MIAMI HURRICANES

2020-21 WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CLIPS

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Author: Miami Athletics

A Miami Gamer Trifecta

When looking at the Miami women's basketball coaching staff, it might standout that the Hurricanes have five current and former professional basketball players on their staff. But what is even more special is that three of the five called Miami home during their collegiate careers.

Octavia Blue, Shenise Johnson and Morgan Stroman all shed blood, sweat and tears for the Canes during their times in a Miami uniform. And now, they're mentoring the younger generation of Canes, something that has been extremely fulfilling for them.

"Coming back to The U has been amazing," Stroman said. "I come to work every day just wanting to inspire and wanting to help them. We need more women helping women and we need more loving and giving. We need to give to our younger generation that is coming up."

Stroman was playing professionally overseas until the summer of 2019 and was at a crossroads upon coming back to the US.

"I was going through one of those after-basketball crises," Stroman said. "I just did not know what I wanted to do or my purpose in life. I knew that I wanted to help people younger than me through basketball, but I just didn't know how. So, Coach [Meier] kind of helped me get to that how."

Throughout the 2019-20 season, Stroman worked in a player development role, inspiring the younger generation both on and off the court. Recently, Stroman was elevated to the title of assistant director of operations and has become even more immersed in Miami basketball. She shows up to the gym each day with high energy and a willingness to give back to the program that gave her so much as a player.

"I'm really just thankful for the people that supported me and to Coach Meier for giving me the opportunity to come back home and learn and grow within 'The U'," Stroman said.

Meier brought back another Miami standout during the offseason in Johnson. The Minnesota Lynx player wrapped up her 2020 WNBA season in September and then made the trek down to south Florida.

Like Stroman, Johnson brings a wealth of professional experience to the staff and was one of the true "Miami gamers," according to Meier, so she knows that it takes to be the best.

"The energy has been great and it's been fun," Johnson said. "They've been helping me out along the way, reintroducing me to the way that we do things here at Miami and it has been a blast."

In the months that she's been at Miami, Johnson recognizes the tremendous growth that the team has made.

"Watching that individual growth daily and then putting it together collectively as a team, that is what I look forward to most," Johnson said. "I love being in the mud with them and in the gym with them every day."

Johnson and Stroman are able to serve as connectors between the team and the coaching staff as both of them played for Meier and Blue during their times at The U.

"It's been nostalgic being around Blue because that is who I looked up to when I was playing," Johnson said. "Us having that chemistry and relationship really helps."

While she didn't play for Meier at Miami, Blue is another Miami gamer.

"Octavia Blue is a Hurricane through and through," Meier said. "Her jersey is in the rafters and she is in the UM Hall of Fame. She's a true inspiration to anybody who puts on the orange and green."

In her ninth season of coaching at Miami, Blue has seen the Canes to nine straight postseason appearances and has worked with multiple WNBA draft picks.

But to Blue, more important than any of the statistics or awards, is how she is able to mentor the younger generation.

"To watch them mature into young women and to graduate and do great things, that is more fulfilling to me even than the

progression of the basketball skills," Blue said. "Mentoring the younger players is so incredibly rewarding for me."

Similarly to Stroman and Johnson, Blue explored new opportunities playing professionally in the WNBA and overseas and served as an assistant coach on a few other teams. However, the pull to 'The U' remained and eventually drew her back to Coral Gables, Fla.

"I love the people and I love what this school stands for," Blue said. "There isn't a place in the country that I travel to, personally or professionally, recruiting-wise that people don't throw up their U every time they see me and I love being a part of that."

At the core of each gamer is a love for not only the sport of basketball, but also for the University of Miami and the program that they each played for and the 2020-21 team reaps the benefits of their tutelage and experiences.

Date: Nov. 5, 2020
Author: Miami Athletics

French Connection

From playing together in France to becoming teammates at The U, Naomi Mbandu and Kenza Salgues have developed a bond along the way.

On any given day in the University of Miami basketball facility, it is not unusual to hear “great job” followed by a “merci.” French has become a natural part of Miami women’s basketball practices, as the 2020-21 roster features a pair of players in Kenza Salgues and Naomi Mbandu hailing from France.

Salgues is entering her second season with the Canes, appearing in 25 games for Miami a season ago, while Mbandu joins the team as a transfer from Gulf Coast State College. Considered the No. 2 junior college prospect by ASGR basketball, Mbandu helped her team to the NJCAA Division I national championship in 2019.

Through four months of workouts, the connection between the two French players has thrived, but it is a relationship that predates their time at Miami.

The duo met at the National Institute of Sport, Expertise and Performance (INSEP), a training institute for elite athletes in Paris. Notable alumni include NBA players Tony Parker and Clint Capela, and tennis star Lucas Pouille.

Both Mbandu and Salgues represented France on the international stage, playing in the FIBA U20 and U18 Women’s European Championships, respectively. While they were never on the same team because of their ages, the pair played together at international team camps, where they developed a rapport.

The French natives stayed in touch through the years despite ending up at different schools, as Mbandu spent two seasons at Gulf Coast State College, while Salgues found her way to Miami. Then, in November 2019, good news came down the pike; Mbandu would be joining the Canes for her last two years of eligibility.

“I was so happy,” Salgues said upon hearing the news. “It’s a dream to be here, in college, in Miami.”

Mbandu first chose Miami because of her respect and belief in head coach Katie Meier, but she also knew that it would be a great fit for her as an international student.

“Kenza gave me a lot of good advice,” Mbandu said. “I saw that she was happy here and that it was a good place to improve my game.”

Mbandu has worked diligently over the last four months to learn Meier’s system and the Miami basketball way. Having a teammate who she has not only played with before, but also one that speaks French has been an asset for the forward.

“[Kenza’s] a point guard so she really helps explain the plays and stuff,” Mbandu said. “She’s tough and smart and can lead a group.”

Salgues and Mbandu both remark that the biggest adjustment about playing basketball in the United States is the speed and physicality of the game. They learned the “smart” side of basketball in Europe and are now developing the toughness factor needed to compete in the ACC.

Their toughness will be put to the test in the next few weeks as the Canes prepare to start the 2020-21 season. Despite the uncertainties of the upcoming months, Mbandu and Salgues will continue to support each other

Date: Sept. 30, 2020
Author: Miami Athletics

The Canes Coaching Club

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — As every basketball player knows, eventually the ball stops dribbling. But just because they are no longer running up and down the court does not mean that a player's ties to the game are over.

For nine Canes, the move was familiar; just a little further up the bench, from player to coach.

These Canes have gone on to coach at all different levels. Kym Hope and Krystal Saunders are just up Biscayne Blvd., at Johnson and Wales – North Miami, serving as the head coach and assistant coach, respectively.

Albrey Grimsley coached at both the NAIA (St. Thomas University) and the Division I (Central Florida) level, while Diane Barnes and LaToya Cunningham are coaching high schoolers across the nation.

Two Hurricanes returned to their roots, Octavia Blue and Morgan Stroman. Blue serves as the Miami associate head coach and Stroman assists in player development, both mentoring the current generation of UM players.

The Canes coaching club gained another member this month when Shawnice Wilson was named an assistant coach at St. Francis University on Sept. 11.

"I told so many people around me that I would never coach because of the high demand, as far as time," Wilson said. "But as I got older and further in my career, I realized the necessity for all the time the coaches put in and I understood that piece about basketball. Here we are now, and it's definitely been fulfilling."

Wilson, or "Pepper" as she was affectionately referred to during her time as a Cane, played at Miami for two seasons, averaging 7.7 points and 5.3 rebounds in 64 games played. Upon graduating, the post player competed professionally overseas for five years, including stints in Spain, Italy and Sweden.

Prior to accepting the coaching position, Wilson worked as a teacher counselor and ran a basketball skills training camp, "Pep's Post Skill Development, LLC," working to improve athletes' conditioning, fundamentals and overall basketball skills.

While coaching was not something she had planned on pursuing in college, the lessons she learned from head coach Katie Meier and the assistant coaches stuck with her.

"Coach Meier's energy, that is the one thing that screams at me," Wilson said. "Katie Meier was consistent with her energy and consistent with displaying her passion. She would preach to us about life lessons that you learn on and off the court and I find myself reiterating those same lessons."

Along with bringing a high level of energy to practice every day, Meier strives to show her players that coaching is a viable career option if they have the passion and dedication.

"My players see me, and they know that I am treated fairly and with respect and that our administration is all about equality," Meier said. "We've shown here that we can graduate every kid and build a great family atmosphere, while still having a great balance in our lives."

Meier commends her "loyal and hard-working" assistant coaches for being strong examples for the players.

"They've been successful and heard and respected," Meier said. "They are all about the U and working hard and giving players all the time that they need."

For Wilson, Blue's is always in her mind.

"Coach Blue's voice stays in the back of my head when I'm coaching these players because there were a lot of great things that I picked up from her," Wilson said. "I hope to be as impactful, if not more, to these players as my coaches were to me."

The Canes players that have joined the coaching ranks were fortunate to not only learn from the experiences of their coaches, but also from their own personal experiences as players. Hope, Saunders and Wilson know exactly what is needed from their players because they've been in their shoes.

“I think it’s important for the players to be able to connect and relate to coaches,” Wilson said. “I was a very hard-working player so I can demand that from the girls because I’ve been in their situations.”

Like every new coach, Wilson’s goals for the first couple months are to learn as much as she can about the program and the players. She is looking forward to learning the ins and outs of coaching including how to pull the best from her team.

Meier has no doubt that Wilson will be an exceptional assistant coach.

“Pepper has an amazing presence and knows how to command respect,” Meier said. “She never made excuses as a player and will be a great inspiration as a coach.”

Each coach has had their own unique road to joining the coaching ranks, but they all have one thing in common – it all started as players at The U.

Date: Sept. 16, 2020
Author: Miami Athletics

Canes Embrace Challenges During Unprecedented Summer

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — On July 20, Miami women's basketball players and coaches alike stepped foot into the basketball practice facility for the first time in over four months.

"To finally have the whole team back was just refreshing and a reminder of how much passion we have for each other and for the game of basketball," head coach Katie Meier said.

Prior to that Monday in July, team interactions were conducted primarily through Zoom calls, with players spread all across the world from France and Sweden to Ohio and Georgia. All physical activity was 100 percent voluntary and it was up to the players to stay motivated.

"After our season ended and when the spring workouts were interrupted by COVID-19, my whole mentality just changed," senior Taylor Mason said. "I fell in love with not only working out, but also with making myself better in school and in basketball."

Mason started running more, averaging three miles per day, and began to eat healthier, too. Knowing the upcoming season would be her last in a Miami Hurricanes uniform, the guard challenged herself to be better than the previous year and to give it her all.

That positive mindset and dogged determination propelled her through the early summer months to the moment she could be back on the court with her team.

Meier describes the transition from the end of the season to the beginning of in-person workouts as "unprecedented," but as she goes on to explain, when times are hard and inconvenient is when the Canes thrive.

"We have a little saying that, when adversity hits and people say 'bounce back,' we want to bounce better," Meier said. "I think that is what we are really focusing on; just getting better."

The bouncing forward began with gradually easing the players back into a routine and providing them with a sense of normalcy in being at the gym every day. Because early summer workouts were all voluntary and conducted with varying levels of success depending on the players' circumstances, Meier knew that each individual would be in a different place, physically.

"As a coach, there was no judgment, no disappointment," Meier said. "Being back in the gym provided just total excitement and gratitude."

That excitement rubbed off on her players as they were happy to be back with their Canes family.

"It felt great to be in an atmosphere filled with love and family," Mason said. "They are my family down here in Miami, so it just felt like I was back home."

As the summer progressed and the Canes got more workouts under their belts, the team started making strides on the court. For Meier, the goal for the summer was to remind the players what it is that makes Miami teams great.

The great Miami teams play hard. The great Miami teams compete in every instance. The great Miami teams have impactful communication with each other.

It is the latter aspect that Meier is seeing in one of her senior leaders, Mykea Gray.

"Mykea is really talking way more than she ever has," Meier said. "She's incredibly committed to just playing."

The guard, who was an ACC All-Defensive selection a season ago, has always led by example, but throughout the summer, stepped up her game in terms of vocal leadership on the court. That willingness to take ownership of the team and help lead the other players has developed her into a "true basketball player" in the words of Meier.

The Canes will need leadership and dedication from its senior class, including Gray and Mason, as they continue to prepare for the 2020-21 season.

Date: Sept. 9, 2020
Author: Miami Athletics

From Four-Year Starter to First Lieutenant

Mornings dawn early for First Lieutenant Charmaine Clark, who wakes up at 4:50 a.m. each day. What follows is her normal routine: stretch, breakfast, work, exercise and then she is back at home, where she works on class assignments or watches WNBA and NBA games.

It is that consistency of routine that Clark craved after graduating from the University of Miami in 2010.

Prior to enlisting, Clark was no stranger to military life as both of her parents served in the Army. Surrounded by the military, the Hinesville, Ga., native was able to see the different opportunities that her parents were afforded and the different characteristics that they developed from serving their country. It was only natural that Clark would follow in their footsteps.

“I felt like I could make a difference being in the military,” Clark said. “From that position, you can influence more people to do different things with their life and not be told that they can only be one thing.”

Clark worked hard to transition from being known as “just a basketball player” to building a career in the Georgia Air National Guard.

The enlistment process was relatively seamless for Clark, who was familiar with the ways of the military. It also helped that she was used to early wake-up calls, grueling work outs and high expectations from her playing days at Miami.

A four-year starter for the Hurricanes, Clark averaged 6.5 points, 4.1 rebounds and 2.0 assists during her time at UM. She was part of a Miami program that was moving in an upward direction under new head coach Katie Meier.

A role player in Meier’s system, it was not until Clark’s senior year that she truly developed as a team leader.

“When coach allowed me to be a captain of the team my senior year, I had to deal with lots of personalities and be that middle man, filtering information down,” Clark said. “I think that definitely helped me become the person I am and the leader that I am today.”

On Meier’s end, she knew Clark’s gut and intuition would make her an exceptional leader.

“Charmaine recognized excellence and recognized average and sometimes had to say tough things to her teammates because she wanted excellence,” Meier said. “She was very much a team player and was committed to the program. Her leadership and dedication were one of the reasons we were able to turn the corner her senior year.”

During Clark’s senior season, in 2009-10, the Canes’ roster was full of young players; Clark and Diane Barnes were the lone upperclassmen. However, under their leadership and the coaching prowess of Meier, Miami posted a 22-14 record and made a run in the WNIT before falling to California in the title game.

From her time as a Cane, Clark learned the value of time-management and discipline, both of which she uses in her life today as a First Lieutenant in the Air National Guard. The values came into play even more so in October of 2019, when Clark was invited to represent the United States at the 2019 CISM World Military Games.

The “Olympics of the military,” according to Clark, the Games occur every four years, but 2019 was the first year that women’s basketball was included in the competition. Clark, who has played for the Air Force team since 2016, was selected to participate in the Games after a strong showing in the Armed Forces tournament.

“It was such an honor to not just represent the United States of America, but also everyone who has had a hand in my career and life thus far,” Clark said. “It also allowed me to tie back into the basketball world that I had before I joined [the military].”

When she is not at work or balling out on the court, Clark is focused on growing her charitable organization, the Inspirational Living Foundation, which she established in 2015.

The foundation is centered around community service and youth enrichment, primarily in the Hinesville, Ga., area. Inspirational Living works to provide mentorship and volunteer opportunities to local residents, with the goal of uplifting others and building a better environment.

Clark and the foundation work tirelessly throughout the year to give back, participating in Toys for Tots drives, organizing

gala and back-to-school events, and feeding the homeless.

It is the last one that is of a personal nature for Clark.

“After I joined the military, I was at one point homeless and not many people knew,” Clark said. “I didn’t want to feel sorry for myself because it was only making the situation worse. So, for four straight months, I would collect as much money as I could and I would go out and feed the homeless with the money that I had. That is literally where it started.”

Over the last five years, the foundation has continued to grow and, at this year’s virtual Back-to-School Bash, Clark was able to give away 20 tablets to people in the community.

For the Inspirational Living founder, the next step is to extend the foundation outside of her hometown so that she can give back to more people, all the while creating a partnership with the military and the community.

As she continues her journey in the military and in life, Clark knows that she will always have support from her Canes family.

“Ten years later, I still feel like I am part of the family and I think that is what makes UM and Coach Meier so unique.”

Date: Aug. 21, 2020
Author: Miami Athletics

A Gamer for Life

“If you want to be a gamer, come to The U.”

It is a phrase that head women’s basketball coach Katie Meier has uttered countless times. But Meier is not only in the business of developing gamers on the court, she works hard to develop gamers in life.

When gamers come to Miami, in addition to playing basketball at an elite level, they receive a world-class education and mentoring from some of the best coaches and professors in their respective industries. In short, they are set up for success no matter what career path they decide to pursue upon graduation.

“We want them to set themselves up for success in whatever they aspire to do,” assistant coach Octavia Blue said. “To see them graduate and do great things, that’s more fulfilling to me even than the progression of their basketball skills.”

From garnering internship experience to networking with professionals, Blue hopes that each player leaves Miami with all of the tools to be successful after the ball stops dribbling.

And the proof is there.

Miami’s all-time leading scorer, Tamara James, went on to become the mayor of Dania Beach, Fla., following her overseas professional career. A 2010 graduate of Miami, Charmaine Clark has worked her way up the Air Force ranks, currently serving as a Second Lieutenant and most recently helping the U.S. to a bronze medal at the 2019 CISM Military World Games.

Tamara James (‘06) was elected as the mayor of Dania Beach in 2016.

Meier and her staff work to make sure that their players are capable of thinking on their feet and handling the pressure in big-time situations, whether that is during the final seconds of the NCAA Tournament or in an important job interview.

“Being a gamer at The U, you are expected to make quick decisions with confidence and certainty,” Meier said. “When you are in a job interview and get asked a sudden question, you’ll be able to make that big decision because you are used to doing so on the court.”

While many Miami gamers move on from basketball after their four years as a Cane, UM has no shortage of players that went on to play professionally.

Twenty-five players that Meier has coached have played professional basketball and five of them were selected in the WNBA draft. Three players, Shenise Johnson, Beatrice Mompremier and Riquna Williams are currently playing in the WNBA, while others such as Adrienne Motely, Laura Cornelius and Emese Hof are gearing up for their overseas seasons.

For Cornelius, her evolvement as a basketball player came in the mental aspect of the game.

“At UM, I played in a lot of big-time games and learned how to ‘manage’ them,” Cornelius said. “I learned how to take control of the pace of our play, how to decide what plays to run late in the game and who should get the ball in close moments. They are all aspects that are critical to being a point guard and I’ve taken that knowledge with me into my professional career.”

Similarly, for 2017 graduate Jessica Thomas, learning how to be a leader on and off the court was vital to her development as a player and a person.

“Coach Meier told me from the beginning, ‘Everybody needs to be willing to trust you, that you got them and are going to lead the way,’” Thomas said. “That was the biggest difference for me. It wasn’t about physical aspects. It wasn’t about skills and speed and shooting the ball. It was more so being a leader on and off the floor for my teammates.”

An innumerable amount of Canes have gone on to be leaders in their lives; leaders on the court, leaders in their communities, leaders in their careers. But they all have one thing in common; they were all molded from their time at The U.

“At the end of the day, it is about where you can develop, and not only as a player,” Thomas said. “Miami was the best decision I could have ever made. I became the woman I could never have even imagined by playing at the University of Miami.”

Date: Aug. 18, 2020
Author: Miami Athletics

Fitzroy Anthony: A Basketball Obsession

“Basketball completely changed my life.”

Fitzroy Anthony spent the first 12 years of his life on the island of Antigua, where he and his family did not have much. He spent the days on horses with his uncle’s horseback riding company and lived with his mother and, later, his grandmother.

On an island where kids grew up playing cricket and soccer, basketball was not even a wisp of an idea.

That all changed when Anthony moved to Florida.

When Anthony was eight years old, his mother, who had been in Florida for five years attending beauty school and working, sent for Anthony to join her. Having lived in Antigua his whole life, the culture shock upon arriving in Florida was jarring; so much so, that Anthony moved back to Antigua less than a year later.

But Anthony’s mother was determined and moved her son back to Florida prior to Anthony starting the fourth grade. And, for the Antigua native, it was the best thing that could have happened.

“I can’t imagine what I would have been doing if I remained in Antigua,” Anthony said. “The opportunities I have now and where I am at, I would never have had if I stayed in Antigua, not even a question.”

Anthony’s introduction to basketball was similar to that of any other kid; he played football in the grass with his friend’s and basketball on his neighbor’s hoop. But it wasn’t until his friend’s dad asked him to play in the West Boca Rec League that he became fully immersed in competitive basketball.

That is when the basketball obsession started.

“I just fell in love with basketball and never looked back.”

Playing basketball in college quickly became a goal for Anthony, who recognized how far the sport could take him.

“I remember thinking, ‘Okay, don’t let basketball use you, you use basketball to get to where you need to get,’” Anthony explained. “Basketball helped me as far as having tunnel vision of wanting to go to college, wanting to have a career and do something positive.”

As his basketball career progressed at Olympic Heights High School, Anthony started getting phone calls about playing at the next level. While he knew that he was never going to be a “big-time, high-major kid,” Anthony continued to outwork his friends and teammates and was rewarded with a scholarship to play basketball at Palm Beach Atlantic University.

From 2004-08, Anthony was an integral part of the PBAU team, but his college career was anything but easy.

During that time, he went through two coaching changes. With each switch, he had to prove himself to his new coach.

“If I wanted playing time, I had to earn it,” Anthony said. “It was all about what sacrifices were you willing to make to earn what you want. I had to take every single opportunity that was given to me.”

The challenges he faced through college taught him two very important lessons: leadership and work ethic. What kind of leader will you be during the tough times? How hard are you willing to work to get what you want? These are the questions that Anthony found the answers to during his college career.

Not only did Anthony learn valuable life lessons during his college career, but he also discovered his calling: coaching.

“I had a younger sister that played basketball and I would help her train,” Anthony said. “She would come up sometimes on the weekend to work out and, one weekend, when I took her to practice, her coach said ‘Hey, this weekend we don’t have a coach. Would you mind coaching?’ And just like that, they suckered me in.”

One weekend turned into two, which turned into three and, soon enough, Anthony was coaching his sister’s team in addition to continuing his own basketball career.

While every basketball player aspires to play professionally, Anthony recognized the best fit for him would be to put his

education degree to use and take the coaching path instead.

Coaching provided Anthony an outlet for his “addiction to basketball,” as he puts it. He had so much love and passion for the game that the best way to use it was to share it with others, specifically up-and-coming players.

Upon graduation from Palm Beach Atlantic in 2008, Anthony quickly made his mark on the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) circuit, winning over 80 percent of his games on the sidelines as a coach.

But more important to Anthony than any records or championships was the impact that he could have on his players at such a vulnerable age.

“As a coach, you bring so much value and understanding to them as a role model that they look up to you,” Anthony explained. “Basketball was the thing that drove me to get out of my environment, so I just wanted to give back and show them the pathway of how they can use basketball to get to where they want to go.”

As he continued to be a role model for his players, Anthony’s career started to take off when Miami native and WNBA All-Star Sylvia Fowles reached out to sponsor his AAU team. Fowles, who grew up playing for the Miami Suns, wanted to give back to her community and did so by putting Anthony and the Suns on the big stage.

Not only did the sponsorship help the athletes that he coached, but it also furthered Anthony’s career through networking opportunities.

“Coaching a big-time travel program and having big-time athletes puts you in front of college coaches,” Anthony said. “That allowed for me to be on the phone with college coaches and build relationships in the industry.

It was through coaching AAU and high school basketball – he served as the coach at Coral Springs Charter School – that Anthony built a relationship with Miami women’s basketball head coach Katie Meier.

“I always took my players to Katie Meier Elite Camp and she would recruit a lot of our players,” Anthony said. “Between talking on the phone and her coming to high school practices, she was able to make her own assessment of my character, basketball philosophy and coaching goals.”

While Anthony had his eyes on a job at the University of Miami as an assistant coach, he knew he needed some collegiate coaching experience first.

That experience arrived in the form of an opening at Florida Atlantic University.

In May of 2012, FAU hired a new women’s basketball coach, Kellie Lewis-Jay. Coming from Nebraska, Lewis-Jay looked for an assistant who was familiar with Florida basketball, making Anthony the perfect fit.

During his three years with the Owls, Anthony primarily worked with the team’s guards, coaching Shaneese Bailey and Malia Kency to All-Conference USA First Team and All-Freshman Team honors, respectively. Bailey eventually transferred to Miami in the summer of 2015, following Anthony to The U.

While he was developing his players on the court, he was also growing as a coach off the court. Making the transition from AAU coaching to Division I coaching was a challenge, but one that Anthony readily accepted with an open mind.

“You have to have a growth mentality,” Anthony said. “When you get to the college level, you are going to be exposed to so many new things and it is okay not to now everything. But you have to seek advice, seek mentors and continue to work to get better and develop.”

One of the mentors Anthony always kept in contact with was Meier. So, when an assistant coach position opened up at Miami in the spring of 2015, it was a no-brainer for Anthony.

“It was the dream job, being in your backyard and working for someone that you watched and learned from.”

Anthony’s admiration for Meier’s coaching philosophy and her strong beliefs are ultimately what drove him to accept the position.

The basketball addict brought his passion for the game and willingness to outwork others to Miami, instilling his energy into his players.

“Fitz does a great job of amping up the energy in a very positive way,” Meier said. “If you feel like you want to be average, then you better stay away from Coach Fitz that day because he will call you out. It’s a wonderful standard to have in the program.”

That standard has produced elite-level basketball players at Miami, from a pair of WNBA draft picks in Adrienne Motley (2017) and Beatrice Mompremier (2020) to seven All-ACC honorees.

As his coaching career has progressed, Anthony has cultivated his coaching style, one full of intensity, toughness and energy. His style is a direct reflection of the hard-working player that he was and the tough players that he enjoys coaching.

“I’m going to push my players to be the best version of themselves, but along with pushing them, I am going to love them along the way,” Anthony said. “I think in anything in life, you can’t be tough without loving someone. When you love people, they appreciate you being tough and holding them to a higher standard.”

Anthony holds his players to a higher standard because he knows just how much the game of basketball can give them.

His dedication to his players and the game of basketball was evident in the work he put in on the court, and that dedication had a lasting impact on several Canes.

“[Jessica Thomas], Fitz and I were always up at the gym at 6 a.m. working out,” Motley said. “Nobody in the NCAA would guard us like Fitz and he wouldn’t take it light on us. Looking back now, he made us better and I am so grateful to have had him as a coach.”

Some of Anthony’s players, like Motley, went on to play professionally, while others chose different paths. Regardless of whether his players pursue basketball as a career, Anthony knows that the doors that playing collegiate basketball open are endless and he strives to always help his players achieve their dreams.

“Nothing is more rewarding than watching them walk across the stage at graduation and seeing them chase their dreams,” Anthony said. “As coaches, we played a big role in their lives for four years and seeing them go after their dreams is truly the biggest thing.”

While Anthony’s players are chasing their dreams, he will continue to live out his as a coach at Miami; just a kid from Antigua with an addiction to basketball.

Date: July 23, 2020
Author: Miami Athletics

Octavia Blue: Basketball and Beyond

Orange and green runs through Octavia Blue's veins.

From growing up in South Florida to coaching the Canes, Blue dons UM gear with pride. But it is her journey back to The U that shaped her into the coach she is today.

Blue's first foray into basketball came during a middle school physical education class. While the other girls were jumping rope and playing hopscotch, Blue wandered over to the basketball hoops. Despite never having played basketball before, she picked up a ball and started shooting.

She was a natural and quickly caught the eye of her physical education teacher.

"He came over and asked me why I didn't play for the basketball team," Blue recounted. "I told him, 'I don't know how to play,' but he said he'd teach me and the rest is history."

Blue's involvement in basketball spans over 20 years and is highlighted by lessons she has learned along the way.

Growing up in South Florida, Blue knew of the University of Miami and even attended some games with her local high school team, watching Canes greats like Vicki Plowden.

During the early stages of the recruiting process, Blue had offers from programs like Kentucky and Arkansas, and was strongly leaning towards attending a school out-of-state. However, her mom wanted her closer to home and made her take a visit to Miami.

"When I stepped on campus, even though my mind was completely made up on going out-of-state, it flipped in a heart-beat," Blue said. "I felt that Miami was home and I wound up committing to UM right after my visit."

During her four years as a Cane, from 1994-98, Blue not only etched her name in the record books as one of the greatest basketball players in program history, but also grew as a young woman. The people around her on campus helped shape her into who she is today.

"I love the people and I love what this school stands for," Blue said. "There isn't a place in the country that I travel to that people don't throw up their U every time they see me and I love being a part of that."

"Coach Blue has more pride for this university and this program than anyone I've met. Her jersey is retired, she's in the UM Hall of Fame and she expects her players to have Miami pride." – Katie Meier

On April 28, 1998, Blue's dreams of playing professional basketball came true as she was selected as the 15th overall pick in the WNBA Draft by the Los Angeles Sparks. But with getting drafted came the realization that she had to actually make the team.

In a new city, surrounded by her basketball idols such as Lisa Leslie, Blue worked hard to get over the "awe period," as she calls it, and to just perform.

"You have to continue to be who you were when you were drafted because that is the player that they wanted," Blue said.

The worst mistake you could make, in Blue's opinion, is to try to reinvent yourself just to make the team. If you try really hard to be a player that you are not, you will just end up scared and not playing at your peak level. Staying true to her game saw Blue through three seasons in the WNBA, taking the floor in 59 games.

When she wasn't playing in the WNBA, Blue spent eight seasons overseas playing in professional leagues in France, Greece, Israel, Poland and Turkey.

"My time overseas was really difficult during my first year in Turkey," Blue said. "At 22 years old, I was leaving my home for a little town in a place where they don't speak English. People would stare at me everywhere I went."

Typically, a few Americans can be found on each team overseas, providing some support for each other while they are away from home. That was not the case for Blue during her time in Turkey. The adjustment to the European style of basket-ball, along with the lack of people with whom she could relate put some serious doubts into Blue's mind about whether she

really wanted to play overseas.

However, because her heart was set on playing professional basketball, Blue took the chance to play abroad and made it something more.

“I stuck it out and, had I not made the decision to stay, I don’t know that I would have had the career that I did,” Blue said. “I also don’t think I would have learned how to overcome adversity and tough things out. It really shaped who I am.”

Blue’s transition to coaching was unique in that the forward effectively retired without knowing she was doing so. During her last season in Poland, Blue snapped her Achilles tendon in a game, forcing her to head back to the United States to recover.

It was while she was home in Florida doing rehab that she fell into coaching.

“I got a call from one of my old coaches at Miami, Robin Harmony, who was the head coach of St. Thomas University in Miami, asking me to come be her assistant coach,” Blue said. “I told her that I’d never really had a desire to coach, but I agreed to come and help the post players. I stopped by the first practice and it didn’t take long to get me hooked.”

The interaction with the players, who reminded her so much of herself in college, is what really drew Blue to coaching. She enjoyed showing them how to put in hard work and how to be great, and wanted to continue to do that at the next level.

When she was looking to take that next step, she turned to a local Division I head coach in the area, Miami’s Katie Meier. Blue told Meier of her prospective interview with St. John’s and the Miami coach helped her prepare for the process.

The preparation paid off as Blue landed her first Division I coaching job at St. John’s in the fall of 2008.

While at St. John’s, Blue expanded her knowledge of the game. She learned that there are so many intangibles that go into coaching, from recruiting to scouting to preparing for a game.

“When you love something and are passionate about it, you want to learn everything about it,” Blue said.

Blue’s dedication to the game could be seen during the time that she spent in the gym with her players and when she was on the road for a recruiting trip. It was at an AAU tournament that her passion for the game caught the eye of then-Georgia Tech head coach MaChelle Joseph.

Joseph prided herself on being the first coach to the gym at tournaments, but someone kept beating her to the gym at this particular event: Blue. For Blue, spending long hours in the gym on recruiting trips was just part of the job that she loved.

“I attacked coaching the same way I did as a player, with eagerness and passion,” Blue said.

Fast forward to May 2012.

After three seasons coaching at Georgia Tech, Blue got the call that she had been waiting for.

“Coach Meier called me and said ‘Blue, I want to bring you back home,’” Blue recalls. “I tried to play it cool, but I was so excited and told her that I was ready to come back home.”

Blue brought her passion for basketball and love of The U with her back to Miami, and works hard every day to instill both in her players. Describing her coaching style as “tough love with some playful joy,” she builds relationships with her players based on mutual respect.

“I think of them all as my little sisters,” Blue said. “I take time to try and build trust with them so that, when I do come down on them, they know that it’s coming from a good place.”

Numerous Miami gamers have come through the program since Blue joined the Canes’ coaching staff in 2012, including Jessica Thomas and Beatrice Mompremier. Under Blue’s tutelage, eight players have garnered All-ACC recognition, while Mompremier earned back-to-back All-America Honorable Mention nods and was selected in the 2020 WNBA Draft.

“I swear Blue is like my older sister,” Mompremier said. “Although I’m not at UM anymore, we still talk every other day. Over the years, Blue and I created a bond that I think will last forever.”

On the court, Blue's main focus is the development of the Miami post players. Having played both at UM and in the WNBA, Blue knows what it takes to compete at an elite level and that is exactly what she expects from her players.

For Mompremier, having a coach who played basketball in college and at the professional level was very important, as she had someone to guide her through her last three years of college.

"Because she experienced the same things that I have, she was able to tell me what I needed to do and what I needed to get better at," Mompremier said. "Having her see my potential motivated me to be a better player and person on and off the court."

Because recruiting starts so early in basketball, Blue has known some of the players who come to Miami since they were 14 years old. One of the most rewarding parts of coaching, in her opinion, is seeing the players grow and mature into young women.

"To see them graduate and do great things, that is more fulfilling to me even than the progression of their basketball skills," Blue said.

"At the end of the day, I want them to be the best versions of themselves and I want to help them get to whatever they aspire to."

Heading into her ninth season as an assistant coach at UM, Blue will continue to demand excellence from her players, but will be there to support them and help them grow along the way.