'm still trying to figure out what I can and can't do as far as my hamstring and trying to be comfortable out there," McGusty said. "I felt comfortable and felt like I played good defense, ran the floor well, obviously the turnover at the end hurt a lot. We had a lot of plays down the stretch that hurt us, but that one is the one everyone is going to remember."

Miami shot 46.9 percent (23 of 49) from the field and hit 41.2 percent (7 of 17) from behind the arc. They had 17 assists to 16 turnovers.

"Seventeen assists is really good for us, but the problem is the 16 turnovers--it takes away opportunities for us to score and the last two possessions we turned the ball over and those were critical mistakes," Larranaga said.

The Tigers jumped out to a 21-9 lead behind five 3-pointers—two by Simms.

The Hurricanes eventually went with a small lineup and were able to climb back into the game. Cross's third 3 of the half tied the game at 32. Cross then found Earl Timberlake down low for a bucket to give Miami a 34-32 lead into the break.

Simms Helps Push Clemson Basketball Past Miami Hurricanes

AP

Jan. 2, 2021

Aamir Simms scored 25 points and his last basket with 19 seconds left was the game winner and Clemson beat Miami 66-65 on Saturday.

Nick Honor stole the ball from Kameron McGusty with four seconds left on Miami's final possession to secure the win.

Isaiah Wong made two free throws with 96 seconds left to cap a 10-2 run and the Hurricanes led 65-61. Honor responded with a 3-pointer with 1:05 to go, and following a Miami turnover, Simms connected on the game clincher.

Simms started the game with a pair of 3-pointers and a dunk and the Tigers led 8-3. PJ Hall's jumper with 11:47 before halftime gave Clemson a 21-9 lead.

Miami responded and outscored the Tigers 23-11 before intermission. The Hurricanes grabbed their first lead of the game on Earl Timberlake's layup with 45 seconds before the break and a 34-32 lead.

Simms finished 10-for-14 shooting. Clemson (8-1, 2-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) now has seven of its eight wins over Power 5 conference affiliates

Wong led Miami (4-4, 1-2) with 13 points and Timberlake 11.

UP NEXT

Clemson: Hosts N.C. State on Tuesday.

Miami: Hosts North Carolina on Tuesday.

MBB Set to Face North Carolina

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Jan. 3, 2021

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – Saturday's matchup with Clemson followed a familiar script for the University of Miami men's basketball team.

For the third time in just eight games this year, the Hurricanes fell behind by 12-plus, only to rally back and either take the lead or pull within one.

Dec. 8 against Purdue, Miami (4-4, 0-3 ACC) turned a 20-point deficit into a four-point win, 58-54. Tuesday at No. 24/RV Virginia Tech, the Hurricanes trailed by 17, including by seven in the final minute, before cutting the deficit to one in a two-point setback, 80-78.

Against the Tigers, Miami trailed by 12 early, but turned that into a six-point lead before ultimately falling by one, 66-65.

No matter the result, the Hurricanes have proven beyond a doubt they do not give up regardless of the odds.

"Adversity tends to develop character and we've had so much adversity," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "We've had so many things to overcome and the challenges are too numerous to mention. Each time we have a new set of circumstances to deal with, it seems like the guys pull together and give us as chance to win.

"We were very fortunate against Purdue; we made our free throws down the stretch and were able to win that game," Larrañaga continued. "At Virginia Tech, we had a very nice look at a three that would have won the game. Yesterday, against Clemson, we were down one and we had a chance to score and win the game right at the end. So, we've battled back from being down. It would be much better if we could play from out in front for once."

Six players scored at least nine points for Miami in the setback against the Tigers, with Isaiah Wong's 13 points leading the group. Freshman guard Earl Timberlake had 11 points and eight rebounds, while sophomore guard Harlond Beverly and senior guard Elijah Olaniyi both notched 10 points.

Freshman forward Matt Cross scored nine points and posted seven assists, the most by a Hurricane since March 2019, while redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty added nine points of his own.

Of those six players, three of them are in their first year on Miami's roster and two others are in their second. Due to the bevy of injuries the Hurricanes have faced—another element of adversity this season—many young and new

players have seen an increased role.

Larrañaga, a two-time ACC Coach of the Year, thinks playing these types of games have benefited those players. However, when the results begin to improve, he feels it will be even more of a help.

"Once you start winning those close games, it tends to build a lot of confidence within the team that they have the ability to make the big shot or make the big free throw or get the big stop," Larrañaga explained. "All these guys have been put in that situation. We've won one and lost two, but we're probably going to be in 10 or 15 more of them."

The lone player to log at least nine points against Clemson who is in at least his third year with the Hurricanes is McGusty. It was his first action since Dec. 12, when he suffered a right hamstring injury within the first five minutes of the Hurricanes' matchup with FGCU.

A Katy, Texas, native, McGusty is seven points away from 1,000 in his career and his presence back on the hardwood is significant for Miami.

"Kam is such an important part of our program," Larrañaga said. "He can shoot the three. He's good attacking the rim. He plays hard at the defensive end of the floor. He's not 100 percent; that's the unfortunate thing. He's still nursing a hamstring pull. He won't be able to practice today and probably will do very little tomorrow. [We are] hoping he can be ready for North Carolina on Tuesday."

The Tar Heels are indeed next for the Hurricanes, as Miami welcomes the six-time NCAA champions to the Watsco Center for an 8 p.m. matchup Tuesday night.

The Hurricanes are 8-25 all-time versus North Carolina, including 3-9 at home, but have found significant success in the series under Larrañaga.

Miami is 6-9 versus the Tar Heels since 2011-12, when Larrañaga got to Coral Gables. That is the third-most wins of any team against North Carolina during that stretch. Miami is also one of only four schools with at least four wins by 10-plus over the Tar Heels in that span and one of just two with multiple wins by 15-plus.

The Hurricanes dropped the most recent matchup, a 94-71 road setback on Jan. 25, 2020, in a game they played with just six scholarship players, half of whom were freshmen. It marked Miami's fourth straight loss in the series after taking six of the prior nine outings.

"Over the first seven years, we just had a lot

of good players and those guys matched up very well," Larrañaga said. "The battle for the first seven years was kind of even, but they've dominated the last two years."

This year's edition of one of the nation's most storied programs will head to Coral Gables with a 6-4 (1-2 ACC) record after playing seven Power Five foes within its first 10 games.

The Tar Heels, like Miami, are coming off a one-point decision Saturday at home. However, in their case, it was a 66-65 win over Notre Dame.

North Carolina boasts five McDonald's All-Americans on its roster, including four in its freshman class. The Tar Heels also have the ACC Preseason Player of the Year in senior forward Garrison Brooks.

Sophomore forward/center Armando Bacot is currently the leader in points (11.4) and rebounds (8.2) per game for Roy Williams, the fifth-winningest coach in Division I history.

"They're such a big team, such an incredibly good offensive rebounding team," Larrañaga said. "They have four big guys that are bigger than anybody that we have, other than Nas [Brooks]. Their size, skill and speed in the open court have always been a real challenge. Not only for us, but for everybody that plays Carolina."

The Tar Heels were picked fourth in the ACC preseason poll after registering a 14-19 (6-14) ledger during the 2019-20 campaign.

Tuesday night's contest will be televised live on ESPN HERE, with Dan Shulman and Dick Vitale 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.

Following its outing against the Tar Heels, Miami hits the road to face NC State Saturday at noon, with action set to be televised live on RSN from Reynolds Coliseum in Raleigh, N.C.

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 set to host UNC with no return in sight for Chris Lykes

By DAVID FURONES
SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL |
JAN 04, 2021 AT 4:00 PM

Miami Hurricanes preseason All-ACC guard Chris Lykes has been out for a month with an ankle injury, and there is no swift return in sight with Miami set to host North Carolina on Tuesday night at Watsco Center.

"[Lykes] hasn't practiced a single moment, so not anticipating him playing [Tuesday]," UM coach Jim Larrañaga said on Monday.

Again without the senior guard who first injured the ankle on Dec. 4 against Stetson, Miami (4-4, 0-3 ACC), which already has front-court players Sam Waardenburg and Rodney Miller out for season, tries to avoid its first 0-4 start in ACC play in the 8 p.m. tip on ESPN against the Tar Heels (6-4, 1-2).

On top of having no update on Lykes, fellow senior guard Kameron McGusty is "sore, beat up," Larrañaga said, after returning in Saturday's 66-65 loss to Clemson from missing three games due to a hamstring injury.

"Whether or not we'll have him for [Tuesday], I'm not sure yet," Larrañaga said. "He'll do very little [Monday] hoping that rest is a better way to treat that injury than having him get on the court and strain it again."

Without Waardenburg and Miller, the Hurricanes are down to 7-foot center Nysier Brooks, forwards Matt Cross and Anthony Walker and reserve power forward/center Deng Gak in the frontcourt. They will have to face a Tar Heels front line that recently sent ACC Preseason Player of the Year Garrison Brooks to the bench for an expanded role for standout freshman Day'Ron Sharpe and also starts 6-10 Armando Bacot and brings 7-1 Walker Kessler off the bench.

"We're not going to grow any taller, and they're not going to shrink," Larrañaga said. "It's a matter of they have the advantage in size. What we have to do is, instead of one guy guarding them, the whole team has to guard those big guys. We got to surround them. We got to rebound with them."

In the past two losses, by a combined 3 points to Clemson and Virginia Tech, UM has fallen behind early and had to come from behind. It was also the case in the Hurricanes' 58-54 win over Purdue on Dec. 8.

"The common thread is we start to dig ourselves in a hole early in games," Larrañaga said. "For us, with the roster as short as it is, everybody's got to play well right from the very beginning to really give us the best chance. ... One of our hopes is that we can get off to a better start and play from out in front one of these nights."

While famed ESPN analyst Dick Vitale will be on the call from his home on Tuesday night, without fans in the arena due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there won't be the same big-game atmosphere in Coral Gables as there usually would when UNC comes to town.

"I will be ready, and I know our team will be ready," said sophomore guard Harlond Beverly, who has been elevated into the starting five since Lykes' injury. "We will bring our own excitement and camaraderie, and just really excited to play."

While injury-riddled, Miami recently had senior guard and Stony Brook transfer Elijah Olaniyi gain immediate eligibility four games ago and debuted freshman Earl Timberlake, who was out to start the season with an ankle injury, three games ago. With Olaniyi starting and Timberlake coming in off the bench, both are averaging 8 points per game.

"Just trying to be the team's Swiss Army knife right now until we can get the full team back," Olaniyi said.

MBB Falls to North Carolina, 67-65

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Jan 5, 2021

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – The shorthanded University of Miami men's basketball team dropped a heart-breaking 67-65 decision to North Carolina Tuesday night at the Watsco Center, its third straight setback by two points or fewer.

Playing without all four of their returning starters due to injury, the Hurricanes still managed to turn in a staunch defensive performance, but it was not enough. Freshman guard Earl Timberlake paced Miami in scoring for the first time, recording 12 points to go along with five rebounds, five assists, five steals and two blocks.

"These last three ACC conference regular season games [have been] very tough to swallow. We had our chances—multiple chances to win these games and just keep coming up a little bit short," Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga said. "I think our guys fought valiantly and put ourselves in position to win. We had a 10-point lead in the second half, but Carolina kept coming and the press bothered us, which it shouldn't have. All we had to do was catch the ball."

After a sluggish start by both teams that featured 13 combined turnovers in the opening 8:03, North Carolina (7-4, 2-2 ACC) took a 14-8 edge with 11:41 on the first-half clock. The Hurricanes, however, countered with a 13-2 burst in 4:47 that included eight straight points, surging to a 21-16 edge with 4:41 to play in the half.

The Tar Heels went 5:19 without a point and 7:11 without a field goal, missing 11 consecutive attempts, before closing the frame strong to take a 32-30 advantage into the locker room. Both teams shot under 40 percent in the frame, but North Carolina posted a 5-of-11 (45.5 percent) mark from deep compared to the Hurricanes' 2-of-7 (28.6 percent) tally.

Miami (4-5, 0-4 ACC) used a 19-6 run early in the second half to go in front, 53-43, with 12:03 to play. After the Tar Heels answered with seven straight points, the Hurricanes scored the next six and led by nine, 59-50, with 7:35 to play.

The tide began to turn when redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks fouled out with 5:35 remaining on a three-point play by North Carolina freshman forward/center Day'Ron Sharpe that made it 59-55.

"Nysier was negating their post play and getting some defensive rebounds and was a target inside and got several baskets in and around the rim," Larrañaga said. "So, losing him was a huge loss, but the main thing is we didn't handle the full court press very well."

After a pair of free throws by Timberlake to stretch the lead back up to six, North Carolina went on an 8-0 run, capped by a pair of 3-pointers, to take a 63-61 lead with 1:42 on the clock. Sophomore guard Isaiah Wong tied the game with a pair of free throws with 58 ticks left and, after two shots from the line at the other end, did so again with a jump-shot with 14 seconds remaining.

North Carolina senior guard Andrew Platek, however, connected on a shot from the baseline with three seconds left to put the Tar Heels in front for good, as sophomore guard Harlond Beverly's full-court heave rimmed out.

Timberlake, who led all players in assists and steals in addition to his team-high in points, became the first Miami freshman with at least five steals in a game since Shane Larkin did so on Jan. 10, 2012, against North Carolina.

Senior guard Elijah Olaniyi, in his first game at Miami as a reserve, scored 11 points and went 4-of-4 at the line. Brooks totaled 10 points and a team-best six rebounds in just 21 minutes of action.

Junior guard/forward Rechon "Leaky" Black led all scorers with 16 points for the Tar Heels. He shot 4-of-4 from 3-point range after entering the night 3-of-15 on the season.

Freshman guard Kerwin Walton scored 13 points, while Sharpe logged 12 points and a game-best 16 rebounds, the most by a Miami foe since November 2019. The Hurricanes held senior forward Garrison Brooks, the ACC Preseason Player of the Year, to six points on 1-of-7 shooting.

Despite playing a team with a frontcourt boasting Brooks and three McDonald's All-Americans, Miami had a 32-24 edge in paint points and limited the Tar Heels to 34.4 percent (21-of-61) shooting. The Hurricanes also logged 14 steals, their most since Dec. 23, 2012, against No. 4/5 Arizona in Honolulu.

However, the decisive stat proved to be 3-point percentage. North Carolina, which entered the night shooting a 28.7 clip on the year, went 9-of-20 (45.0 percent) from deep, setting a season high in both makes and percentage. Meanwhile, Miami registered a 3-of-16 (18.8 percent) tally from deep.

"This is a really nice group of guys, they like each other, they get along well. The coaches like the players," Larrañaga said. "We've just had so much adversity with injuries and the most challenging part is being able to prepare for an opponent. Kam McGusty practiced yesterday, but he couldn't even go today. Chris Lykes hasn't been on the court for over a month now. So, those are our two leading returning scorers and Sam Waardenburg [and Rodney Miller Jr. are both] out for the season. We need to get Chris and Kam back."

The Hurricanes now have back-to-back road games, the first of which comes Saturday at noon against NC State, with action set to be televised live on RSN from Reynolds Coliseum in Raleigh, N.C.

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MIAMI HURRICANES POSTGAME NOTES

– The Hurricanes moved to 8-26 all-time against North Carolina, including 3-10 at home and 6-10 in Larrañaga's tenure.

– Larrañaga, who entered the game tied for the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 664-452 in 37 years as a head coach, including 194-118 in 10 seasons at Miami.

– For the first time this season, Miami used a starting lineup of Beverly, Brooks, Timberlake (first start), Wong and freshman forward Matt Cross.

– Miami once again played without senior guard Chris Lykes (left ankle), redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty (right hamstring), redshirt senior center Rodney Miller Jr. (right knee, season) and redshirt senior forward Sam Waardenburg (left foot, season).

– Four of Miami's five losses this season are by a combined nine points, with the last three, all in ACC play, coming by a total of five.

– The Hurricanes are the second team in ACC history, per the Elias Sports Bureau, to lose three straight games by combined total of five points or fewer, joining the 1989-90 Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets.

– The prior lowest combined point total in three consecutive games all lost by Miami in Larrañaga's tenure was eight, recorded early in the 2018-19 season: two (83-81) to Seton Hall on 11/25/18 in Fullerton, Calif., followed by three (57-54) to Rutgers on 11/28/18 and then by three (57-54) to Yale on 12/1/18 at American Airlines Arena in Miami.

– The Hurricanes' 14 steals marked their second-highest total ever in an ACC game, trailing only the 15 they logged on 1/22/05 at North Carolina.

– The last time the Hurricanes lost a game when leading by double figures was 2/26/19 at Wake Forest, a 76-75 setback.

– Miami dropped to 98-22 in Larrañaga's tenure when holding its opponent under 40 percent shooting.

– The Hurricanes fell to 178-14 under Larrañaga when leading with 2:00 left, including to 78-9 in ACC competition.

– Miami held North Carolina to just one made field goal in a span of 15 attempts during the first half.

– The Hurricanes went 7:21 without a field goal, missing eight straight shots, before Wong's game-tying basket with 14 seconds remaining.

– Sharpe is the first Miami opponent to grab 15-plus rebounds in a game since Missouri State's Tulio Da Silva had 17 on 11/21/19 in Charleston, S.C.

– Sophomore forward Anthony Walker surpassed 150 points, 50 free-throw attempts and 500 minutes played at Miami.

– Brooks, who became the first Hurricane to foul out this season, scored in double figures for the 17th time, including the third this year.

– Olaniyi notched his 62nd double-digit point total, including his third in five appearances at Miami.

– Timberlake, who scored in double figures for the third time in four collegiate outings, became the first ACC player with seven-plus points, five-plus rebounds, five-plus assists, five-plus steals and two-plus blocks in a game since Florida State's Chris Singleton on 11/14/10 against UNC Greensboro.

– Timberlake also became the third Hurricane in Larrañaga's tenure with a 4x5 game, including the first to do so with steals and the first to do so in ACC play.

– Beverly eclipsed 300 points in his career.

– Wong scored eight points, finishing short of double figures for the first time in the Hurricanes' nine games this year.

Platek's Runner Sends North Carolina Basketball Past Miami Hurricanes

AP

Jan. 6, 2021

Leaky Black scored 16 points, and Andrew Platek's running jumper with three seconds to go carried North Carolina to a 67-65 win over Miami on Tuesday night.

Off the inbounds following Platek's basket, Miami's Harlond Beverly launched an approximately three-quarter court shot that bounced off the left side of the rim to end it.

Platek's shot followed a high-arching, fade-away jumper by Isaiah Wong which tied the game at 65-all for Miami. Opting not to call timeout, Platek took a pass, drove the right baseline and got his shot over two outstretched defenders.

Kerwin Walton scored 13 points and Day'Ron Sharpe scored 12 points and grabbed a career-high 16 rebounds — seven on the offensive end — for North Carolina (7-4, 2-2 Atlantic Coast Conference).

Earl Timberlake scored 12 points for Miami (4-5, 0-4), Elijah Olaniyi added 11 points and Nysier Brooks had 10.

ADDING UP

The Tar Heels have won back-to-back contests by a combined total of three points. Miami has dropped three straight games by a combined total of four points.

UP NEXT

North Carolina: Scheduled to host 19th-ranked Clemson on Saturday.

Miami: Travels to Raleigh, North Carolina to play the Wolfpack on Saturday.

For more AP college basketball coverage:
<https://apnews.com/Collegebasketball> and
http://twitter.com/AP_Top25

Miami falters late to North Carolina, remains winless in ACC

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Jan. 6, 2021

The Hurricanes were in position to win their first ACC game of the season, but struggled down the stretch and came up short once again.

North Carolina's Andrew Platek made a tie-breaking lay-up with 3.6 seconds left to keep the Miami Hurricanes winless in conference play after a 67-65 loss on Tuesday despite leading by as many as 10 in the second half.

"Very, very tough to swallow," head coach Jim Larranaga said. "We've had multiple chances to win these games and just keep coming up a little bit short. I think our guys fought valiantly and put ourselves in position to win with a 10-point lead in the second half, but Carolina kept coming."

The Hurricanes were led by Earl Timberlake's 12 points in his first career start while Elijah Olaniyi scored 11 and Nysier Brooks chipped in 10.

Miami (4-5, 0-4 ACC) led 59-50 with seven minutes left before letting the game slip away and dropping to 0-4 in the ACC for the first time since joining the conference in 2004. They have lost their last three games by a total of five points.

"We're trying to keep a positive mindset and a positive energy around us because the last three losses have been within five points," Brooks said. "We know we're there. We just need something to get us over the hump."

Isaiah Wong hit a 10-footer for the Hurricanes to tie the game at 67, but on the ensuing possession he allowed Platek to drive in for the game-winning layup with three seconds left.

"We ran a set play for Isaiah and he did a great job of getting to the basket and scoring, but then they got it down the floor and letting Andrew Platek just go to the basket and make a layup was just horrendous defense by us," Larranaga said. "That's very, very disappointing. That should have been the best defense we played all night. It was the last possession and we had to get a stop and Andrew just went to the basket like no one was guarding him."

The loss dropped Miami to last in the ACC.

North Carolina (7-4, 2-2) was led by Leaky Black's 16 points while Day'Ron Sharpe added 12 points and 16 rebounds.

Brooks was doing his best to keep the Tar Heels out of the paint, but when he fouled out with 5:35 left, Miami's 59-53 lead faded away.

"Of course (it made a difference) because Nysier was kind of negating some of their post play and getting some rebounds and was a target inside, got several baskets around the rim so losing him was a huge loss," Larranaga said.

A 3-pointer by Black gave the Tar Heels a 63-61 lead, their first since the opening minutes of the second half, with 1:42 left.

Wong tied the game at 63 on a pair of free throws with 58 seconds left.

Garrison Brooks hit a pair of his own with 46 seconds left to give the Tar Heels the lead back at 65-63 before setting the stage for the back-and-forth deciding possessions involving Wong.

Miami lost despite holding North Carolina to 34.4-percent (21 of 61) shooting and forcing 20 turnovers. However, Miami also struggled in those areas, shooting 34.9 percent (22 of 63) with 14 turnovers.

Timberlake led the Hurricanes in scoring, but made just 3 of 13 shots and had five turnovers in 37 minutes. He did add five rebounds, five assists, and five steals.

North Carolina led 32-30 at halftime.

Miami played without Chris Lykes (left ankle) for the seventh straight game and Kameron McGusty (right hamstring) was also out after making a return last game following a four-game absence.

The Hurricanes return to the court on Saturday (12:00 p.m., FSFL) at North Carolina State.

Time to Turn the Tide

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Jan 7, 2021

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – To say the University of Miami men's basketball team has been unlucky this season would be like saying January weather is nicer in South Florida than Alaska.

Of 357 teams at the Division I level, the Hurricanes rank No. 342 in the KenPom luck rating, the lowest mark of any Power Five team. That does not even directly factor in the team's astounding bevy of injuries to key players.

Miami's four returning senior starters—Chris Lykes, Kameron McGusty, Rodney Miller Jr., and Sam Waardenburg—and top-ranked recruit, Earl Timberlake, have combined to be available start to finish in just 12 of a possible 45 outings.

The Hurricanes have lost their last three games—two against current top-20 foes and one against a six-time NCAA champion program—by a combined five points. Just how unlucky is that feat? Well, Miami is the second team in ACC history, per the Elias Sports Bureau, to drop three consecutive games by just five or fewer total points.

Nonetheless, positivity remains inside the Watsco Center, as the Hurricanes continue to press on in the face of such a series of unfortunate events.

"I think we've had a very resilient group, especially being younger," Miami associate head coach Chris Caputo said. "A lot of times, I think, guys that are newer to college basketball and younger, because they don't have quite as much perspective and not as much experience, they only know success for the most part. You never quite know exactly how they're going to handle these situations, but I think they've done a remarkably good job in terms of keeping their focus, their effort, their energy and their togetherness."

Optimism certainly remains for the Hurricanes that they can get this season headed in the direction it would almost certainly be going anyway with better luck, either with injuries or bounces of the ball.

Miami (4-5, 0-4 ACC) also has good reason to believe it can indeed make that happen. The lone prior ACC team to suffer the same three-game heartbreak the Hurricanes have, 1989-90 Georgia Tech, went on to reach the Final Four.

"Very much so, yeah, I do," Caputo said of whether he sees belief among the players a turnaround is possible. "I think they know we're playing incredibly shorthanded and that we have the opportunity to get a little bit more experience, get a little bit more healthy each day. When we get to the point when we're—knock on wood—fully healthy, [we will be even better].

Obviously, we're not going to get Sam or Rodney back, but other than that, I think everyone has a real belief that we're a very competitive team in our league."

One thing Miami will need to solve as it looks to start racking up wins is better handling late-game situations. Luck certainly plays a part in continuous close losses—just check that KenPom rating—but there are ways teams can improve their chances of picking up close victories.

For the Hurricanes, some of the issues have stemmed from having players in unfamiliar situations with so many talented veterans unavailable due to injury.

"Taking care of the ball is something we've got to do a better job of. A lot of times that's prevalent with younger teams, younger guards. That's a piece to the puzzle late in games," Caputo shared. "Obviously, the experience of playing together in those situations is just not there. We haven't really been [in these spots] as a group. The older guys have, but the younger guys haven't really been hardened by any experience. So, it really is the first time.

"It's the first time maybe Earl has to take the ball out of bounds or Matt [Cross] has to come catch the pass against the press or Harlond [Beverly] is on the free-throw line in a critical moment," Caputo continued. "All those things are pretty new. And so, while our sophomores got some experience last year, certainly having a guy like Chris Lykes, Rodney Miller, Sam Waardenburg or Kameron McGusty who played in the NCAA Tournament and been in critical situations over the past five years [would be beneficial]. That's how you sort of prepare for those things; we just haven't been there yet."

The most recent narrow setback for Miami, which capped the three-game streak of close defeats, came Tuesday night against North Carolina. The Hurricanes led by 10 in the second half before dropping a 67-65 decision at the Watsco Center.

Timberlake led Miami with 12 points, while senior guard Elijah Olaniyi had 11 and redshirt senior center Nysier Brooks logged 10 before fouling out with 5:35 left.

A consensus top-40 prospect, Timberlake added five rebounds, five assists, five steals and two blocks in his first collegiate start. He became the first ACC player to log at least that total in each category while also scoring at least seven points since Florida State's Chris Singleton did so on Nov. 14, 2010, at UNC Greensboro.

"He's multi-faceted in terms of his abilities, obviously, and all the different things he can do," Caputo said of Timberlake. "He plays with great force. He plays with passion. He cares about winning. He wants to affect the game in any way

he can in a positive manner. We talk about playing the whole game—both sides of the ball—and he's certainly that."

The next chance Timberlake and Miami will have to get back on track is Saturday at noon, when the Hurricanes square off with NC State at PNC Arena in Raleigh, N.C.

The Wolfpack is undefeated at home on the year and enters the game at 6-2 (2-1 ACC) after suffering a narrow 74-70 overtime setback Tuesday at No. 18/19 Clemson.

"I think they've got a very good blend of older, experienced guys and also some guys who are very young and talented," Caputo said. "I think that they are, obviously, one of the [better] pressure defensive teams in the country. So, they do force some turnovers and put you in some very, very tough positions. And then, on the other hand, they are a lethal offense, both in transition and then with a balance of scoring inside and out. I really like their team and I think that they, certainly on their home floor, will present a lot of difficulties."

Miami owns an 11-15 record in its series with the Wolfpack, including a 4-8 mark on the road and a 7-9 ledger under 10th-year head coach Jim Larrañaga. NC State won the most recent meeting when it tallied an 83-72 road triumph on Feb. 5, 2020.

Redshirt senior guard Devon Daniels is NC State's leader in points (16.5) and rebounds (5.4) per game on the young season. His team was picked eighth in the ACC preseason poll after posting a 20-12 (10-10) ledger in 2019-20.

The matchup between the Hurricanes and Wolfpack will be televised live on RSN—that is FOX Sports Sun locally—and FOX Sports GO, with Tom Werme and Mike Gminski 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](#). Live stats for the contest can be found [HERE](#).

After playing NC State, Miami will head to Silvio O. Conte Forum in Chestnut Hill, Mass., for its second consecutive road game, Tuesday night at 7 p.m. against Boston College, 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.

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Hurricanes try to bounce back from Larranaga's worst start

Steve Wine
AP
Jan. 8, 2021

MIAMI (AP) — To move ahead of John Wooden on the list of coaching victories, the Miami Hurricanes' Jim Larranaga needs just one win, which has been the case for three weeks.

W's don't come easily, even for a coach with 664 of them.

The Hurricanes are 4-5, their worst start in Larranaga's 10 seasons at Miami — and in fact their worst since 1992-93. They've lost their first four Atlantic Coast Conference games, their worst league start since 2000-01.

Injuries have been part of the problem, as has bad luck. The past three losses were by a combined five points, and Miami is only the second ACC team ever to endure such a stretch of narrow defeats, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Two of the losses came against Virginia Tech and Clemson, both now ranked 19th.

"These last three ACC games are very tough to swallow," Larranaga said. "We've had multiple chances to win these games, and just keep coming up a little bit short."

One of four teams without a win in ACC play, Miami will try to reverse course Saturday at North Carolina State (6-2, 2-1 league).

"We're just trying to keep a positive mindset and positive energy," senior center Nysier Brooks said.

That has been a challenge, especially in the wake of the latest loss. Miami blew a 10-point lead in the second half at home against North Carolina, and a defensive lapse allowed the Tar Heels to score the winning basket with three seconds left.

"We've lost our last three games basically at the buzzer," senior guard Elijah Olaniyi said. "Losing these close games is going to get us over the hump — knowing what we have to do when that clock is winding down and there are two minutes left, and the seriousness we have to play with."

Miami's program has been trending downward of late, with losing records each of the past two seasons. Even so, the conference cellar is unfamiliar terrain for Larranaga, who is tied with Wooden for 36th in coaching victories.

With four returning senior starters and highly touted recruit Earl Timberlake, the Hurricanes were projected for the middle of the league pack this season. But while they have avoided setbacks from the coronavirus pandemic, injuries have riddled the roster.

Those returning seniors — Chris Lykes, Kameron McGusty, Sam Waardenburg and Rodney Miller Jr. — have all missed significant playing time, as has Timberlake. At times Larranaga hasn't had enough healthy players to practice.

"This is a really nice group of guys," the coach said. "They like each other; they get along very well. We just have had so much adversity with injuries. The most challenging part is being able to prepare for an opponent."

Waardenburg and Miller are out for the season. The dynamic Lykes, a preseason first team all-ACC selection, has been sidelined since early December because of a sprained ankle and doesn't appear close to returning.

"If he comes back soon, he's not in shape," Larranaga said. "He hasn't played in a month. How do you go out and play when you haven't run up and down a court for over four weeks?"

There's cause for optimism as newcomers Timberlake, Olaniyi and freshman Matt Cross have all played well.

The 6-foot-6 Timberlake made his first start in Tuesday's loss to North Carolina and had 12 points, five rebounds, five assists, five steals and two blocks.

"Earl is a guy who can be a major contributor at both ends of the court," Larranaga said. "He is very good at attacking the defense, he's very good at defending multiple positions, and he can rebound."

For the Hurricanes, that's the question: How well can they rebound?

Aside from Miami, the only ACC team to endure three consecutive losses by a combined five points or less was Georgia Tech in 1989-90. That team went on to the Final Four.

NC State hosts a more defensive-minded Miami team on Saturday

Steven Muma
BackingThePack
Jan. 8, 2021

The Miami Hurricanes have seen nothing in the way of good luck this season, as Jim Larranaga's crew is already a mash unit a little over a month in. Star point guard Chris Lykes has not played since suffering an ankle injury in early December, while 2020 rotation stalwarts Sam Waardenburg and Rodney Miller are out for the year with injuries. Veteran win Kameron McGusty is also banged up and didn't play in Miami's last game.

Few programs could withstand that level of attrition, though Miami is at least hanging in there, and it has lost its last three ACC games (at VT, vs. Clemson, vs. UNC) by a combined five points. The Hurricanes are at least playing better defense this season, which is helping to compensate for the loss of offensive contributors.

— Miami ranks 105th in offensive efficiency and in league games is averaging just 0.91 points per possession, which ranks 14 out of 15. The Hurricanes are shooting just 27.1% from three but have made 51% of their twos, which is a bit above the national average.

— Among the bright spots is sophomore guard Isaiah Wong, who stepped into the void and is taking a quarter of Miami's shots while he's on the floor, a substantial increase from last year. He's hitting 57% of his twos and has been excellent at getting to the line, with 45 free throw attempts in nine games. The Canes need him to be a difference-maker.

— Freshman wing Matt Cross has been outstanding in a secondary role and has been by far the team's best three-point shooter early on (46.4%). He's also making 62.5% of his twos.

— But there are ugly numbers in a lot of places. Harlond Beverly is accounting for an above-average workload but has made only 42% of his twos and 22% of his threes. In 1+ seasons, he's 21-96 from outside, which is not ideal. After shooting 74% at the free throw line as a freshman, he is 14-34 (41%) at the line this year, and that's just odd.

— Big man Anthony Walker is a solid disruptor on the defensive end and has made 60% of his twos, but he is 2-21 from beyond the arc this season, and 5-40 for his career. He should probably take those attempts out of his repertoire.

— While the Hurricanes' interior depth has been gutted, they nonetheless rank 11th in block rate and 55th in defensive rebounding percentage. Their overall improvement in the paint has helped the unit improve from 149th in defensive efficiency last season to 42nd this year. Op-

ponents have shot just 43% inside the arc this season.

— Miami's route to success is shutting down the paint, including the glass, while avoiding fouls. The Canes generally have done those things well all season. Unfortunately for them, ACC foes have shot it better than 42% from three. There's some bad luck in that number, and it's been costly.

— Still, the Canes' defense has kept them in games, giving them a chance down the stretch, and with some different outcomes in those previous three games, they'd look more like a surprise team than one totally worn out by injuries.

— NC State will need to be smart about how it attacks the paint and take care of the ball in the process. It's not a good idea to assume that Miami will be an easy out.

— KenPom likes State by six.

MBB Notches 64-59 Road Win at NC State

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Jan. 9, 2021

RALEIGH, N.C. – Behind a game-high 24 points from sophomore guard Isaiah Wong, the University of Miami men's basketball team edged NC State, 64-59, Saturday afternoon at PNC Arena.

The Hurricanes used outstanding defense to hold the Wolfpack to just 37.9 percent (22-of-58) shooting and register their first ACC triumph of the year despite trailing by four with under four minutes left.

In addition, the decision moved Miami head coach Jim Larrañaga past Hall of Famer John Wooden on the all-wins list.

"I'm really proud of the guys for recognizing how important details are," Larrañaga said. "When we did things correctly, we really played well, but sometimes we get distracted or we don't focus as well. These guys are playing an incredible amount of minutes because we just don't have a deep enough bench [due to injuries] to give them adequate rest."

NC State (6-3, 2-2 ACC) used an early 10-0 burst to jump out to a 14-6 lead, but the Hurricanes quickly began to chip away. Miami (5-5, 1-4 ACC) trimmed the deficit to one on six occasions over the final 10 minutes of the half, but could not pull even or surge ahead.

The Wolfpack, buoyed by a 10-2 advantage in second-chance points, went into the intermission with a 32-31 edge.

Miami, however, finally got over the hump early in the second half, as it held NC State without a point for a span of 4:29, during which it used a 7-0 run to go in front, 40-36, with 16:42 to play.

After the Hurricanes upped their lead to five with 13:06 on the clock, their offense went cold and failed to score over a 7:31 period, during which NC State logged a 11-0 burst to take a 51-45 edge with 6:18 remaining.

Miami once again battled back, though, and took a 56-54 lead on a contested, driving layup by Wong with 1:51 to go. Freshman guard Earl Timberlake doubled the lead on a pair of free throws 43 seconds later, making it an 8-0 surge by the Hurricanes in 2:38 of action.

NC State cut it to 58-57 on a 3-pointer by junior guard Thomas Allen with 54 seconds left before a Timberlake tip-in with 23 seconds to play upped the advantage back to three. After grabbing a defensive rebound, the former top-40 recruit then hit two more free throws with 17 left to make it 62-57.

Wong added two more free throws 10 seconds

later to ice the game, giving the Hurricanes a 14-3 run to close the game before a Wolfpack basket just before the buzzer.

"To execute like we did at the end of the game when they are that tired and being pressed for 40 minutes, and to still be able to make their free throws, get the rebounds and play defense the way we did was really great," Larrañaga said.

Along with his 24 points, which came on 8-of-15 shooting from the floor, Wong added a team-best nine rebounds and co-game-high three steals, the latter mark tying a career best. Timberlake finished with a career-high 13 points while playing through foul trouble.

Allen paced NC State with 14 points and went 4-of-5 from beyond the arc, while redshirt senior forward DJ Funderburk had 12 points and a game-high 11 rebounds. Redshirt senior guard Devon Daniels chipped in 11 points in the set-back.

The Hurricanes outshot NC State on field goals, 3-pointers and free throws to earn the road victory, despite conceding 16 offensive rebounds and grabbing just six of their own.

Larrañaga now has 665 victories in his coaching career, good for sole possession of No. 36 all-time among coaches with at least 10 years of Division I experience, passing Wooden, a 10-time NCAA champion.

"From the time I started following college basketball in the 60's, I was a big fan of John Wooden. My first season as a head coach at AIC, we ran all of UCLA's offenses and defenses," Larrañaga said. "I had the utmost respect, not only for his basketball coaching, but his leadership style. I felt like he was a tremendous role model for all coaches. I certainly don't compare myself or anything about what he accomplished because he was, in my mind, the best college coach of all-time."

"He's got 10 NCAA championships, he could've easily coached another 10 or 15 years ... but he gave it up at 65; I'm 71 and still coaching," Larrañaga continued. "He's a great role model. I hope I'm a great role model for my players."

Miami resumes its road trip Tuesday at 7 p.m. when it squares off with Boston College, live on RSN, at Silvio O. Conte Forum in Chestnut Hill, Mass.

To keep up with the University of Miami men's basketball team on social media, follow @CaneHoops 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 12-15 all-time

against NC State, including 5-8 on the road and 8-8 in Larrañaga's tenure.

– Miami is now 3-1 in its last four road games versus the Wolfpack, dating back to 2/4/17.

– Larrañaga, who entered the game tied for the 10th-most victories of any active Division I coach, is now 665-452 in 37 years as a head coach, including 195-118 in 10 seasons at Miami.

– In addition to Wooden, Larrañaga also broke a tie with Oklahoma head coach Lon Kruger on the all-time wins list.

– For the second time this season, Miami used a starting lineup of Beverly, Brooks, Cross, Timberlake, Wong, sophomore guard Harland Beverly, redshirt senior center Nysier Brook and freshman forward Matt Cross.

– Miami once again played without all four of its returning starters: senior guard Chris Lykes (left ankle), redshirt senior guard Kameron McGusty (right hamstring), redshirt senior center Rodney Miller Jr. (right knee, season) and redshirt senior forward Sam Waardenburg (left foot, season).

– The Hurricanes improved to 10-30 in ACC play in Larrañaga's tenure when just two players score in double figures.

– The Wolfpack's 59 points were 10 fewer than their prior lowest total in a game this season.

– Miami held NC State without a field goal for a span of 4:48 in the first half, including without a point for the final 3:09 of that stretch.

– Both teams had 11 made field goals (Miami on 26 attempts, NC State on 27) and six made free throws (Miami on eight attempts, NC State on six) in the opening 20 minutes, but the Wolfpack connected on one additional 3-pointer.

– The Hurricanes allowed exactly 32 points in the first half for the third consecutive game and fourth time overall this year.

– Senior guard Elijah Olaniyi eclipsed 500 rebounds as a collegian.

– Wong eclipsed 1,000 minutes played, 400 points, 150 rebounds and 100 made free throws at Miami, as well as reached 50 assists.

– Wong scored in double figures for the 19th time, including the ninth in 2020-21, as well as logged 20-plus points for the eighth time, including the fifth in 2020-21.

– In addition, Wong tied his career high in ACC play with eight made field goals, matching the mark he set at eighth-ranked Florida State on 2/8/20.

– Timberlake tallied double-digit points for the fourth time in five collegiate outings.

– Cross surpassed 250 minutes played in his young career.

Jim Larranaga tops John Wooden with 665 career wins as UM beats N.C. State 64-59 on road

Michelle Kaufman
Miami Herald
Jan. 9, 2021

Once again Saturday afternoon, for the fourth game in a row, a conference game came down to the final seconds for the University of Miami men's basketball team.

After losing the previous three by a total of five points, the Hurricanes finally finished on the winning end — 64-59 on the road against North Carolina State.

The difference this time? "Details," said coach Jim Larranaga.

On Friday night at the team meeting, in an effort to stress that details matter, Larranaga wrote the names of all his players on a white board, but misspelled each name by one letter. Instead of "Earl" Timberlake, it said "Ear." Instead of "Kam" McGusty, it said "Pam."

He asked his players if it made a difference that their names were misspelled, even though it was just by one letter. They all agreed it did.

Then, he had the players put their right shoe on their left foot, and vice versa, and had them walk around.

"I said, 'Same shoe, same size, same color, but it probably doesn't feel great being on the wrong foot, right?'" Larranaga explained of his lesson.

The team apparently got the message. They took care of details in the final minutes, made free throws when it counted most, grabbed rebounds in the closing minute, and that made the difference.

Guard Isaiah Wong led the Canes with 24 points on 8-of-15 shooting and had a team-high nine rebounds. Freshman Earl Timberlake added 13 points, including six in the final minute of the game. Freshman Matt Cross had nine points and transfer guard Elijah Olaniyi added seven.

It was the first ACC win for the Hurricanes (5-5, 1-4 ACC) and career win No. 665 for Larranaga, pushing him ahead of legendary John Wooden to No. 36 on the career win list. The injury-plagued Hurricanes were off to their worst start in Larranaga's 10 seasons at UM, so Saturday's win was critical, and Larranaga says it should be a confidence booster.

Miami was playing without injured leading scorers Chris Lykes and Kam McGusty. Both may be ready to return next week.

"Winning's a lot more enjoyable than losing," Larranaga said. "We've been in some really tight games, our guys have fought valiantly and today we were able to finish. We made some key defensive stops, made some key free throws. Isaiah Wong was absolutely tremendous. Earl Timberlake got in early foul trouble, made some really key plays in the second half. And I'm sure our guys feel good going back to Miami."

As for surpassing Wooden on the win list, Larranaga said: "I love John Wooden. He was a role model for me growing up and when I got my first coaching job. I ran the UCLA offense, and tried to develop a philosophy like his. I'm not in any way in the same category of John Wooden. The guy is a legend. He's very, very special to all college coaches. He won 10 national championships. Guy was amazing and in a category all by himself."

NC State dropped to 6-3 overall and 2-2 in the ACC. Miami's next game is on the road Tuesday at Boston College.

Wong, Timberlake lead Miami past N.C. State 64-59

ASSOCIATED PRESS |
JAN 09, 2021 AT 3:32 PM

RALEIGH, N.C. — Isaiah Wong scored 24 points and Earl Timberlake had six of his career-high 13 in the last 68 seconds as Miami finally won a close game, defeating North Carolina State 64-59 on Saturday.

Wong had a layup in an 8-0 run inside the last four minutes that put the Hurricanes, who lost their previous three games by a total of five points, ahead 58-54. Timberlake capped the run from the foul line with 1:08 to play.

The Wolfpack got a quick 3-pointer from Thomas Allen in the right corner, his fourth, to make it a one-point game. Miami ran the clock down before Wong missed a layup but Timberlake grabbed the rebound and slammed it home. Seconds later he grabbed a Wolfpack miss and was fouled, the freshman calmly making two at the line for a 62-57 lead.

Wong added free throws after N.C. State missed for a 14-3 closing run before DJ Funderburk scored at the buzzer.

The Hurricanes (5-5, 1-4 Atlantic Coast Conference) were coming off losses of 80-78 to Virginia Tech, 66-65 to Clemson and 67-65 to North Carolina.

Allen scored 14 points to lead the Wolfpack (6-3, 2-2), who played their fourth tight game. Funderburk scored 12 and matched his career-high with 11 rebounds and Devon Daniels added 11. N.C. State's last three games were decided by a total of 10 points, including two wins.

Miami led 32-31 after a tight first half. Until the closing seconds, Miami's biggest lead in the second half came after Wong and Timberlake combined for a 7-0 run for a 40-36 lead. In the middle of the half, Daniels and Funderburk combined for 10 points in an 11-0 that gave N.C. State its biggest second-half lead at 51-45.

In the second half, Miami shot 52 percent and made 9 of 12 free throws while the Wolfpack shot 35.5 percent and was 2 of 6 from the line.

Miami goes to Boston College on Tuesday. N.C. State is scheduled to play at Florida State on Wednesday.

Isaiah Wong's 24 leads Miami past NC State 64-59 for 1st ACC win

Chris Stock
InsideTheU
Jan. 9, 2021

With Chris Lykes and Kameron McGusty on the sidelines, Isaiah Wong is doing it all for the Hurricanes.

Wong scored 24 points to lead the Miami Hurricanes to their first ACC win, beating N.C. State 64-59 on Saturday.

"Winning is a lot more enjoyable than losing," head coach Jim Larranaga said.

Wong, who made 8 of 15 shots from the floor with many drives and finishes at the rim, also grabbed a team-high nine rebounds—all on the defensive end—to go with two assists and three steals.

Wong is carrying the Hurricanes in scoring, averaging 17.5 points a game with Lykes, the team's leading scorer the last two seasons, out for the previous eight games with a left ankle injury and McGusty missing six of the last seven right a right hamstring injury.

"The guy is a high-octane scorer," Larranaga said. "He's got a nose for openings, he creates all kinds of problems for the defense, he can make acrobatic layups, he can hit the 3, he's a very good free-throw shooter, and he's working really hard defensively and it culminates with a defensive rebound. When he rebounds like that—our guards have to rebound because you've got to recognize we are much smaller than when we were getting ready to play this season."

Earl Timberlake added 13 points for the Hurricanes, who snapped a three-game losing streak.

"We've been in some really tight games, our guys have fought valiantly, and today we were able to finish," Larranaga said.

Miami (5-5, 1-4 ACC) trailed 51-45 with six minutes left before outscoring N.C. State (6-3, 2-2) 19-8 to end the game.

"We made some key defensive stops, we made some key free throws," Larranaga said.

The Hurricanes lost their last three games by a total of five points and found themselves in another tight one against the Wolfpack, who had beaten Miami in the last three meetings.

"We put ourselves in position to win the last four games so it's nice to be on the winning side of this one," Larranaga said.

Timberlake was making his second career start in his fifth game and providing Wong with scoring relief. Timberlake also had four rebounds, one assist, and one steal in 27 minutes.

"Earl is a competitive, he plays very hard, and we need some additional scoring," Larranaga said. "Without Chris Lykes and Kameron McGusty we're not really a 3-point shooting team anymore and we needed to figure out where to get Earl the ball so he could do some damage. Everything he did in the second half was really right by the rim. Everything he does successfully around the basket gives us another way to score the ball. We're a 2-point shooting team that can be very effective getting the ball to the basket."

Wong started the charge back for the Hurricanes in the final six minutes with an acrobatic layup that bounced in. Matt Cross followed with a 3 while Nysier Brooks and Harlond Beverly added baskets to tie the game at 54 with 2:48 left.

Wong hit another layup, Timberlake added a pair of free throws for a 58-54 lead with 1:04 remaining.

N.C. State's Thomas Allen hit a 3 to cut the deficit to 58-57 and Wong missed a layup, but it was Timberlake who scored on a put-back dunk.

Timberlake and Wong each added a pair of free throws in the final seconds to seal the win as the two combined for 24 of Miami's 33 points after the break.

It was also the first road victory, in just two attempts, on the season for the Hurricanes, who were 6-11 away from home last season.

"I'm sure our guys feel good going back to Miami," Larranaga said. "N.C. State is a really, really good team and they've won some really good games here so hopefully this is a real confidence-booster for us."

Headed North, Back on Track

Alex Schwartz
MiamiHurricanes.com
Jan. 10, 2021

CORAL GABLES, Fla. – After back-to-back-to-back crushing defeats, the University of Miami men's basketball team returned to its winning ways Saturday afternoon at NC State.

Following a stretch of three straight losses by five total points—just the second time that has happened to a team in ACC history—the Hurricanes' fortunes took a turn for the better at PNC Arena in Raleigh, N.C.

Miami tallied a 64-59 victory to snap its skid, as well as give head coach Jim Larrañaga the 665th triumph of his career, moving him past the legendary John Wooden on the all-time wins list.

"I've been coaching a very long time and every game is different, every opponent is different. What you hope to do is execute the game plan and give yourself a chance," Larrañaga said. "We've been doing that, but we're playing good teams and they're doing it, as well. Sometimes you execute a little bit better and you win like we did yesterday and sometimes the opponent does some things and they end up winning the game. But I don't consider [this victory] anything like a relief. Winning is more fun, but it's the competition that we look forward to."

Trailing by four with under four minutes left, Miami (5-5, 1-4 ACC) went on a 14-3 run to register its first road win of the year.

The final 10 points during that stretch came from sophomore guard Isaiah Wong and freshman guard Earl Timberlake, who combined for 37 points in the victory. Their play was particularly important in Miami showing it can indeed find a way to win a tight game down the stretch.

"At the offensive end, you have to have someone who kind of raises his game and makes some big plays, and we actually had several guys who did that," Larrañaga said. "Isaiah Wong probably is the most significant because he scored 24 points and made some really key shots. Earl Timberlake, who scored in a variety of ways near the basket. One time off an offensive rebound, another time a little jump hook, another time got fouled and made the two free throws. And that's really the last part of the picture; you've got to make your free throws to close out a game because you know you're going to get fouled."

While the backcourt scoring was certainly vital, it was not the only reason Miami flipped the outcome in this particular affair.

After averaging 16.3 turnovers per game in those three narrow setbacks, the Hurricanes committed just 12 versus the Wolfpack. In fact, Miami did not give the ball away even once over the final 12 minutes of the game.

"We made such a strong emphasis in the practices and in the pregame of paying close attention to the details of doing little things well, things that you might take for granted. Like, just inbound the ball," Larrañaga shared. "When you're playing against a team that presses for 40 minutes, if you turn the ball over too often, they get to score without having to go against your defense. So, our guys did a better job yesterday of taking care of the basketball. I think we actually had fewer turnovers than NC State did."

There is no question the Hurricanes left the Tar Heel State feeling better than they did four days earlier following a 67-65 loss to the powerhouse program that bears that nickname.

The hope now is that the feeling that comes from ending up on the right side of a tight game can be an asset moving forward. While Larrañaga certainly does feel that can be the case, he does note it is not quite that simple and one of the dependable aspects of the 2020-21 Miami team needs to remain so.

"Well, I certainly think winning builds confidence. The more you win, the more confident you are, but as I mentioned earlier, every game is different," the two-time ACC Coach of the Year shared. "Every team's defense is different. We played our first four games against all zone teams and then, all of a sudden, we're now playing against all man-to-man teams. So, you have a different offense, you have a different set of circumstances. What has been pretty consistent is our defense and yesterday that was the difference. We held NC State to 59 points and had they gotten their average, there's no way we could've beaten them."

Indeed, Miami held the Wolfpack to over 20 points below their scoring average of 79.6 entering the game. The Hurricanes limited NC State to 37.3 percent (22-of-59) shooting from the field, including a 30.4 percent (7-of-23) mark from 3-point range.

After underwhelming defensively each of the past two seasons, an uncommon occurrence for a Larrañaga-led team, Miami has completely turned a new page this year.

The Hurricanes are No. 32 in KenPom defensive efficiency and are allowing just 64.5 points on 39.5 percent shooting in 2020-21. There are a variety of reasons for that uptick in performance, much of which can be attributed to new players and more experienced players.

"Our guards, Harford Beverly and Isaiah Wong, have a good bit of experience from last year and now they're playing a ton," Larrañaga said. "They're learning as they go and they've both improved dramatically in that category. Earl Timberlake and Elijah Olaniyi are very competitive guys and have done a really good job of stabilizing our defense on the perimeter."

The next defensive challenge for the Hurricanes comes from Boston College. Miami is set to face the Eagles Tuesday at 7 p.m. at Silvio O. Conte Forum in Chestnut Hill, Mass., which is about 31 miles from freshman forward Matt Cross' hometown of Beverly, Mass.

Three of the last five matchups between the two sides have been decided by two points or fewer, with Miami winning twice by one and Boston College winning once by two.

Those are among the several memorable meetings in the series Larrañaga looks back upon through his 14 outings against the Eagles, during which he is 12-2.

"We've had great games at Boston College. One year, we beat them in double-overtime. I think a couple years ago they beat us at the buzzer. So, we expect another game like the ones we've been playing," Larrañaga said. "...With our shortened roster, we need everybody [who is available] to be healthy

and playing well. I was pleased that Deng Gak gave us 14 quality minutes [against NC State]. He doesn't score, he doesn't get a lot of stats, but he definitely helps us."

Miami is 25-26 all-time against the Eagles, good for its fourth-most games (51) and victories against any current Division I team.

Before splitting the past four contests, the Hurricanes were 15-2 in the prior 17 affairs, with 12 straight wins to cap that streak. Prior to that, however, Miami lost 13 consecutive games, mostly during the programs' BIG EAST days.

This will be the ninth time in the series Larrañaga squares off with Jim Christian, Boston College's seventh-year Boston College head coach, whose teams can present problems in a variety of ways.

"Jim Christian has a lot of head coaching experience in several different leagues. When he came into the ACC, his experience really showed," Larrañaga said. "He was able to do a lot of things offensively and defensively that no other coaches in the ACC were doing. He's had some really good guards who are very hard to defend. He plays multiple defenses that force you to really focus on your preparation because they will take advantage of any situation that you're not prepared for."

Christian's team this year sports a 2-9 (0-5 ACC) mark on the season, but lost by just one at Duke, went to overtime at Minnesota and held a nine-point second-half lead against Villanova.

Junior guard Wynston Tabbs is the Eagles' leading scorer at 13.3 points per game. Boston College was picked No. 14 in the ACC preseason poll after tallying a 13-19 (7-13) record in 2019-20.

Tuesday night's affair will be televised live on RSN and FOX Sports GO, with Evan Lepler and Mike Gminski on the call. A full affiliate will be 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](#). Live stats for the contest can be found [HERE](#).

Following its outing against the Eagles, Miami returns home to host Louisville Saturday night, with action set to begin at 8 p.m., live on ACC Network from the Watsco Center

After playing NC State, Miami will head to Silvio O. Conte Forum in Chestnut Hill, Mass., for its second consecutive road game, Tuesday night at 7 p.m. against Boston College, 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.

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