

Leonard Hamilton upbeat on Florida State's future

By Brent Kallestad
Associated Press
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TALLAHASSEE — After four consecutive NCAA tournament appearances, Florida State is sitting home this spring watching the other in-state schools still in the hunt for a national title.

Although Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton is disappointed to be a spectator, he's excited for former Seminoles assistant coach Andy Enfield taking upstart Florida Gulf Coast into the round of 16 against longtime archrival Florida on Friday. Hamilton's former team, Miami, was also in the tournament before losing Thursday night to Marquette.

"It's good for the state of college basketball in the state," Hamilton said Thursday. "I know how they felt when they were watching us."

Just a year after winning its first Atlantic Coast Conference championship with a team featuring half a dozen seniors, the Seminoles struggled all season on the way to an 18-16 record.

"You're going to have a year when you have to regroup," Hamilton said Thursday. "That's the challenging part, what motivates you to come back and get right back in that national spotlight."

Hamilton needs to find a replacement for scoring leader Michael Snaer, but otherwise has everyone back from a team that finished 18-16 after their opening-round NIT loss to Louisiana Tech. The Seminoles didn't defeat a top tier team until late-season home-court victories over Virginia and North Carolina State.

Florida State was eliminated from the ACC tournament by North Carolina and saw its season end four days later with an NIT loss to Louisiana Tech. The Seminoles had a tough time on their home floor, too, losing to South Alabama and Mercer.

"That's part of what we go through," Hamilton said. "This is kind of our regrouping year."

Snaer leaves as the school's eighth leading scorer and a legacy of a half dozen game-winning shots in the final seconds, including four this season that enabled the Seminoles to eke out a winning record for an eighth straight year.

"Overall, we built the foundation that I think we can stand on," Hamilton said.

Hamilton said Thursday that his young team will be right back in the thick of things next year with four experienced seniors available to pick up the slack created by Snaer's departure.

Okaro White and Terrance Shannon, a pair of 6-foot-8 forwards, return along with 6-11 center Kiel Turpin and shooting guard Ian Miller, who limped through his junior season with a bad ankle. Shannon also missed a major portion of the season with a neck injury suffered in mid-January.

"Okaro and Michael had to carry the load and those were heavy loads," Hamilton said about the only two who averaged in double figures. "I've always tried to have the veterans carry the load."

But injuries to Shannon, Miller and freshman Devon Bookert kept Hamilton from getting a cohesive unit onto the court for much of the season, clearing the way for two other freshmen — Aaron Thomas and Montay Brandon — to earn playing time.

Bookert, however, healed sufficiently to be a factor down the stretch, taking charge of the team's point guard responsibilities.

"I'm excited about moving forward with the nucleus we have and the two guys we have already signed," Hamilton said.

The incoming freshmen are 6-9 Jarquez Smith from Jones County (Ga.) High School and 6-4 shooting guard Xavier Rathon-Mayes, reportedly as deadly a shooter as his dad, former Seminole Tharon Mayes.

Hamilton excited about FSU's future

Seminoles coach confident young team is 'on our way'

Mar 29, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

As he looks ahead to next season, Florida State men's basketball coach Leonard Hamilton gets excited about the possibilities.

Not only is he bringing in two recruits that he thinks can contribute right away in 6-foot-9 forward Jarquez Smith and 6-3 sharpshooter Xavier Rathan-Mayes, but he also is still very much in the running for Andrew Wiggins, the No. 1 player in the country.

On top of that, he loses just one senior off the 2012-13 roster in departing guard Michael Snaer.

So the Seminoles will return 11 contributors from a team that went 18-16 overall and 9-9 in the ACC, including late-season wins over Virginia and North Carolina State.

"I thought the learning experiences they went through were valuable," Hamilton said. "And I'm excited about moving forward with the nucleus that we have. And the two guys that we have already signed bring some very positive skills with them that I think will be very valuable."

Smith became a shot-blocking wonder at Jones County (Ga.) High School, finishing his senior season with nine triple-doubles (points, rebounds and blocked shots). But Hamilton says the most impressive aspect of the forward's game is his ability to see the floor and make passes.

Smith is a legitimately skilled offensive player that can shoot and handle the ball. At 6-foot-9, that should pose some problems for defenses.

Mayes, the son of former FSU star Tharon Mayes and a high school teammate of the aforementioned Wiggins, is considered one of the top shooters in the country. He scored 55 points in one game this season for Huntington Prep, but what most excited Hamilton about the guard's senior season is that he had games of 14 assists, 17 assists and 20 assists.

Mayes also has a high-level basketball IQ and figures to be a part of the rotation very quickly.

"We're on our way," Hamilton said. "I can see the scenario setting u,p and we're preparing ourselves to keep our program moving in the direction that we've been moving the last number of years."

Hamilton isn't allowed to publicly comment on Wiggins, but rest assured the forward would be an enormous lift to an already good recruiting class. As well to a team that returns 80 percent of its scoring and 86 percent of its rebounding.

Either way, Hamilton believes the future for his program is bright, as his core of newcomers begins to transform into hardened veterans.

“We are going to have a better understanding of our rotations and how those guys fit,” Hamilton said. “Those first-year guys now have a better understanding of the intensity and focus you need and the challenge of competing in the ACC.”

“I think we all would say their competitive spirit increased as we went through the year. And at the end of the year, I thought we were getting close to playing with that junkyard dog mentality we have been known for.”

FSU coach Leonard Hamilton pleased with rotation fixes entering ACC tourney

Coley Harvey | Orlando Sentinel FSU reporter
12:09 p.m. EDT, March 13, 2013

RALEIGH, N.C. — It may have taken 29 games for it to click, but Florida State finally found a lineup rotation that has coach Leonard Hamilton pleased. As the Seminoles begin opening-round ACC Tournament play Thursday night, look for them to employ the setup often.

“We’re playing 10 people and it’s hard to play a whole lot more,” Hamilton said from Tallahassee earlier this week. “But I’m comfortable with the rotation.”

Specifically, FSU’s current primary playing roster features the likes of starters Michael Snaer, Michael Ojo, Aaron Thomas, Okaro White and Devon Bookert. Centers Boris Bojanovsky and Kiel Turpin, forward Robert Gilchrest and guards Ian Miller and Montay Brandon round out the rotation by playing minutes off the bench.

While the starting five and bench five normally play with one another on the floor, there is occasional overlap of personnel. Such has been part of the Seminoles’ (17-14) gameplan since their Feb. 13 home loss to Miami. Despite falling 74-68, the Seminoles actually enjoyed one of their better and most inspired performances of the year in that game.

So, the rotation stuck.

At long last, the combination appears to have become a winning one.

Sixth-seeded FSU enters Thursday’s game against 11-seed Clemson (13-17) having won its last two games. Those include victories over Virginia and North Carolina State, two teams that are hoping long conference tournament runs can get them off the NCAA Tournament bubble.

For FSU, a string of tournament wins that finish with the Seminoles playing in Sunday’s championship game seems to be the only way a fifth-straight trip to the NCAA Tournament is a possibility.

“As long as we go in there with a business mindset and we stay focused this whole time, we’re going to come out with a good result,” Miller said.

Expected to play a larger role this season, Miller has been relegated to the bench and late-game duty following a foot injury that first sidelined him in the preseason. Battling through the pain since November, he still has become a staple in FSU’s lineup. Despite missing four games just before the start of the ACC season, Miller has played more than 20 minutes in seven of the last 18 games.

He had nine points, including a sequence of seven straight FSU scores, that helped propel the Seminoles to a 71-67 win over NC State last Saturday.

One scorer and onetime starter who has found it difficult to become part of the 10-man rotation since the aforementioned Miami game is Terry Whisnant. The sophomore guard had five double-digit scoring games before the new lineup went into effect, and had previously solidified himself as a 3-point threat.

But since Feb. 13, he hasn't seen more than 11 minutes in a game. He also didn't play at all in four of the eight games in that stretch. He missed one of those games following a death in his family.

Freshman Montay Brandon, a taller, longer guard and stronger defender, has been getting Whisnant's minutes recently.

"Montay's length was better suited for some of the defensive assignments we had and now that we're kind of playing him more of the combo [guard] and playing Ian more at the point, that kind of is just a game adjustment we've made," Hamilton said. "Montay is 6-7 and there have been some long wings that we've had to defend in some of the games that we've been playing. So nothing other than that."

The timing, coupled with Brandon's ability just has Whisnant in a tough spot.

There is one key reason why the rotation seems to be working. Veterans Snaer and White have begun limiting their fouls after routinely getting in foul trouble at the beginning of the season. Since FSU's loss at Wake Forest on Feb. 9, Snaer hasn't had more than two fouls in a game. White, who has fouled out five times this season, hasn't done so in the last seven games. He's drawn just one foul in each of the last three contests.

By limiting their foul counts, two of FSU's best players have been able to stay on the floor a little longer.

Hamilton would add one more reason as to why his current lineup format is working: depth.

"Now we've got Ojo and the [other] three guys and Robert's solid play that has allowed us to really keep Okaro fresher," Hamilton said.

As the season has gone on, the more FSU's newest players — Gilcrest, Thomas, Bookert, Brandon, Bojanovsky, Ojo and Turpin — have understood concepts and game strategy, Hamilton added.

"What has happened with our freshmen is that they are learning and growing and improving," he said. "They're learning more of the mindset you have to be in. The competitive nature of each game. How you have to play together as a team so you can take advantage of the individual talents on the team."

If the newcomers can continue improving across this week, the Seminoles may see more than one night at the tournament after all.

... And now, to Greensboro we go. Check back here to the blog all weekend for more updates from the Greensboro Coliseum, and FSU's attempted run through the ACC Tournament.

'Challenged' Seminoles reverse rebounding roles

Feb 27, 2013 |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

Florida State's rebounding woes didn't start earlier this month at Wake Forest. And they won't necessarily be solved by a dominating performance Tuesday night.

But during a season like this – when the Seminoles have to embrace any and all improvements – the Seminoles might want to savor this for awhile.

Less than three weeks after getting embarrassed on the boards and on the scoreboard in Winston-Salem, N.C., the Seminoles returned the favor against the Demon Deacons on Tuesday. FSU grabbed more than twice as many rebounds as Wake Forest and rolled to a 76-62 victory.

“We got out-rebounded by 20 last time we were up there,” said FSU coach Leonard Hamilton, who acknowledged that his coaching staff “challenged” the players before Tuesday's game. “I thought our guys responded because we played so poorly up there.”

Indeed, it was a complete reversal from that game on Feb. 9, when the Demon Deacons grabbed 45 rebounds to the Seminoles' 25 and rolled to a 71-46 victory. The Seminoles grabbed 44 rebounds in the winning effort Tuesday, compared to 21 for Wake Forest.

In the first meeting, the Seminoles grabbed just five offensive rebounds; they had 13 on Tuesday.

Also in the first meeting, Wake forwards Devin Thomas, Travis McKie and Arnaud William Adala Moto combined to record 20 rebounds between them. Those three finished with a total of nine this time.

“Our guys are just concentrating a little but more and doing the little things you have to do to rebound,” Hamilton said. “There was a lot more commitment to do that tonight.”

The Seminoles were led on the boards by junior forward Okaro White, who just barely missed out on a double-double; he scored 13 points and grabbed nine rebounds.

The rest of FSU's damage on the glass was done by committee – guards Devon Bookert, Michael Snaer and Aaron Thomas each recorded five rebounds, and center Kiel Turpin and forward Robert Gilchrist each grabbed four.

“We focused on it (through) all our preparation for the game,” said freshman center Boris Bojanovsky, one of nine Seminoles to record at least three rebounds. “Last game, we got destroyed on the boards. This game, we had to rebound. And we did good.”

The Seminoles, who rotate several first-year players on the front line, have been one of the nation's worst rebounding teams this season. In six of their last 12 games, they had endured double-digit rebounding deficits.

But on Tuesday, they posted a season-high plus-23 rebounding margin. Their previous high was plus-14 against North Florida in November.

"We can't get too high off of one game," Snaer said. "We've got to do it again."

White said performing better in the rebounding department was a must for the Seminoles.

"We felt like we were a little more athletic than them, but they just took it to us up at Wake," White said. "They killed us. So we tried to get a little revenge and use our athleticism this time around."

Patience has FSU coaches seeing true progress from freshman Michael Ojo

Seminoles center continues to learn the physical toughness coaches have to teach
March 14, 2013 | By Coley Harvey, Orlando Sentinel

GREENSBORO, N.C. — Before he arrived at Florida State, Michael Ojo, all 7 feet and three inches of him, had seldom dunked a basketball.

For a long time, he couldn't.

At the facility where the center first began playing the sport in his hometown Lagos, Nigeria, there were only two goals. If he threw down a hard slam with all of his weight — which even as a 17-year-old was nearing 300 pounds — there was a strong chance that he might bring the rim, support poles and all, crashing down. Replacing all of it would have been costly.

So, by default, the same mean streak most post players his size innately possess, was stifled. But now that the freshman is theirs, FSU coaches believe they know ways to get it out.

"One of the things we try to concentrate on is explosion," assistant Corey Williams said. "Coach Ham [head coach Leonard Hamilton] is always reminding him, 'Jump! Will you please freaking jump?'"

While Ojo's hamstrings, quadriceps and calves may at times be hesitant to lift his body above the hoop, Hamilton, Williams and the rest of the staff haven't been as shy about teaching him. The more they teach, the more they discover patience is the only way they will see true progress.

Lately, that patience has paid off.

"He's gotten better," Williams said. "He's understanding a lot more. It's obvious that he's one of those kids you don't have to force to work. He'll listen."

Wednesday afternoon, one day before the sixth-seeded Seminoles (17-14) were set to take on the 11th-seeded Clemson Tigers (13-17) late Thursday night in the first round of the ACC Tournament, Ojo was listening intently to Williams' every word.

During FSU's one-hour, pre-tournament shoot-around inside the Greensboro Coliseum, Ojo was receiving one-on-one instruction from Williams as his teammates went through other drills.

"Turn and explode," Williams kept repeating while taking the young player through a catch-and-finish exercise. The object was to have Ojo snatch a ball from a trainer with two hands, pivot, and powerfully leap toward the goal for a dunk or layup.

In another portion of the workout, Williams walked Ojo through a segment that required him to catch a pass, turn and lay the ball up in one fluid motion. Such scoring movements haven't come very easily for Ojo in games this season.

"He has a better touch and feel for what he's looking for," Williams said. "Whether a guy's playing on his left shoulder or if they're playing on his right shoulder, he's now able to react with which way to go.

"When he first got here, it didn't matter what shoulder they were on. He was going one way and that was it."

Those are the kind of improvements that have Hamilton encouraged that his six freshmen and transfers will have better seasons next year, regardless how this one finishes. Even after this week's ACC Tournament, the Seminoles are a virtual lock to participate in a national postseason tournament.

"They're learning more of the mindset you have to be in. The competitive nature of each game," Hamilton said. "Learning how you have to play together as a team so you can take advantage of the individual talents on the team."

Ojo remains a work in progress, but he has Williams anxious for the future.

"Sometimes you see some stuff that you say, 'Holy Moly. He's going to be a problem before it's all said and done,'" Williams said.

**Snaer reflects on FSU career
California native leaves mark**

By Corey Clark

March 21, 2013

Michael Snaer had a mission four years ago when he arrived in Tallahassee as one of the most heralded recruits in Florida State history.

The California native didn't just want to score some points and win some games, he wanted to help change a program.

Which is exactly what he did, after turning down offers from traditional powers like Kansas and UCLA to play for Leonard Hamilton.

"I really wanted to come to Florida State and as a competitor take that challenge of not just adding to tradition, just being another notch, but actually starting something and being something huge and making something meaningful," Snaer said.

Which he was able to do over a four-year career that included three NCAA Tournaments, a Sweet 16 appearance and the program's first-ever ACC championship.

"Ever since I've been here we were always like the first team to do this or the first team to do that," Snaer said. "Or the first time we've done this since 19-whatever. It feels so good to hear those kinds of things and know all your hard work is paying off and you're really making a difference somewhere."

When Hamilton talks about Snaer's legacy he doesn't mention the ACC Most Outstanding Player award. Or the six-game winners. Or even the fact that the former McDonald's All-American finished eighth on the all-time scoring list at Florida State.

No, for the head coach, Snaer's legacy is something else entirely.

"When he came it was different," Hamilton said. "He decided that if I'm going to get into the lineup and I'm going to play I need to learn how to guard somebody. He didn't start the first few games as a freshman, but his defense was so good we had to put him on the floor. And not very many high school all-Americans will do that. They want to shoot, have an offensive mind.

"But he turned it around and said I know I can score but let me make my mark and give the team what they need -- a defensive stopper. That's going to be something he carries with him into the future, and he will always be a representative of the type of mentality that he brought to the program."

He also brought an incredible ability to hit game-winning shots. So, so many game-winning shots.

Snaer wound up hitting enough - six in total over the last two years - that his last name became a verb among college basketball fans when he'd hit another one. As in, "Maryland just got Snaer'd."

The day following his career-ending 71-66 loss to Louisiana Tech in the first round of the NIT, Snaer was asked if he could appreciate how he will be forever etched in program history for his late-game heroics.

"I can't appreciate it as much as I know I will in the future," Snaer said. "But I can definitely still appreciate it now. Just having my career here and looking back on it and knowing what I've meant on this program and what this program has meant to me.

"I can definitely appreciate it."

Snaer has uncanny knack for game-winning shots

By Carroll Rogers
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

A straight-faced Florida State fan held up a sign to an ESPN camera Thursday night at the Tucker Center in Tallahassee, Fla., that read: "You've been Snaered."

No facial expression, or explanation, needed. By now, six ACC teams know not only what that means, but what it feels like. Virginia was just the latest.

Florida State senior guard Michael Snaer drove the lane, drew contact and scored anyway on a left-handed layup with 4.4 seconds left, converting his sixth game-winning shot in the past two seasons.

"I never really imagined one, let alone as many as I've hit," Snaer said.

Virginia has the top scoring defense in the ACC and a defensive-minded coach in Tony Bennett. But he watched helpless, even though he and everybody in the arena knew who would take the shot.

"There are just those certain players that have that ability, when the pressure's on or a play needs to be made — they just slow it down," Bennett said. "... That's a separator."

Snaer, last year's ACC tournament most valuable player, enters this year's tournament leading a team that had to remake itself after graduating six seniors. The defending champion Seminoles defeated N.C. State on Saturday to claim a No. 6 seed and will open Thursday against No. 11 Clemson, the first of four ACC teams to be "Snaered" this season.

Of the six game-winners, four came on 3-pointers and two on drives. Three came on kick-out passes. Three he created on his own. Snaer made the layup against Virginia with 4.4 seconds left — oodles of time by his standards. The other five game-winners came with 2.6 seconds left or less, including three with the backboard lit and the buzzer sounding.

It started with a buzzer-beating 3-pointer at Cameron Indoor Stadium to snap Duke's 45-game home winning streak. Coach Mike Krzyzewski called Snaer the best competitor in the ACC and told him so after FSU knocked Duke out of last year's ACC tournament. Coach K would have been hard-pressed to predict another four game-winners this season, but by Thursday's Virginia game, Snaer's teammates were calling for it.

Joell Hopkins told Snaer he predicted it at halftime. The Seminoles fan with the sign had him beat.

"There's a mentality that he has that he doesn't care if he misses it," said Georgia Tech coach Brian Gregory, whose Yellow Jackets gave up a buzzer-beating drive to Snaer on Feb. 5. "He's not thinking about necessarily winning the game. He has the mentality that he's OK if they lose it with the ball in his hands."

It's not that Snaer doesn't care if his team loses; this is a guy who used to throw video-game controls and cry to his mom that the computer was cheating. The second-oldest of eight children, Snaer couldn't

let his younger sisters beat him in Connect 4. These days, he acknowledges getting frustrated when his 3-year-old daughter can't master a game on his smartphone.

But he relishes the late-game responsibility, either way. In Snaer's freshman season, two of his last-second chances failed — on a charging call against Maryland and a missed jumper against Miami. He learned he could handle it and also use it.

"I've been there before," Snaer said. "The only thing I'm afraid of is not giving myself a chance to win if I turn the ball over or not get a shot off."

He does everything he can to make sure he gets it right.

"He loves being in the gym working on his game," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said. "He calls it the laboratory; 'I'm going to the lab.'"

Snaer is a basketball thinker, and as Hamilton says, a bit of a perfectionist. In each of the six game-winners, Snaer can point to a mistake he learned from a similar play earlier in that game or another game, or something he learned at practice.

Of the 3-pointer against Duke, Snaer said twice the previous season he failed to sprint down court after an opponent's made basket — in overtime in an NCAA tournament loss to Virginia Commonwealth and in the ACC tournament loss to Virginia Tech.

"I was still standing right there, like 'Aw, dang, they just made a shot,'" Snaer said. "The ball is already out, and I'm just in the way. I'm messing up the spacing. So during the Duke game, as soon as the ball went through, I didn't think about it. I just took off down the court and got good spacing. I trusted that (point guard) Luke (Loucks) would get the ball down the court and make the right play."

Snaer acknowledges his 3-pointer to beat Clemson on Jan. 24 was lucky. He started out on a bad angle, missed a screen set for him near midcourt and didn't initially know how much time was left. He banked in the shot over two defenders.

But in that final moment, he took his time. That was something he practiced the day after rushing a shot and missing in FSU's NCAA tournament loss last year to Connecticut. Assistant coach Stan Jones explained to Snaer if he had taken two hard dribbles and pulled up, he would have been fine.

"Him telling me that really helped me calm myself down in clutch situations and slow the game down a little bit mentally," Snaer said.

Snaer can slow the game in his mind to the point of overcoming even his own worst-case scenario. Against Georgia Tech, he let a routine pass go off his hands for a turnover with 42 seconds left with the score tied. But the Seminoles held on defense, and he got a second chance. He could have been called for a push-off on Mfon Udofia, but wasn't and never gave up on a drive to the basket.

"When you've been playing for a while you take a step back and think, 'Yeah, that was a big play;, yeah, they got a little momentum, but look at the score, look at the time we have,'" Snaer said. "I can forget about that and just start fresh."

FLAIR FOR THE DRAMATIC

FSU senior guard Michael Snaer has made six game-winning shots, four of them this season:

Thursday (vs. Virginia): Snaer drove the lane and scored a left-handed layup over Virginia's All-ACC forward Joe Harris with 4.4 seconds left. Snaer made the free throw for a conventional 3-point play and a 53-51 win.

Feb. 5 (at Georgia Tech): Snaer drove the lane and scored at the buzzer for a 56-54 win at McCamish Pavilion. He had turned the ball over on FSU's previous possession and also avoided a possible charging call, before driving for the game-winner.

Jan. 30 (vs. Maryland): Snaer made a 3-pointer with 1.3 seconds left for a 73-71 victory, giving him two last-possession game-winners in less than a week. Ian Miller had driven the lane and passed out to him on the left baseline.

Jan. 24 (vs. Clemson): Snaer banked in a 3-pointer from 25 feet with two defenders in his face for a 60-57 victory. He had lost track of the game clock, but looked up to see two seconds left and got the shot off just in time.

Feb. 16, 2012 (vs. Virginia Tech): Snaer nailed a 3-pointer with 2.6 seconds left for a 48-47 win. He got open on the right wing, waving his right hand to point guard Jeff Peterson who penetrated and passed to him.

Jan. 22, 2012 (at Duke): Snaer made a 3-pointer from the right wing at the buzzer for a 76-73 win against the then-No. 4 Blue Devils. The victory snapped Duke's 45-game home winning streak and move FSU into first place in the ACC.

Snaer does it again, hits winner to beat Cavaliers

Mar 7, 2013 |

Written by

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NoleSports.com editor

Apparently, all the Florida State men's basketball team has to do is keep a game close in the final seconds. If they can do that, you-know-who is going to win it.

Senior Michael Snaer converted a running, left-handed, "and-one" basket with 4.4 seconds remaining to lift FSU to a 53-51 win over Virginia on Thursday night at the Civic Center.

It was his sixth game-winning bucket in the last 14 months, and fourth of the 2013 ACC season.

"I knew I was getting the ball at the end of the game, and I knew I was going to make a play," said Snaer, who finished with 14 points. "Some way, some how. Either I'm going to shoot it or one of my teammates will get an open look if someone helps."

After the ball was in-bounded to freshman point guard Devon Bookert (nine points, four rebounds, three assists, zero turnovers in 32 minutes), Snaer ran around two baseline screens to get the ball at the wing.

Virginia junior Joe Harris was right up on the California native.

Then Snaer just blew by him into the paint.

"That was the design, to run him along the baseline to try to give himself a chance to free himself up a bit," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said. "And hopefully they weren't going to call any more moving screens. But he did get the ball, and he was able to explode to the basket and was fortunate enough to make the basket and the free throw."

Said Virginia coach Tony Bennett: "Joe was on him. We thought we made him make a tough shot. He made a floater going to his left. It comes down to those situations as making a play, either offensively or defensively.

"... I'll look at the tape, but it seemed like a pretty tough shot."

Bookert had perhaps the best view of the play. And he said it was plenty tough.

"He double-pumped, probably jumped five feet, wiggled the ball around and shot it with his opposite hand," Bookert said with a smile. "So it was pretty hard."

The shot improved the Seminoles' record to 16-14 overall and 8-9 in the ACC. Virginia, fighting for a spot in the NCAA Tournament, dropped to 20-10 and 10-7.

It was an impressive turnaround against the Cavaliers for FSU, which got pounded earlier this season in Charlottesville, Va., by 20 points.

And Hamilton pointed to the defense as the biggest reason for the bounce-back effort.

The Seminoles held Virginia to just 38.6 percent shooting from the floor, and the Cavaliers' leading scorer, Harris, was held to 13 points (four below his average) on 5 of 15 shooting.

"I thought our defense stepped up tonight and was the key for us having an opportunity to win this basketball game," Hamilton said. "I thought they had to stay focused and talk and communicate, and from that standpoint I thought they did the best job they've done all year."

Meanwhile, Florida State shot 47.7 percent against one of the nation's top defenses, including 52.6 percent in the second half.

Junior forward Okaro White finished with 17 points and six rebounds, and junior center Kiel Turpin added 11 points off the bench for the Seminoles, who wrap up the regular season Saturday afternoon at home against North Carolina State.

The Wolfpack are one of just five teams left in the conference who haven't been "Snaer'd" in the final seconds.

"I'm not even really worried about hitting game-winners and making last-second shots," Snaer said. "I'm really just trying to finish up strong and win every game, especially at home. Tonight was a big game that we really needed."

The Art Of Hitting Game-Winning Daggers

Robbi Pickeral

ESPN.Com

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As Illinois forward Tyler Griffey was being hoisted atop shoulders Feb. 7 in the aftermath of his game-winning layup over top-ranked Indiana, teammate Brandon Paul was watching the replay, giddy but still a little stunned about how it had all come together.

"With only 0.9 seconds left, I had made up my mind beforehand," said the senior guard who threw the game-winning inbounds pass. "Rather than look for a desperation 3, I'd look more toward the basket, hoping that a player would bust a switch or something like that. I didn't expect Tyler to get as open as he did, but he did.

"We practice that [inbounds play] every day in practice, and it's something we do at a high level."

But never quite that high.

For the mere seconds of highlight film borne from a game-winning jumper, tip-back or layup -- and there have been plenty of all of those this season -- there are days, weeks, even months of preparation that go into that moment.

Florida State associate head coach Stan Jones -- whose team has won three games this season on last-second shots from senior guard Michael Snaer -- calls prevailing in those nail-biting situations "more of an art than a science." Practice may not always make perfect in these cases, but it's still key.

"There's not a coach or a program of any merit that doesn't spend time every week, almost every day, working on those last-second situations ... so players have some kind of recognition of how to handle it," Jones said.

At FSU, that means spending time during the offseason evaluating personnel and determining which players the team would want on the court if it needs a last-second 2 or 3.

The Seminoles then practice all sorts of situations -- full-court, from the sideline, after a made basket, out-of-bounds under the basket -- in the days leading up to each game.

And if a contest is close, you'll likely see Jones whip out an index card that lists multiple options of down-to-the-wire scenarios, in case he and head coach Leonard Hamilton need to draw something up on a timeout grease board. Every once in a rare while, one of those plays might turn out just like it's drawn up -- like at Duke last season, when FSU forward Bernard James' just-right screen in the backcourt freed up point guard Luke Loucks to run the floor, draw defenders and find Snaer in the just-right place for the game-winning 3.

"Just like we practiced it," Jones said.

More often, though, coaches count on players to read the situations they've prepped for and make clutch decisions. Like when Snaer caught the ball going the wrong way on an inbounds pass, misused a screen, but still buried a 25-foot game winner against Clemson on Jan. 24.

Or when UCLA point guard Larry Drew II ignored clapping teammate Shabazz Muhammad and instead buried a fall-away jumper of his own to beat Washington 59-57 on Feb. 7.

Or when Butler's Roosevelt Jones stole an inbounds pass with 3.5 seconds left and drove into the lane for a buzzer-beating floater to beat then-No. 8 Gonzaga 64-63 on Jan. 19.

"I do think the biggest thing is, some guys really love that moment and excel in that moment," said Butler coach Brad Stevens, whose team has won on three last-second shots this season (against Marquette, Indiana and the Zags), and lost on another (at La Salle). "But I think for most, it's more about, 'This is the job, this is the task at hand,' and I feel like the reason we've had three guys make those shots, instead of one guy make all three, is we have a pretty task-oriented team.

"We talk about this all the time: Sometimes you have to give everything you have for 40 minutes, one possession at a time, just to have a chance to win. In those three games, because of the level of competition, because of our complete and total focus on trying to win that game, I just think you play that possession like all the other possessions, you're just trying to figure out a way to win and win that possession. So your work, the 39 minutes and 58 seconds before that, kind of prepares you for those moments."

Usually at the end, the shooter gets most of the credit if his shot swishes through, but so many others often deserve kudos for making it happen.

Like Wisconsin's Mike Bruesewitz, whose on-the-money pass put teammate Ben Brust position to hit a running 3-pointer that forced overtime, and an eventual win, over then-No. 3 Michigan on Feb. 9.

"Without that, the shot doesn't get off," Brust told ESPN.com's Andy Katz after the game. "If that thing gets tipped, then that's the game. Mike put it right where I needed it."

Or Paul, who knew exactly what he needed to look for with 0.9 seconds left against the Hoosiers -- and found it.

Just before the crowd closed in.

"Everyone had a hand in that play, from Coach calling it, to everyone running it, to Tyler getting open," Paul said. "That's what we prepare for, and [we] pretty much did it to perfection."

It's been a crazy season chock full of last-second shockers. Five favorites so far:

Snaer's drive: Just when you thought the FSU senior couldn't hit one more game-winning 3-pointer -- he didn't. On Feb. 5, he made a driving layup just before the buzzer to win at Georgia Tech.

Alex Barlow's floater: All three of the Bulldogs' game winners have been fun to watch, but two things put Barlow's spinning 6-footer with 2.4 seconds left in overtime on Dec. 15 over the top: It came against No. 1 Indiana, and Barlow is a walk-on.

Matthew Dellavedova's heave: Who doesn't love a near-midcourt shot? With fewer than three seconds left, St. Mary's senior guard Matthew Dellavdova took a long outlet pass and buried a 3-pointer on the run from waaaay out to beat BYU 70-69 on Jan. 16.

Reggie Johnson's tip-in: The Miami big man kept his team undefeated in ACC play on a tip-back at NC State with 0.8 seconds left on Feb. 2. And he did it with his left hand, the same hand that had been encased in a cast just three weeks before because of a broken thumb.

Griffey's layup: Seriously, how did he get that open?

In his words: Michael Snaer on the five shots that made him college hoops' king of buzzer beaters

By Jeff Eisenberg | The Dagger – Mon, Feb 11, 2013 9:00 AM EST

Michael Snaer's game-winning 3-pointer at Duke last year is still the biggest of his game winners (Getty Image ...

Twenty seconds remained in a tie game between Florida State and Georgia Tech last Tuesday night when Seminoles guard Michael Snaer overheard two of his teammates say something that made him chuckle.

Michael Snaer sinks a game-winning layup at Georgia Tech last week (AP)"A couple guys said in the huddle, 'Oh, we're going to win this game. Mike's got it,'" Snaer said. "It was funny to me to hear them say that, but it's a good feeling knowing that your teammates, your coaches and the fans at home are thinking in their heads, 'We got this because we've got Mike.'"

College basketball's king of clutch validated his team's faith in him that night, attacking the rim off the dribble and scoring a game-winning layup just before time expired. The basket was Snaer's third buzzer beater in the previous two weeks and his fifth since January 2012, all in the final 2.6 seconds of a game and all securing victories for Florida State.

Having a reputation for sinking game-clinching shots is still surreal to Snaer because the 6-foot-5 senior still agonizes over his misses far more than he cherishes his makes.

Midway through ACC play Snaer's debut season in Tallahassee, referees called him for charging and nullified a basket that would have tied a game against Maryland in the final 15 seconds. Weeks later, the highly touted freshman missed a jump shot that could have wrapped up a victory over Miami.

"You don't get over those," Snaer said. "I'm going to always remember. Those are the moments that have helped me mature to this point to where I can actually hit game winners. I think it takes failure first."

If so, those early missteps have proven worthwhile for Florida State. Snaer's recent ability to win games at the buzzer propelled the Seminoles to a top-three finish in the ACC a year ago and enabled a youthful, erratic Florida State team (13-10, 5-5) to at least remain in striking distance of an NCAA tournament bid this season.

Snaer relived each of his five buzzer beaters in detail recently during a conversation with Yahoo! Sports. Below are videos of each shot along with Snaer's recollection of what he did right, what he did wrong and what enabled him to sink each shot.

Date: Jan. 22, 2012

Opponent: Duke

Venue: Cameron Indoor Stadium

Shot: A right-wing 3-pointer at the buzzer to give Florida State a 76-73 victory over the fourth-ranked Blue Devils. The shot snapped Duke's 45-game home win streak and propelled the Seminoles to first place in the ACC.

The key to the most memorable shot of Snaer's career was his ability to learn from a mistake he had made previously in the same situation.

In a Sweet 16 loss to VCU the previous March, Snaer felt he sabotaged Florida State's final play in overtime by not positioning himself properly to give his point guard enough room to make a play off the dribble. As a result, Snaer was careful against Duke to sprint down court until he reached the right corner immediately after Austin Rivers tied the game with a driving layup with 4.9 seconds to play.

"I always thought to myself, if I had just gotten down the floor early enough against VCU, maybe we would have had the space to be able to find a gap and make a play," Snaer said. "[Against Duke], I didn't want to panic and make the same mistake. I took off running as soon as the shot went through."

The reward for Snaer's hustle was a wide-open 3-pointer. A Bernard James screen in the backcourt freed point guard Luke Loucks, who sped up court, drew help defenders and fed Snaer in time for him to get the shot off over a late-closing Andre Dawkins.

"The funny thing is I knew I had enough time to shoot it without rushing it," Snaer said. "I had to trust Luke was a good enough point guard that he would give me the ball with enough time to get a shot off. He wouldn't give me the ball if there wasn't enough time. I had to trust that."

Even so, Snaer still wasn't 100 percent sure he got the shot off in time. In fact, it brought back memories for Snaer last Thursday watching Illinois' Tyler Griffey frantically looking around to see if he beat the clock on a game-winning layup against Indiana.

"After he made that layup, he turned and looked like, 'Did we win? Was it good? Did I get it off in time?'" Snaer said. "Those same questions were running through my head too. I looked at his face like, 'I've been there. I know exactly what you're feeling like right now.' It wasn't until my teammates ran off the bench and grabbed me that I knew, 'OK, it had to have counted.'"

Date: Feb. 16, 2012

Opponent: Virginia Tech

Venue: The Tucker Center

Shot: Snaer's right-wing 3-pointer with 2.6 seconds left erased a two-point Hokies lead and lifted the Seminoles to a 48-47 victory. The win kept the Seminoles in first place in the ACC.

Having trailed by as many as 15 points early in the second half and by eight with less than two minutes to play, Florida State was hoping just to have a chance to win the game on its final possession.

Virginia Tech's Robert Brown gave the Seminoles that opportunity when he missed a pair of free throws with 10 seconds to play and the Hokies up two.

As point guard Jeff Peterson dribbled up the left side of the floor, Snaer ran up the other side until he realized he was wide open due to a miscommunication by two Virginia Tech defenders. Eyes wide, he pulled up at the right wing, waved his hands frantically and hoped Peterson had spotted him.

"Once I saw Jeff drive middle, my hand went up and I couldn't believe they left me open again," Snaer said. "I'm like, 'Oh Jeff, just make this play.' In my head, I'm like, 'Come on, come on, come on.'"

The answer to Snaer's prayers came in the form of a perfect kick-out pass from Peterson after he'd forced the defense to collapse on him in the paint. Two Virginia Tech defenders rushed at Snaer, but he had time to get off a clean look and confidence it was going to drop.

"Once it got to me, it was over," Snaer said. "I knew I was going to make it because of the first one. That time, I knew from the beginning. I was like, 'If they leave me open, I know the shot is going in. I've already done this.'"

Date: Jan. 24, 2013

Opponent: Clemson

Venue: The Tucker Center

Shot: Snaer banked in a right-wing three as time expired to give Florida State a 60-57 win over a Clemson team that led most of the game. The Seminoles trailed by as many as 12 points at home in the second half.

So many of Snaer's game-winning shots have been a result of picture-perfect plays by him and his teammates.

The one against Clemson was more of a happy accident.

The first thing Snaer says he did wrong was not catching the ball going toward the basket on the inbound pass. Mistake No. 2 was failing to use the drag screen properly to create separation from his defender. And the final blunder was losing track of how much time was left in the game.

"In my head I'm thinking I have about five seconds left or so," Snaer said. "I look up, and there's only two seconds. All I have time to do is take one hard dribble and let this thing fly."

Undeterred, Snaer pulled up from 25 feet and hoisted a right-wing 3-pointer over the outstretched arms of multiple defenders. Snaer admits he didn't call bank, but he did think the ball had a chance to go in off glass as he observed its trajectory.

The shot inspired a surprisingly emotional reaction from Snaer considering the team he had just beaten was Clemson and not Duke or North Carolina. The senior ran to the other baseline, pumped his fist and screamed as his teammates chased after him.

"We really needed that game," Snaer explained. "We really needed a home win to keep the faith of our fans and to keep everyone interested. We hadn't been doing so hot to that point, so we had to show a little spark, show a little life and give people a reason to keep coming to our games and supporting us."

Date: Jan. 30, 2013

Opponent: Maryland

Venue: The Tucker Center

Shot: In a clash of potential bubble teams, Snaer proved to be the difference, burying a game-winning 3-pointer with 1.1 seconds to go to give his team a 73-71 victory. Florida State completed a sweep of Maryland to improve to 4-3 in the ACC and 12-8 overall.

For Snaer to have a shot at yet another buzzer beater, he needed Maryland's Dez Wells to fall for the bait.

With Florida State trailing by one and nine seconds remaining, coach Leonard Hamilton drew up a play for point guard Ian Miller to penetrate the defense and either score himself or kick to a shooter. Snaer's job was to inbound the ball, then run between the left corner and the left wing to try to free himself from his defender.

"I had to keep my defender from knowing where I was and try to catch him ball watching," Snaer said. "Once Ian made the drive and got his head turned, I knew I'd maybe have to move one or two times and Ian would have to make a good pass. I was thinking ahead on that play, and that really helped me."

Sure enough, despite Snaer's history of success in late-game situations, Wells got sucked into the paint to help when Miller drove. Miller kicked to Snaer along the sideline and the senior delivered, burying a game-winning 3-pointer to put Florida State up two with only 1.3 seconds remaining.

"It actually worked exactly how we drew it up," Snaer said. "There was so little time left and I had a young player guarding me. I definitely wasn't too surprised I was that open, but I was still kind of surprised. I knew I had a little bit of time to shoot it, and it felt good to get one that was that clean."

The sight of that shot dropping was a relief for Snaer because he felt pressure with Florida State facing a fellow bubble team and trailing by one entering its final possession.

"Me and Ian joked about it," Snaer said. "We talked about how much less pressure it is to shoot the ball when you're tied versus when you're down by one or down by two. It was definitely a good feeling to hit that shot."

Date: Feb. 5, 2013

Opponent: Georgia Tech

Venue: McCamish Pavilion

Shot: Snaer split two defenders and laid the ball off glass as time expired to give Florida State a badly needed 56-54 victory. That play atoned for a mistake he made on the team's second-to-last possession when a routine pass slipped through his fingers for a turnover.

To sink a third game-winning basket in two weeks and a fifth in two seasons, sometimes it takes a little bit of good fortune.

In Snaer's case, the lucky break was a referee's non-call.

With Florida State in jeopardy of being taken to overtime at last-place Georgia Tech, Hamilton put the ball in Snaer's hands on the Seminoles' final possession and instructed his senior leader to make a play. Snaer passed up a ball screen, ran smack into Mfon Udofia and created space with his left arm, sending the Georgia Tech guard sprawling but somehow not inducing a whistle.

"I didn't really feel I pushed off, but the call could have easily gone the other way," Snaer said. "There wasn't enough contact to make him fall like that, but he's a good defender. I'll admit that. I'd probably try to do the same thing if a guy came at me like that. That was a call he could have gotten and he did a great job selling it too."

When referees let Snaer play on, he took advantage of the space he created, split the two defenders and attacked the rim, laying the ball off glass as time expired for a tie-breaking game-winning layup. It was the first of Snaer's game-winners that wasn't a 3-pointer, and he was pleased with his decision to go to the rim.

"It was a higher percentage shot," Snaer said. "I was happy to mix it up a little bit, and I thought that was the right shot in that situation."

No surprise. Whether it's a jump shot or a driving layup, if the game is on the line, college basketball's most feared final-possession scorer always seems to come through.

Snaer Making Dramatic History
FSU's senior guard has 5 buzzer-beaters
By Corey Clark, Tallahassee Democrat
February 8, 2013

There are no official NCAA records to document who has the most last-second, game-winning shots in college basketball history.

So there is no way to know, for certain, whether Michael Snaer's five buzzer-beaters are the most ever by a single player.

But one thing seems certain. It's unlikely anyone has ever had a 13-month stretch like this.

With his game-winning finger-roll on Tuesday night at Georgia Tech, Snaer now has five game-winners in the last two seasons. Against five different ACC teams. Meaning he has broken the hearts of 45 percent of the conference on last-second shots. In barely over a year.

Not that he seems all that affected by it.

Snaer was asked on Thursday if he could appreciate what he's done these last two seasons and how remarkable it is for one person to hit five game-winners.

"I definitely can," Snaer said. "But it's kind of like with last year's accomplishments — you've got to wait until the season is over and really take it and look at your accomplishments and what you've done.

"Now you've just got to focus on the next game and being consistent and being the player your team needs."

There are at least two players that had Snaer-like, last-second successes during their playing days — West Virginia's Da'Sean Butler and Vanderbilt's Barry Goheen.

Butler hit six game-winning shots for the Mountaineers during the 2009-2010 season, including three in a seven-day span. But of the six, one came with 17 seconds left, one with six seconds left and another with four seconds left.

Only three of Butler's winners came with less than three seconds on the clock. All five of Snaer's have been hit with 2.4 or less, including three absolute, bona-fide buzzer-beaters.

Just like Goheen.

When the Vanderbilt guard finished his college career in 1989, he actually had four by-the-definition buzzer-beaters to his credit. Three were game-winners (including a 40-footer to beat Louisville) and the other was a game-tying 3 against Pitt in the 1988 NCAA Tournament — a game the Commodores won in overtime.

He also beat Tennessee with an "and-one" basket with four seconds left and beat Ole Miss with free throws in the final seconds as well.

"In my experience, I guess it was easier for me to block out the situation," Goheen said in a 2008 interview with the website Basketball Interview Challenge, "and not think that we were behind one point with 10 seconds to go and this shot I'm about to put up will or will not mean the game whether it goes in or not. I never really thought about that.

"It should be like the first shot of the game or the first shot in practice. That's how I tried to view it."

Snaer has a similar philosophy. After his 3-pointer with 1.1 seconds left to beat Maryland this year, he said it was a shot he's supposed to make because he was wide open. And he approached the moment just like he would have if there were 10 minutes left in the first half.

"In the course of the game, I'm supposed to make that shot every single time," Snaer said.

Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton joked on Thursday he wasn't sure he had won five games in his coaching career on last-second shots heading into last season. Now he's won six in the last 13 months — five by the same person.

Hamilton said Snaer's tireless work ethic in practice and in post-practice drills is what helps him in the high-pressure moments.

"As a result of being that focused ... it gives you a little bit more confidence," Hamilton said. "And you're not quite as uptight in those situations because you've done it over and over and over in the gym. And I think that magic focus level makes him a little more comfortable."

Another buzzer-beater: Snaer lifts FSU past Tech

'Noles beat Ga. Tech at the buzzer

Feb 6, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

ATLANTA — It was another midweek conference game for the Florida State Seminoles.

So, naturally, it ended with another Michael Snaer buzzer-beater.

For the third week in a row, the senior guard hit a game-winning shot in the closing seconds to give FSU a win — this time his running layup at the horn knocked off Georgia Tech, 56-54, on Tuesday night at McCamish Pavilion.

It was Snaer's third buzzer-beater of the season and fifth of his career, as the Seminoles improved to 13-9 overall and 5-4 in the ACC.

"I'm not even nervous anymore at the end of the game," said FSU center Kiel Turpin, who had 10 points, five rebounds, three blocks and two steals. "I'm just like, 'Mike's going to get it. He's going to score.'

"We know it's going to go in."

This one was different, though.

The first four buzzer-beaters of Snaer's career were all on 3-pointers. This one came by attacking the basket. He got the ball near midcourt with 11 seconds left, dribbled for a few moments, drove past one defender and bumped into another before attacking the basket.

"I started driving and once he cut me off, I just stopped," Snaer said. "He tried to draw an offensive foul, which was pretty good defense by him. But they didn't call it so at that point I had to make a play."

Snaer continued: "I saw it open up. I saw Kiel had his man sealed. I knew I'd be able to get around and have just enough time to hurry up and get it up off the glass. It was really off instinct."

His layup dropped through the basket as the horn sounded and the Seminoles were celebrating yet another last-second victory.

Snaer gave Florida State a 54-51 lead with 1:56 left as he knocked down both ends of a one-and-one. The Seminoles had a chance to extend the lead 26 seconds later, but Aaron Thomas missed two free throws. After a scrum for a loose ball, Georgia Tech's Mfon Udofia then banked in a 3-pointer with a minute left to tie the game at 54-54.

The Jackets became the fifth ACC team to lose at the hands of Snaer at the buzzer.

"We wanted him to take the shot with four seconds left," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said. "And hopefully if he takes the ball to the basket, it puts pressure on them whether they're going to foul him or let him go."

“You can’t say this very often, but it was really just like we drew it up.”

So was the start FSU had on Tuesday night.

It was the exact opposite from the one the Seminoles had on Saturday against Duke, when they trailed 18-2 before they had a chance to breathe.

Against the Jackets, FSU jumped out to a 13-0 lead just six minutes into the game.

“I thought our guys got off to a fast start because they were very conscious of moving the ball, making the extra pass and making sure we were going to execute tonight much better than we have in the past,” Hamilton said.

But over the final 14 minutes of the half, FSU scored just 13 points and allowed Brandon Reed to connect on all three of his 3-point attempts as the Yellow Jackets stormed back.

Georgia Tech went on an 11-2 run and then a 12-1 run in the first half, and took its first lead of the game on Daniel Miller’s driving dunk with three seconds left before halftime.

Florida State’s second half started then like this: Montay Brandon turnover, Snaer missed shot, Brandon turnover, Snaer missed shot.

And the Yellow Jackets took a 31-26 advantage.

Fellow freshman Devin Bookert was immediately inserted into the game for Brandon, who had five assists in the first half, and the Seminoles’ offense seemed to respond as freshman center Boris Bojanovsky scored eight points in just over two minutes.

He and Turpin combined for 20 points on the night for the Seminoles.

“All we did this week was work hard on calling for the ball and finishing around the hoop,” Turpin said.

“It was nothing different. We just got the ball more and were able to finish.”

When Bookert knocked down a 3 from the left wing, the Seminoles had a 41-39 lead with 11:10 left.

A Thomas drive two minutes later put FSU up by four and Hamilton’s team had a chance to extend the lead on the next possession but Okaro White (three points, game-high 10 rebounds) missed an open 3 from the right corner.

Georgia Tech’s Marcus Georges-Hunt drilled a wide-open look from the right wing on the other end and the Seminoles’ lead was down to one.

From there it was back and forth.

And the outcome was very much in doubt. Right up until the ball left Snaer’s hands.

“This is a big win,” the senior said. “Because we’ve got to stay in the hunt. And the only way to do that is be 5-4 at this point.”

Florida State plays again Saturday at Wake Forest.

Postgame: Michael Snaer hits the dagger as Terps let one slip away

Posted by Alex Prewitt on January 31, 2013 at 12:19 am

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Of course the burden fell on this man, alone in the corner with the clock ticking down, a history of ACC daggers already in his pocket. Because really, how else can a close game against Florida State end these days, but with a three-pointer lofted from the ice-cold wrists of Michael Snaer with 1.1 seconds left?

Snaer worked his magic once again, hitting his second game-winner in seven days and fourth in the past two seasons, lifting the Seminoles to a 73-71 win over Maryland at the Donald E. Tucker Center on Wednesday night, another gut-wrenching loss for an already starved Terrapins bunch.

Had Maryland executed down the stretch, however, it would have silenced the sparsely packed crowd and benched the chopping tomahawks. Had Nick Faust not missed three free throws in the final five minutes, or had Alex Len converted a gimme alley-oop dunk with 13 seconds left, or had the entire Terps defense not collapsed on a stumbling Ian Miller, leaving Snaer open on the left side, they might have secured their first ACC road win this season.

Instead, it begat tears in the locker room and a long plane ride home, left to dwell on another game against Florida State that slipped away. After blowing a double-digit, second-half lead in their last meeting on Jan. 9, the Terps led by seven points with 6:26 left in the second half. But the Seminoles, who made 14 of 16 free-throw attempts in the second half, more than Maryland converted all game, tied things up at 66-66 after a Miller jumper.

“Never thought we were going to lose,” Turgeon said. “So it does make it hard. And we felt like we were in control. And we missed some opportunities. Then we had two possessions in a row, two out of three where we just fouled and we put white to the line. One on the block, late in the shot clock, then Nick runs over White. So we just gave them four points that they didn’t have to earn.

“Those hurt you. Those little things we that we’ll get better at as this young team grows. It hurts because you invested so much. And this was one we really put a lot into. We were really invested. We put a lot into every game. But this one we felt like we could win if we played well. Just came up short.”

Dez Wells, who by and large took over offensively during the stretch run, drilled a step-back three-pointer with the shot clock near zero. On the other end, Okaro White hit two free throws after Faust bulldozed him trying to fight over a screen. Following a Wells jumper, Snaer hit a floater to cut the lead to 70-71. And with 30 seconds left, Turgeon called a timeout, setting up what could have extended Maryland’s lead to three points and put plenty of pressure on the home Seminoles.

Some might argue that the play shouldn’t have been run to Len in the first place. Wells was the hot hand, and Len had performed a substantial disappearing act, finishing with four points, five rebounds, four fouls and three turnovers in 17 minutes, hampered by foul trouble and sitting out for a nine-minute stretch after intermission.

But Maryland, which Turgeon said executed offensively the best it has all season, ran the designed set perfectly. Len screened and rescreened for Logan Aronhalt up high, then slipped to the rim. Faust's pass was on target, but Len's dunk slammed off the back iron.

Even with their botched possession, the Terps could have still set up a triumphant plane ride back home with a defensive stop, something they've prided themselves on all season. After a Leonard Hamilton timeout, Snaer inbounded the ball in front of Florida State's bench. Montay Brandon shot up the lane and caught the inbounds high, while Snaer floated into the corner. Brandon swung the pass to Miller, who drove baseline and slipped. Five Terps collapsed onto the ball, allowing Miller to wave an acrobatic pass to Snaer, who once again proved himself as one of college basketball's best clutch shooters.

"The chaos led to it," Turgeon said. "We knew it was a double screen for somebody. Either Snaer or Miller. We knew it was coming. Just didn't guard it. Miller comes off that thing 100 miles an hour, got in the paint, we didn't sink the way we were supposed to sink. I think the fumbling, we went after the ball, he just made a great play. Obviously we weren't anywhere near him. I was hoping he'd take too much time and miss it. Sometimes you can be too open."

Not for the guard who has now beaten Maryland, Clemson, Virginia Tech and Duke with buzzer-beaters, all in the past two seasons. The Terps actually withstood the pressure substantially well, given their penchant for collapses on the road this season, shooting 49.1 percent from the field and committing just four turnovers after halftime.

But there's no solace to be taken from this loss, no moral victories from perhaps its toughest defeat this season. The road gets easier from here, beginning with a home game against Wake Forest on Saturday, but this wound will surely cut deep.

"No, I don't take anything good from losing," Wells said. "That's all I have to say about it. Everyone's pretty down. When you lose like that, everyone takes it really, really hard. Everyone wants to win so bad. We were just so ready to play, so pumped and amped to just get these guys for beating us on our home court. He just made a really good shot at the end. That's really all I can say."

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Instead, it begat tears in the locker room and a long plane ride home, left to dwell on another game against Florida State that slipped away. After blowing a double-digit, second-half lead in their last meeting on Jan. 9, the Terps led by seven points with 6:26 left in the second half. But the Seminoles, who made 14 of 16 free-throw attempts in the second half, more than Maryland converted all game, tied things up at 66-66 after a Miller jumper.

“Never thought we were going to lose,” Turgeon said. “So it does make it hard. And we felt like we were in control. And we missed some opportunities. Then we had two possessions in a row, two out of three where we just fouled and we put white to the line. One on the block, late in the shot clock, then Nick runs over White. So we just gave them four points that they didn’t have to earn.

“Those hurt you. Those little things we that we’ll get better at as this young team grows. It hurts because you invested so much. And this was one we really put a lot into. We were really invested. We put a lot into every game. But this one we felt like we could win if we played well. Just came up short.”

Dez Wells, who by and large took over offensively during the stretch run, drilled a step-back three-pointer with the shot clock near zero. On the other end, Okaro White hit two free throws after Faust bulldozed him trying to fight over a screen. Following a Wells jumper, Snaer hit a floater to cut the lead to 70-71. And with 30 seconds left, Turgeon called a timeout, setting up what could have extended Maryland’s lead to three points and put plenty of pressure on the home Seminoles.

Some might argue that the play shouldn’t have been run to Len in the first place. Wells was the hot hand, and Len had performed a substantial disappearing act, finishing with four points, five rebounds, four fouls and three turnovers in 17 minutes, hampered by foul trouble and sitting out for a nine-minute stretch after intermission.

But Maryland, which Turgeon said executed offensively the best it has all season, ran the designed set perfectly. Len screened and rescreened for Logan Aronhalt up high, then slipped to the rim. Faust's pass was on target, but Len's dunk slammed off the back iron.

Even with their botched possession, the Terps could have still set up a triumphant plane ride back home with a defensive stop, something they've prided themselves on all season. After a Leonard Hamilton timeout, Snaer inbounded the ball in front of Florida State's bench. Montay Brandon shot up the lane and caught the inbounds high, while Snaer floated into the corner. Brandon swung the pass to Miller, who drove baseline and slipped. Five Terps collapsed onto the ball, allowing Miller to wave an acrobatic pass to Snaer, who once again proved himself as one of college basketball's best clutch shooters.

"The chaos led to it," Turgeon said. "We knew it was a double screen for somebody. Either Snaer or Miller. We knew it was coming. Just didn't guard it. Miller comes off that thing 100 miles an hour, got in the paint, we didn't sink the way we were supposed to sink. I think the fumbling, we went after the ball, he just made a great play. Obviously we weren't anywhere near him. I was hoping he'd take too much time and miss it. Sometimes you can be too open."

Not for the guard who has now beaten Maryland, Clemson, Virginia Tech and Duke with buzzer-beaters, all in the past two seasons. The Terps actually withstood the pressure substantially well, given their penchant for collapses on the road this season, shooting 49.1 percent from the field and committing just four turnovers after halftime.

But there's no solace to be taken from this loss, no moral victories from perhaps its toughest defeat this season. The road gets easier from here, beginning with a home game against Wake Forest on Saturday, but this wound will surely cut deep.

"No, I don't take anything good from losing," Wells said. "That's all I have to say about it. Everyone's pretty down. When you lose like that, everyone takes it really, really hard. Everyone wants to win so bad. We were just so ready to play, so pumped and amped to just get these guys for beating us on our home court. He just made a really good shot at the end. That's really all I can say."

Snaer does it again

FSU's senior guard drains dramatic trey in home win

Jan 25, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

It's just what Michael Snaer does.

With the game tied at 57, and eight seconds on the clock, the Florida State senior dribbled past half court, moved to his right, rose up over two defenders and banked in a buzzer-beating 3-pointer from well beyond the arc to give the Seminoles to a dramatic, come-from-behind 60-57 win over the Tigers on Thursday night at the Civic Center.

It was the third game-winning shot of his career. All three have been 3-pointers. And all three have been from the right wing. This one was the only one that hit the backboard, though.

"Something about it seemed good," Snaer said. "My eyes just got a little wider when it went up. And then it went through and I was like, 'Did that really just happen again? Did that really just happen again?'"

Yes. It did.

About five minutes after he celebrated with his teammates on the court, the California native went into the crowd and shook hands with fans and posed for pictures. One female fan held up a sign that read "You got Snaered" as her friend took a picture of her and the star guard.

Yes. His name has now become a verb.

That's what happens when you make a habit of hitting game-winning jump shots.

"He's very confident and he knocked it down," FSU head coach Leonard Hamilton said. "It was a big win for us. We needed something positive to happen to us."

But he was far from the only hero for the Seminoles (11-7, 3-2 in the ACC) on Thursday night. Junior center Kiel Turpin had by far his best game in an FSU uniform, with 16 points (all in the second half), four blocks and four rebounds.

And with the Seminoles trailing by three with under a minute left, freshman guard Devon Bookert – who played most of the second half – drilled a 3-pointer to tie the game with 44 seconds left.

Florida State's defense forced a shot-clock violation on the other end, setting the stage for the Tigers to be Snaered on the other end.

But without Turpin's career-high and Bookert's clutch 3, as well as a defensive stop on the Tigers' final possession, the All-ACC candidate never gets the shot to win the game

“Mike told me before we went out there that the defense was about to be focusing in on him,” Bookert said of his big shot.

“He said, ‘They’re probably going to collapse on me so just be ready to shoot.’ ... It felt good when it left my hand, but I couldn’t really see it. I just heard the crowd.”

Said Snaer: “That was a huge shot.”

And a huge win for a team that was reeling from a 20-point loss at Virginia.

Florida State scored just 36 in the game against the Cavaliers and followed that up with a 21-point first half on Thursday night. Clemson actually went on a 16-0 run over a six-minute stretch to take a 29-16 lead.

But the Seminoles got an and-one basket from Boris Bojanovsky and two free throws by Bookert to go into the locker room trailing by eight.

“Boris made a big play there when we had to have it,” Hamilton said.

And 19 minutes and 52 seconds of game time later they were all watching as Snaer slowly made his way up court for the game-winning shot.

“We were all kind of looking at him like, ‘What is he doing?’ junior forward Okaro White said.

“He’s at the top walking up slow; clearing people out and it was like, ‘What is he doing?’ But he ended up hitting the shot and it ended up working out in our favor.”

The Tigers were, in fact, Snaered.

“The time I looked at the clock it said two seconds so I just threw it up,” said Snaer, who had nine of his 11 points in the second half.

“And you’ve just got to get lucky. That’s all that is. ... I guess I’ve still got that lucky touch.”

Snaer takes over by backing off

Feb 18, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

He didn't hit his biggest shot or produce his greatest scoring output, but Michael Snaer might have played his most complete game of the 2012-13 season Saturday against Boston College.

Florida State's senior shooting guard scored 21 points — nine short of his season high — but he did it with tremendous efficiency. In leading the Seminoles to a 69-66 victory, Snaer connected on 8 of 10 shots from the field and 4 of 4 from the free-throw line.

He also grabbed six rebounds and played exceptional defense.

"I thought Michael allowed the game to come to him ... he tried to play a complete game defensively, rebounding wise," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said. "I thought he played efficiently. He gave us tremendous leadership on the floor in terms of communicating with our young guys, and we had an awful lot of young, inexperienced guys on the floor. But I thought he gave us good leadership in addition to having a real solid basketball game."

Snaer's biggest highlights this season have come from his array of last-second, game-winning shots — he has three in 2013 to go with two more last year. But his play during the first 39 minutes Saturday might have prevented the need for any more heroics.

Instead of trying to force the issue offensively, Snaer appeared content to let his shots come through the flow of the offense. He tied his season low with just two 3-point attempts — it marked the first time he shot fewer than three 3-pointers in a game since early December — and he repeatedly worked his way into the paint for easier baskets.

"I'm just focused on playing like a senior and taking what the defense gives me," Snaer said. "Playing smart and moving without the ball. A lot of it comes from me just moving without the ball and being in the right place at the right time."

And it couldn't have come at a better time for the Seminoles (14-11, 6-6 ACC), who had lost three of their past four games with Snaer struggling offensively.

In losses to Duke, Wake Forest and Miami, Snaer connected on just 10 of 35 shots from the field; that's a combined 28.6 percent.

"He was very efficient today. That was probably his most efficient game," junior forward Okaro White said. "He was being a leader out there, vocally and physically."

Like his words or hate them, Michael Snaer has FSU motivated

ACC Champions, ACC Tournament, Atlantic Coast Conference, ESPN, Florida State, Ian Miller, Leonard Hamilton, Luke Loucks, Michael Snaer, basketball, men's basketball — posted by Coley Harvey on September, 7 2012 5:36 AM

By Brendan Bures

Orlando Sentinel Correspondent

“I believe in myself now. I’m at a point now, I feel like if I’m not the best, I’m one of the best two-guards in the country. I strongly feel that way. I feel that, in my mind, if I’m not the best, I’m one of the best. I can’t be guarded” —Florida State guard Michael Snaer, August 23, 2012 to ESPN.com.

TALLAHASSEE — Maybe it is a bit strange for a college basketball player to so defiantly declare his greatness, especially one from Florida State.

Despite winning the ACC last year—a guarantee made by Michael Snaer in the middle of the season—the Seminoles this offseason rank as the fourth-best team in the conference, according to various media pundits. The Seminoles aren’t a team many of them consider with high regard.

So when Snaer boldly pronounced himself the best two-guard in the nation at LeBron James’ basketball camp, college basketball experts looked at him with raised eyebrows. Sure, he has received preseason first-team All-America honors from one publication — the first time in school history any basketball player has received them. And sure, other publications have favored him to be the preseason ACC Player of the Year, but ... a kid in Tallahassee, not Tobacco Road, the best two-guard in the nation? Really?

“That’s no disrespect to any of those guys there (at LeBron James’ basketball camp), and I’m sure they feel the same way. I’m just not sure if any of them would be bold enough,” Snaer said earlier this week. “It’s just a feeling, just something you feel when you’re out there amongst those names, it’s just a feeling that you have.”

No NBA basketball player reached the top of the sport by believing he was bad. What seems to separate Snaer from most other college players is his differentiation between his on-court persona and his off-the-court attitude. He describes himself as “the goofiest kid ever” when not shooting hoops. But ball in hand, he assumes the confidence he believes is needed to compete with the best.

“People don’t want to accept that about basketball, but in between the lines you have to be cocky,” Snaer said. “It sucks that you have to be that way, but you do if you want to give the best. If you want to play your best.”

There is little doubt Snaer wants to be the best. The secret about all of this—the basketball camps, the predictions of winning, the declarations of greatness—is, according to him, he doesn’t do it for himself. It’s for his teammates.

“If I believe I’m the best, I do the best for my team, my team will feed off that, they’ll believe that they’re the best,” Snaer said. “You give that confidence off to your teammates, and then you also have put your best out there.”

Leaders lead by example and Snaer has always done just that. Snaer is notorious for staying late after practice to perfect his jump shot, and bringing a level of menacing intensity to everything he does. Snaer instills confidence into his teammates through his own work and dedication. Ask any FSU basketball player and they’ll tell you how glad they are Snaer is on their team.

“Whether it’s a drill in practice or video games, the guy competes his heart out. I’m so glad he is my teammate, and I know all 14 guys in the locker room will say the same thing,” former teammate Luke Loucks said.

“He’s such a good leader, to where you got no choice but to follow him. Just a great person to have as a teammate,” current teammate Ian Miller added.

Snaer is quick to compliment them right back. Even though FSU lost six seniors last year, Snaer and the Seminoles believe in themselves more than ever before. One of FSU’s biggest strengths last year was its size in personnel with 6-foot-9 and taller centers and forwards like Bernard James, Xavier Gibson, and Jon Kreft.

All three are gone.

That doesn’t matter in Snaer’s eyes. A team coached by Leonard Hamilton seems to always appreciate hearing the doubters and bowing up to any adversity that comes across its path. In the offseason, Hamilton recruited six newcomers to ease the difficulty of the large losses inside. Each of the young additions are likely to contribute in a meaningful way this season.

“We are way, way more skilled, way more far along skillwise than our seniors were their senior year,” Snaer said. “If you take any guard we have last year and put them up one-on-one against (new five-star recruit) Aaron Thomas, it’s over. Aaron’s going to win. He’s talented.

“Everything for our players now is going to be mental. The talent is unreal.”

Any true teammate would endorse the other players on his team, but if there is anything one can say about Michael Snaer it is this: he doesn’t say anything he doesn’t believe.

Okaro White enjoying breakout year for FSU

Bob Ferrante - FSSouth

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — The stretch lasted just six minutes and 15 seconds. But it was easily the best 6:15 of Okaro White's career.

Florida State trailed Maryland 43-42 on Wednesday night with just less than nine minutes left in the game. But the junior forward then scored the Seminoles' next 15 points, giving them a six-point lead, as they escaped with a 65-62 road win.

"He was just in that zone that allowed him to be aware of everything that was going on," Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton said. "He got put-backs, tip-ins, hit free throws, he was spacing and getting to the right spot when people were penetrating ... he was instinctively responding and reacting. Now that he's a junior, he understands those type of things."

White finished with 20 points and six blocks, both career highs, and added nine rebounds. His six blocked shots were the most by a Florida State player in more than 12 years.

"I just felt the sense of urgency," White said. "I would say my confidence is probably at an all-time high since I've been at Florida State. The thing is you can't just have one good game — you have to keep it going."

White's career night put the exclamation point on a stunning turnaround for Florida State. The Seminoles had struggled just a week earlier and lost at Auburn on Jan. 2. Florida State was 8-5 in the nonconference season — including ugly losses to South Alabama and Mercer — but with victories at Clemson and Maryland, Hamilton's club is 10-5 overall and 2-0 in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Now, Florida State prepares for North Carolina (10-5, 0-2 ACC) on Saturday afternoon in Tallahassee. A win for the Seminoles would continue to build the confidence of a young team that includes just two seniors and a handful of juniors.

White was a good player his first two seasons at Florida State, but now he's developing into his own. At 6-foot-8, he is athletic and defends well. He has moves like a small forward, is agile and is able to drive or shoot from the outside. But he also has the skills of a power forward, with the ability to create points in the low post.

The former Clearwater (Fla.) High standout sees the versatility of his game and embraces the fact that he's a lot of both.

"I just call myself a forward without any name in front of it right now," White said. "Eventually, if I'm allowed to take that next step to the NBA, I might be a 3 (small forward). But I still might be a 4 (power forward). It doesn't matter. Wherever I can be used and have the best opportunity to produce for my team."

White has been asked to start and contribute more this season ... and he is producing.

He is making 50.4 percent of his baskets and is second on the team in points (13.3) and rebounds (6.3) per game. What's remarkable is that he's playing just four or five more minutes per game this season and has raised his scoring average by nearly six points.

"I think he's been playing very good," Florida State assistant coach Corey Williams said. "His level of play has increased. He continues to give us the effort that we thought he could give when we recruited him. We knew it would get to this point."

White has been a bright spot for Florida State but he realizes there is plenty left for him to improve, including his rebounding skills. He's 6-8 but just 205 pounds, so he's often battling inside for rebounds against bigger forwards. While his rebound totals are up slightly, it's been a challenge.

"I never realized how tough rebounding was," White said. "It's just something you have to have a knack for, especially on the offensive rebounding side. You can't stop on first contact. ... Definitely lacking in the rebounding aspect and I'm trying to get back to that."

While his rebounding is a work in progress, there is no doubting his improved shooting. White has hit double figures in scoring in 12 of 15 games this season. He has shown his post moves but also a more consistent jumper. Plus, he's already made 17 3-pointers — out of 41 attempts — after knocking down just 11 last season.

"I think Okaro has improved all of his skills," Hamilton said. "He's really, really worked hard."

As a junior, there's plenty of room to still grow. FSU's coaches love his defensive skills and say that they are comfortable having him defend almost anyone, from point guards to power forwards. And he now has the outside shooting accuracy to complement his post moves.

"I think that's a big asset for him because he's not one-dimensional," Williams said. "You have a 4-man that can play a little 3, shoot from the perimeter, can post you up or use his quickness. I think that makes it difficult for people to guard. As he gets stronger, understands the game a little bit clearer, he has made leaps and jumps."

White Not Settling Short

Eric Fisher
Senior Staff Writer
FSView

Almost seven months ago, when Florida State basketball's season ended with an excruciating loss to Cincinnati in the second round of the NCAA Tournament, junior Okaro White and his teammates could have been satisfied.

They had claimed Florida State's first ACC title after beating Duke and North Carolina in consecutive games in the conference tournament to become the first school to claim an ACC crown besides those two North Carolina powers since 1996, set a school record with 15 ACC wins, and beat an ACC-best six ranked teams.

They could have been satisfied with their accomplishments. But White said he and his teammates were not.

"It was a very big letdown," White said. "There was a lot of hurt going around the locker room because we knew that was one of the great teams at Florida State."

So White did the only thing a player can do to avoid reliving that feeling: got to work on his game this offseason as he prepared to become a bigger piece of coach Leonard Hamilton's puzzle in his third season with the program.

The 6'8" White's height, length, and athleticism give him the ability to play at both the three (small forward) and four (power forward) positions, a versatility that gives Hamilton the freedom to mix and match lineups depending on the opposing matchups. White also has shown the ability to flourish as a starter or a sparkplug off the bench, as he did both last year after starting out as the starter at the three and moving to a bench role mid-season.

After transitioning more towards the power forward spot a year ago, White will have a more defined home at power forward this season, a spot where he says he's able to draw mismatches with his quickness.

"That was the big conversation of playing the three or the four this year, because I could do okay and be fine playing the three this year," White said. "But playing the four, I have so many more mismatches and bad matchups that I would face that I would be able to really strive and succeed. I don't think there's another four, or if there are, there are very few I believe in the country who can keep up with me."

While he chose to make the four his more permanent residence this season, White said he's still worked on his all-around game to further enhance his ability to exploit mismatches.

"I've been working on my ball handling," White said. "So you'll probably see me, depending on where I catch the rebound, go full court with it more this year."

White also said he's taken some inspiration from this offseason from studying his favorite player, Carmelo Anthony, who is similarly sized to White and presents similar problems for defenders with his size and quickness. White said he's taken the most cues from Anthony's high and mid post game and has worked on his own skills in that area.

"Catching it on the high post, mid post, facing up," White said when asked what he's been working on. "And feeling out if I have to go fast or feel the defender out and then go fast, or shoot it, so you'll definitely see a lot of the face-up game this year."

Aside from demonstrating a new bag of tricks on the court, White also noted that a new set of skills off of it are needed heading into this season too as he's assumed some of the leadership void created by the departure of six seniors from last season's team. White described his transition as stepping out from a learning role his first two seasons to taking on a leadership role to the new faces on the team.

"It's a new role to step into," White said. "But once you step into it, you feel proud of it, to teach so many freshmen and kind of show them the ropes."

Despite the amount of new faces on board, White said that the Seminoles are likely an even more talented bunch this year, and isn't shying away from high expectations for the team.

"During the pickup games, these freshmen are very talented and they don't back down from a challenge," White said. "We're going to be tough to guard and I think we're going to have a deep rotation. There's not going to be any drop-off when guys come in."

White admitted that being part of last year's team was special, but with a bigger role on tap for him and an ever-rising standard for Florida State hoops in front of him and his teammates, White won't be satisfied with anything other than yet another breakthrough for the Seminoles.

"I've been blessed, honestly, to come in here at a time when we're on the uprise," White said. "We want to win the ACC regular season and the ACC Championship again this year, but more importantly, just making the NCAA Tournament isn't good enough now. Sweet 16 isn't good enough. We've got to get further—we've got to get to the Elite Eight, Final Four, National Championship."

Seven months ago, White felt the pain of coming up short. If there's anything he can do about it, next March will be different.

Amid the chaos, Miller finds Snaer for game-winner

Jan. 30, 2013 11:55 PM, |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

Depending upon who you asked, the play might or might not have worked exactly as designed. But the ball still ended up in Michael Snaer's hands.

And in the end, that's all that really mattered.

For the fourth time in the past two seasons – and the second time in seven days – Snaer hit a game-winning 3-pointer Wednesday night, this time to propel Florida State to a 73-71 victory against visiting Maryland.

"As soon as Mike started shooting," FSU forward Okaro White said, "he was so wide open I heard (a Maryland player) say, 'Not again.'"

Again, indeed.

Although this one was slightly different than each of the previous three.

After FSU called a timeout to set up a play from the sideline with 8.9 seconds remaining, trailing by one point at 71-70, Snaer inbounded the ball to freshman point guard Montay Brandon, who got it to junior guard Ian Miller on the right wing.

Miller had two options at that point – shoot a 3-pointer or drive toward the basket. Feeling his defender was too close to get for him to get off a clean shot, Miller dribbled to his left, into the heart of Maryland's defense and, for a second, appeared to lose control of the ball.

"Miller looked like he was tripping, fell to one knee," Maryland coach Mark Turgeon said. "And we just kind of panicked and went toward the ball and left Snaer wide open."

Said Miller: "I tripped, but I knew I wasn't gonna lose the ball at that time of the game."

Once he regained control, Miller attacked the paint and thought for a moment about taking the ball to the basket. But once Maryland's Dez Wells, who was guarding Snaer, came over to cut off his drive, Miller kicked it out for the wide-open shot.

"I just collapsed the whole defense," Miller said. "I was gonna shoot a reverse layup. I felt (center Alex) Len on my back, and then I saw Mike's man come across to help on me. So I had to kick it out to Mike because he's a great stand-still shooter."

Once Snaer made the catch, the Terrapins' fate was just about sealed. But after the game, there was some debate about how the play was intended to work.

While Miller said he was the primary option on the play, and White said he actually was expecting the pass to come to him, Snaer said he fully expected it to come his way as well.

“That was how I imagined it in my head,” Snaer said. “If I’m gonna get a shot, that’s exactly how it’s going to be. So it worked out pretty well.”

While it might seem inconceivable that a defender would leave Snaer open in a game-ending situation, Turgeon said his players probably got overly excited when Miller started fumbling the ball.

“The chaos led to it,” Turgeon said. “I was hoping he’d take too much time and miss it. Sometimes you can be too open.”

For FSU juniors Okaro White and Ian Miller, the chemistry goes way back

By Brendan Bures
Orlando Sentinel
March 5, 2013

TALLAHASSEE -- When Ian Miller first met Okaro White, he had his doubts.

"No way I'm playing with this dude," Miller thought.

As Miller describes it, White seemed odd, different. He had chin hairs down to his chest. The only thought running through Miller's mind when he laid eyes on his future teammate was, "who is this guy?"

The pair first started playing basketball together when they were in the 10th grade, attending the same high-profile basketball camps across the country. Since they both had declared their intentions to play at Florida State, coaches often placed them on the same team, trying to establish a connection as early as possible.

Slowly, the two hit it off, forming a chemistry that appears to transfer fluidly on or off the court.

About a year-and-a-half before arriving to FSU, during a top-100 camp in Virginia, the pair shared a room. One night during the camp weekend, as they stayed up late, their basketball-playing futures flashed before them.

Into the early-morning hours, they discussed the possibilities that could exist when they would eventually team up at FSU. They chatted about what it would be like to be teammates; what it might be like to accomplish the lofty goals they set for themselves ... what it would be like to be Seminoles.

"We dreamed about playing here," Miller, a guard, said. "We dreamed about winning the ACC Championship and changing the culture here. And now, we're living it out."

Their dreams transformed into reality when they enrolled at Florida State in 2010 and a year later claimed the throne from the North Carolina elite when they won the school's first ACC championship. For Miller, a Charlotte, N.C. native, the title that came after multiple wins over Duke and UNC was memorable.

During the title run, both were key contributors as White averaged 7.7 points at small forward and 4.4 rebounds while Miller averaged 10.3 points per game.

When they were on the court together, though, the two seemed to operate as one. Even this year, as Miller has battled through a foot injury, they have shown glimpses of the same. They set screens and pass to one another off instinct. Often, they don't even have to look up to find one another on the court. When Miller starts penetrating the defense dribbling with the ball, White knows whether he's looking to pass or score. The other always seems to know what the other will do and can react to it simultaneously.

"It's just a bond that we have off the court that just lead to it on the court," Miller said. "Just watching each other two-and-a-half, three years now, it's sort of big."

While much has been made about senior guard Michael Snaer's clutch game-winning buckets this season, it was Miller who also sparked the Seminoles last season with a crucial score when the season might have slipped away from them.

After losing back-to-back games against Duke and Miami, FSU was tied against Virginia 60-60 in Charlottesville, Va. on the final possession of the second-to-last game of the season.

With 10 seconds left, Miller found himself with the ball. Coming off a screen set by former guard Deividas Dulkys, he set up just outside the 3-point arc, and with a Cavaliers defender in his face, he buried a game-winning score. The win began a five-win run that ended in Atlanta's Phillips Arena as confetti rained from the rafters following the ACC Championship victory. The Seminoles won their next game, beating St. Bonaventure in the first round of the NCAA Tournament but lost to Cincinnati two nights later.

The bond forged those days at camp, during late-night talks about their future, was the catalyst for Miller's and White's on-court success.

"When I go into the game, my thing is, I like to tell the people that I know that can shoot it real well to get in the spots where they can shoot and let me penetrate and create," Miller said. "I tell the bigs, when I drive, just get in the lane where I can give it to you and it's an easy shot for you."

"Me and Okaro, we don't even need to talk about that."

White believes that understanding has helped his play.

"Having that connection already coming in for so long that definitely improves my game when he's on the floor," he said.

Basketball is a game of chemistry and rhythm. It's about finding the right fit of players for the right situations. Building that chemistry takes time; years even, as evidenced with White and Miller.

But Miller's aforementioned nagging bone bruise that has forced him to only watch practices and not participate, has not stopped him from forming the bond he has with White, the man he often refers to as his "brother" off the court.

"That's a sad story because he came in high-talent and he had a great year last year," White said. "The injury kind of hinders him with his movement and everything ... but he's a hard worker, so he should be ready to go next year."

This season hasn't gone the way the two envisioned it. At least, not how they thought it would go back when they thought about it in their summer-camp bunks. At the time, they couldn't have foreseen just how much FSU's 2012-13 team would be one in transition, moving from the senior, star-studded group of last year, to a younger, more inexperienced one this season.

Whatever happens the rest of this season -- the ACC tournament begins in nine days -- White and Miller will be leading the charge for the Seminoles (15-14, 7-9 ACC). Quit, they say, isn't in their vocabulary, and they intend to see this season to its end.

"It's still in our vision, that's the crazy thing," Miller said of seeing a fifth-straight NCAA tournament berth. "We've got to do what we've got to do and pull this thing together ... We can make a run at this thing."

United Faith's Casey Roffler, FSU's Ian Miller find inspiration in each other

By Tom Sorensen

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Posted: Monday, Dec. 24, 2012

Casey Roffler, a sixth-grader who loves basketball, baseball, Nerf guns, Wii and Florida State, has Treacher Collins Syndrome. TCS, a genetic disorder, presents a variety of challenges. Among them is that the jaw, nasal passages and ears don't grow as the face does. The jaw can recede, block airways and impede breathing.

"He's had 15 surgeries in 12 years," Lesa Roffler says about her son. "He's had to have his jaw cut in half; doctors move it forward."

Casey's most recent surgery was 2 1/2 weeks ago, when extenders were placed on each side of the jaw. A day after surgery, Casey was still struggling, still exhausted. Lesa was in Casey's room at Levine Children's Hospital when Esther Feather walked in. Feather is the interim headmaster at United Faith Christian Academy, near the Arboretum on Providence Road, the only school Casey has ever attended.

Casey, 12, did not notice her.

"I'll tell him you were here," Roffler said to Feather.

"Well, let me read you this email I got from Ian," said Feather.

Ian is Ian Miller, a junior guard at Florida State. Miller led United Faith to two N.C. 1A basketball championships and was twice the Charlotte Observer Player of the Year. Feather knew Casey was struggling and asked Ian if he'd write.

The email is 251 words. As Feather read Casey remained impassive.

Then she reached the end.

Wrote Miller: "Fight each and every day to achieve a task that people don't think you can reach because that is how I am where I am in life today. Love you and will see you when I get a little break to come home, or would you like to come to the uncc game and sit on the bench with us at the bobcats arena December 22."

The patient awoke.

Says Feather: "His eyes were huge and his mom said, 'Now that's what we needed to get him awake.'"

On Saturday, Dec. 22, Casey and Lesa and father Travis and 11-year-old brother Luke arrive at Time Warner Cable Arena more than two hours before Charlotte and Florida State tip off.

Travis and Lesa were Miller fans before he committed to the Seminoles. They are bigger Miller fans now. Travis graduated from Florida State in 1992, Lesa in '96.

Their allegiance is apparent, especially on Casey. He wears a Florida State T-shirt, two rubber bracelets – NOLE LIFE and FEAR THE SPEAR – and will wave an FSU pennant.

What's today going to be like?

"Awesome!" says Casey.

The NCAA has rules. Civilians can't sit on the bench, so Casey sits about 10 rows from the court.

Like a lot of 12 year olds, he loves sports. He plays pitcher and shortstop on the United Faith baseball team. He plays wing on the basketball team. He doesn't start. But when he's not in the hospital, he plays.

Do the surgeries hurt?

Casey, who speaks softly, starts to say no.

"Tell the truth," says Lesa.

"Sort of," says Casey. "It hurts a lot, sometimes. But I get used to it."

United Faith has 260 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Casey has 18 students in his class. He got A's and one B+ on his report card despite missing three weeks because of the surgery. Casey was disappointed about the B+.

Lesa says they're fortunate that TCS does not limit her son's performance in the classroom or on the court. Casey often is in the gym, shooting and dribbling and watching the bigger kids play.

Before heading to Tallahassee, one of those bigger kids was Miller.

"I kept seeing a lot of myself in him," Miller says. "He was always playing around and I just fell in love with him. He's just a kid and a kid going through some tough things. I tell him this all the time – he might be tougher than I am. I don't know if I could go through this, you know?"

I ask Casey about the email Miller sent, the one Feather read to him in the hospital.

"He said I make him want to work harder and be a better person," says Casey.

"What else did he say," asks Lesa.

When Casey doesn't respond, she says, "You are his ..."

"Hero," Casey says.

Miller doesn't play against the 49ers. He sustained a stress injury to his right foot, and could be out another week. So he watches from the bench as Charlotte's Ivan Benkovic puts up a long three at the buzzer. Benkovic, too, played at United Faith. The shot misses, and the Seminoles win the tense game 79-76.

Family and friends of Florida State gather in a room next to the arena concourse.

When Miller enters almost everybody looks up and reaches out, congratulating him or asking about his foot. Wearing a gray Seminole warm-up suit and blue walking boot, Miller moves through the crowd until he reaches the Rofflers. He offers his left hand to Casey and his right hand to Luke.

I stand a few feet away with Julian Miller, Ian's father, and ask how his son could attain such empathy and even wisdom at 21.

"That's what everybody tells me," says Julian. "But I'll tell you this. When he gets home today he's got to feed the dogs. I have nine of them, big ones. I rabbit hunt. That fake walking boot might fool Florida State but it doesn't fool me. He's got to feed all nine."

Miller looks up.

"I'm not feeding the dogs," he says.

"Oh, you're feeding them," Julian says with a deep laugh.

Miller huddles with Casey. Here's a young man who spends too much time in the hospital and a basketball player who finished the past two seasons in the NCAA tournament. Yet there's no barrier; they could be members of the same family.

When they finish Miller and I find a quiet corner next to a thick black curtain.

"He's like a little brother to me," Miller, who has an older brother, says of Casey. "The email lifted him up at a time he needed it and was something I loved to do. It made me a better person. Wherever I play, if I play at the next level, or it might not be basketball, I'll always be part of Casey's life."

Sounds as if you both gain from the relationship.

"I meet a lot of people," says Miller. "I've met Michael Jordan, LeBron (James), Muggsy (Bogues). And none of them really inspired me how Casey inspired me. Just to know you got to wake up every day and you got to hit it head on and you can't worry about the bad things in your life."

"You're still breathing and you still got a lot to live for. And Casey is just showing me that, and that inspires me to go out every day and work hard in practice and better myself as a man and as a basketball player."

Will Casey inspire you to feed all nine of your dad's big dogs?

Miller smiles a pained smile.

"Yeah," he says. "I'll feed them."

Whisnant's sophomore season at Florida State has had its ups and downs

The Associated Press

By Richard Walker

Published: Saturday, March 16, 2013 at 12:44 PM.

GREENSBORO – For Cherryville’s Terry Whisnant, the 2012-13 college basketball season at Florida State had a bit of everything.

Whisnant, a sophomore guard, made his first career starts, set career-highs in every statistical category, helped a youthful Seminoles’ team to a 9-9 ACC record and to a school-record fourth straight ACC tournament win.

But he also fell completely out of Florida State’s playing rotation at various times this season.

“It’s just one of those years I guess,” said Whisnant, whose Seminoles lost 83-62 to North Carolina in Friday’s ACC tournament quarterfinals and now await their postseason tournament fate.

In fact, the first game of the season in which Whisnant didn’t play – at Virginia Tech on Feb. 24 – was the day Whisnant attended his grandmother Marie Watlington’s funeral in Chapel Hill.

“It’s been tough, but in the end, she would want me to be happy for her because she’s in a better place,” Whisnant said of his grandmother’s death.

Gastonia’s Leonard Hamilton, the Florida State coach who signed the 2011 Cherryville High graduate says Whisnant has simply been a victim of circumstances and numbers on his team that has only one senior in its playing rotation.

“I think kind of what’s happened is that it’s more the matchups rather than what Terry’s not doing,” said Hamilton, whose 18-15 team is hopeful of being invited to a postseason tournament on Sunday. “Having (Charlotte’s) Ian (Miller) at point guard moved some guys around and changed some roles.”

Whisnant, a two-time Gazette player of the year and Gaston County’s all-time leading boys high school basketball scorer, started 19 of the season’s first 23 games before coming off the bench in six of the last 10 games.

After averaging 2.1 points and 7.7 minutes in 25 games as a freshman on the Seminoles’ ACC tournament championship team, Whisnant’s numbers improved to 5.2 points and 17.4 minutes in 29 games this season.

Whisnant also improved on last season’s 34.5 percent overall shooting and 27.5 percent 3-point shooting numbers to 40.9 and 35.6, respectively, this season.

But after scoring 14 points in a 77-72 home loss to North Carolina on Jan. 12 in which Whisnant hit four of seven 3-pointers, Whisnant was mired in a shooting slump the rest of the season; He has missed 30 of his last 40 shots overall and 22 of his last 28 3-point attempts.

Whisnant's career-high 16-point effort came in a 78-72 Jan. 2 loss at Auburn. Whisnant reached double figures in four other games to give him for the season.

"It's real frustrating," Whisnant said. "I get pieces of advice everywhere. I'm still putting effort into practice and doing what I normally do."

Whenever the Seminoles' offseason begins, Hamilton is hopeful the lessons his team learned with all of its younger players will pay off for the future. He's already certain he'll be taking the team on a European preseason tour in August, he just hadn't arranged a schedule of games or locale yet.

"He'll go through the same program everybody else goes through," Hamilton said of Whisnant. "I'm not concerned. There's nothing he's not doing. He's working hard. We just settled on a (smaller) rotation on the perimeter."

Whisnant finds role as FSU scorer

Sophomore feeling more confident

12:07 AM, Jan 7, 2013 |

Comments

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

Two weeks ago Florida State's Terry Whisnant barely played in a 79-76 win at Charlotte.

Even though he started that afternoon, he was on the court for just four minutes and didn't score a point. Didn't even take a shot.

In the Seminoles' two games this week, however, the sophomore guard averaged 13.5 points and 22 minutes per contest, knocking down 7 of his 13 3-point attempts.

"I'm feeling great," said Whisnant, who scored 11 points in FSU's 71-66 victory at Clemson on Saturday. "It's definitely just coming from running our stuff and my teammates just looking for me in the right spot. And they believe in me, so I'm going to shoot it."

The 6-foot-3 guard is arguably the best shooter on the Florida State team and potentially one of the best in the country. He is 21 of 49 from 3-point range on the year (42.9 percent) and has had six games where he's knocked down at least two from beyond the arc.

Before the season, FSU head coach Leonard Hamilton joked that as long as Whisnant can see the orange on the rim he has the green light to shoot. He's that lethal from the perimeter.

And he showed that again on Saturday, knocking down an enormous 3 from the corner after the Tigers had cut the FSU lead to just three with six minutes to go.

"It was a tough shot," said senior guard Michael Snaer. "That's a tough shot. He knocks it down for us and that just shows you the confidence he has in his stroke. That's what we need in ACC play."

But here's the thing about this Florida State team: There are a wide variety of scoring options in the backcourt. And there are just going to be some games, depending on matchups or how well he is playing, where Whisnant might be on the bench for long stretches.

After all, freshman Aaron Thomas — who scored four points and had a team-high four assists in just 10 minutes on Saturday — has proven he can take over games at times. So has junior guard Ian Miller, who scored seven points in 23 minutes on Saturday in his first extensive action in a month.

And Snaer, an All-ACC selection and the team's leading scorer, is naturally going to log the most minutes of any Seminole as long as he's healthy.

So while frustrated about his lack of playing time that afternoon in Charlotte, Whisnant says he and his teammates understand what their roles are. And they just need to play well, shoot well, when called upon.

“I can’t get too down or too frustrated,” said Whisnant, who is averaging 7.1 points per game. “Because I know my time will come. With the team we have we have so much depth, it can be anybody’s night. So I just come in and play a role. As long as we get the win, it’s all good.”

Cherryville's Whisnant could be Florida State's hidden weapon this season

By Richard Walker

Published: Tuesday, November 6, 2012 at 11:23 AM.

CHARLOTTE – Last month, when coaches, players and media participated in the ACC's annual Operation Basketball preview news conferences, much of the talk centered on preseason favorite N.C. State and perennial powers Duke and North Carolina.

While defending champion Florida State drew some attention, most figured the Seminoles to have another solid season as indicated by their fourth-place preseason pick.

Seminoles players like Charlotte's Ian Miller were careful not to say they felt they were being disrespected. But it's clear Miller, the son of former Belmont Abbey College standout Julian Miller, and his teammates are quite confident they'll be able to repeat last year's success.

And Miller, among others, cited the development of Cherryville's Terry Whisnant as a key reason for their high expectations as they prepare for Friday's 7 p.m. season and home opener against South Alabama.

"We work out together and you can just see his game going to another level," Miller said of Whisnant, the two-time Gazette player of the year who finished his career in 2011 as Gaston County's all-time leading scorer with 2,561 points. "I think he'll be ready to really produce this year."

As a freshman, Whisnant went through the learning curve of a standout high school player trying to learn to play at the highest level of college basketball. While Whisnant had a pair of 11-point games – in nonconference contests against UNC-Greensboro and Florida – he didn't play at all in 10 games, including five ACC contests, two ACC tournament games and one of the Seminoles' NCAA tournament games. Whisnant finished with averages of 2.1 points, 1.0 rebounds and 7.7 minutes in 25 games last year.

This season, Gastonia's Leonard Hamilton, the Seminoles' 11th year head coach and a 1966 graduate of old Highland High School, has frequently said he expects Whisnant to be a top performer and spent the preseason saying he wanted the high school 3-point sharpshooter to take whatever open shots he finds this season.

"I tell our players he can shoot if he sees the orange," Hamilton said of the color of the basketball rim. "I don't do that for many players. I'll do that for him."

In two preseason exhibitions, Whisnant hasn't taken all that many shots, but he's been effective from long range; He drained all three 3-point attempts (and four of five overall) in an 83-75 victory over Lincoln Memorial on Oct. 30 and hit one of five 3-pointers in a 65-56 victory over St. Leo on Monday.

"Terry has a chance to play the role I played last year," said Miller, who was Florida State's top scorer off the bench at 10.3 points per game. "His ballhandling has gotten a lot better because he worked really hard in the summer."

“When Terry first got here, I think he was shocked at the talent we had on the team. But his confidence is where it needs to be right now. He’s coming on and making plays. He’s slashing, he’s shooting.... He’s shooting the ball probably the best since he’s been in college. It’s all a mindset and confidence.”

Whisnant and Miller have been close since Whisnant chose Florida State as his school of choice before his senior year of high school.

“Terry’s like a little brother to me,” Miller said. “We do just about everything together. We’ll go practice together and play video games four or five hours. Me, him and (senior preseason all-conference pick) Mike (Snaer) were in the gym all summer long.”

Whisnant’s choice of video games is a throwback to his athletic past; Whisnant was a standout quarterback and receiver at Chavis Middle School and Cherryville High before focusing all of his attention to basketball.

“He likes football a lot,” Miller said of Whisnant’s love for video games. “He plays RG3 (Washington Redskins’ rookie Robert Griffin III) now. And he runs the ball every time. It’s hard to stop him.”

Whisnant and the Seminoles certainly hope they will be hard to stop – on the hardwood – this season.

“Homecoming” visits

Whisnant will be making seven visits in the area this season, including a Dec. 22 2 p.m. game at Charlotte’s Time Warner Cable Arena against the Charlotte 49ers.

In ACC competition this season, Florida State and Whisnant will visit Clemson (Jan. 5, 4 p.m.), Georgia Tech (Feb. 5, 9 p.m.), Wake Forest (Feb. 9, noon), N.C. State (Feb. 19, 7 p.m.), North Carolina (March 3, 2 p.m.) and to Greensboro for the March 14-17 ACC tournament.

Terry Whisnant Rounding into Form in Year Two

Terry Whisnant is one of the most intriguing players on the Seminoles' roster this season. The sophomore guard came to Florida State heralded as a scorer and saw limited action on last year's ACC Championship team. This season, with Luke Loucks, Deividas Dulkys and Jeff Petersen all out of the fold, Whisnant will see more playing time and a larger role in the Florida State rotation.

"I'm approaching the year as- I don't really have specific numbers [in mind]- just when it's my time to go out on the court give everything I've got to just know my role and do what I've got to do to help the team win," said Whisnant. "Just do everything the way coach wants and try to fulfill my dreams to come out and have a great season."

Whisnant admits last year was a bit of a shock for him. After coming out of high school with a lot of hype, he had to take a step back and learn to pick up some of the nuances of the college game before Leonard Hamilton would turn him loose on the court.

"It was definitely frustrating, coming from high school and playing a lot and then coming here and not playing as much," said Whisnant. "I definitely had to take a backseat, I never had to experience that before so it was a little difficult for me but all the other guys they tried to encourage me to keep my head up.

"It was humbling, it was real humbling. But at the same time it gave me more motivation for the summer to work even harder just because knowing I was in that backseat, I never want to be in that position again."

Whisnant, like the rest of his teammates, lived in the gym in Tallahassee this summer.

"I've never seen so many guys in the gym [as] this summer, including myself," said Okaro White. "I think we're just going to have another one of those teams that you know, any guy could lead the scoring on any given night."

One of those guys is Whisnant, whose ability to score has never been in question. Over the summer Whisnant focused on becoming a more well-rounded player on both sides of the court.

"Definitely [worked on] just knowing where each guy needs to be on the court and just having the confidence to do the things I'm capable of doing on the court," said Whisnant. "Just ball-handling and getting my shot down and just pretty much doing anything I can to [improve] my entire game."

But the biggest aspect of Whisnant's game that still needs improvement is his on-ball defense, something that could limit him again this year until he picks it up.

"[Sometimes] Terry will be working real hard [on defense] and then the guy picks the ball up," said Leonard Hamilton. "But now it's time to close out and be even more aggressive but he picks the ball up and [Terry's] still in the same position..."

That's something that definitely needs to improve.

"I think over the last couple years especially, everyone's labeled coach Ham as like the defensive guru," said White. "Coming in they kind of already know like hey this is what it is, and we consistently tell them, me and Mike [Snaer] and Terrance [Shannon], that you're not going to play if you're not playing defense, no matter how good you are on the offensive end."

Whisnant is going to need to improve defensively before he's unleashed, but he has a lot of faith in his coaches, especially Leonard Hamilton. That should lend itself to Whisnant contributing plenty this season as he continues to grow on the defensive end.

Much like most of the players on Florida State, Whisnant's relationship with Hamilton is extremely close.

"We definitely have a good relationship, it's the same now as when he recruited me," said Whisnant. "He's just like a father figure and he gives me advice on what I need to do and [asks me] 'how's life, how's my family?' He just gives me tips on what I need to do to be successful now and on down the road."

Turpin comes through for 'Noles

Jan. 25, 2013 3:43 AM, |

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

With power forward Terrance Shannon sidelined by a neck injury, Florida State junior Kiel Turpin hoped to step up Thursday night against visiting Clemson.

It took a little longer than he might have hoped, but Turpin did that and more – recording career highs in points and blocked shots -- in helping the Seminoles pull off a stunning 60-57 victory against the Tigers.

“Kiel is solid in a lot of ways,” FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said. “He just is one of the least experienced guys on our team. This is the most number of minutes he’s played, and obviously he stepped up and delivered.”

It didn’t look good early – for Turpin or the Seminoles.

The junior college transfer went to the bench with two early fouls and played only four minutes in the first half.

At halftime, his stat line featured mostly zeroes -- no points or rebounds. Not even a shot attempted.

With Shannon sidelined and Turpin plagued by foul trouble, FSU’s freshman post players – centers Boris Bojanovsky and Michael Ojo – has to man the middle for most of the half. Those two combined for three points and three rebounds in 17 minutes, and the Seminoles trailed by eight points at halftime.

But after a heart-to-heart with the injured Shannon, Turpin turned it up in the second half.

“After my two fouls, Terrance pulled me aside and was like, ‘You’ve got to step up,’” Turpin said.

“We can’t just have Bo and Ojo going at them. We need all three of you guys doing something productive. And I think that kind of got me going in the second half.”

In the second half, Turpin hit 4 of 8 shots from the field and 8 of 9 from the free-throw line.

He finished with a career-high 16 points, grabbed four rebounds and blocked a career-high four shots.

He played 17 minutes in the second half to finish with a career-high 21 for the game.

And during one stretch of nearly 10 minutes, Turpin almost single-handedly kept the Seminoles in the game, scoring 13 of FSU’s 16 points during that stretch.

“He played very well,” Clemson coach Brad Brownell said.

“Made big free throws. A couple of nice baskets when they needed them. He’s gonna be a good player.”

Perhaps most surprising about Turpin's performance was his shooting at the foul line. The 7-foot, 225-pounder came into the game shooting just 58.3 percent from the line. He had recorded only 24 attempts in 17 games, making 14.

But he made all but one of his nine attempts against the Tigers. The junior credited the improvement to recent work he has put in with associate head coach Stan Jones.

"At the beginning of the year, I wasn't making as many as I should, and we completely remade my shot," Turpin said. "Obviously that's helping me a lot."

Gilchrist steps into key role

Junior knows he has to grab rebounds

Jan 30, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

Florida State junior Robert Gilchrist really has no choice anymore. Not with Terrance Shannon likely out for the rest of the season with a neck injury.

The Seminoles' first-year forward will have to learn on the fly, on the court, in the heart of the ACC schedule, how to be a productive Division I basketball player.

"We're going to need him to give us some big games," said FSU head coach Leonard Hamilton, whose team takes on Maryland tonight at the Civic Center. "Robert now is the only power forward we have in the system other than Okaro (White). He's in a needed position.

"He's important. His attitude is good. I wouldn't be surprised if he has a big night for us soon."

Tonight wouldn't be a bad time for the London, England native.

Maryland (15-5, 3-4 in the ACC) is leading the league in rebounding margin and is second in the ACC in offensive rebounds, averaging more than 13 per game.

With Shannon out the 6-foot-9 Gilchrist understands what his role will be for the remainder of the season for the Seminoles (11-8, 3-3).

In a five-minute conversation on Tuesday he used the word "rebound" almost 20 times.

"I've got to go get those rebounds," he said with a smile. "Or I'll have a seat."

Until Shannon's injury, Gilchrist had been completely seated during ACC play. In Florida State's first three conference games he didn't play a single minute. He played nine minutes against Virginia in the game where Shannon was hurt.

And in the last two games he has been on the court for 17 minutes and 22 minutes, respectively (his season-high before that was 12 minutes against Maine).

He's not putting up big numbers by any means, just four points and seven rebounds combined in those 39 minutes, but he's starting to realize what it takes night in and night out in the ACC.

"You have to bring something to every game," said Gilchrist, who averaged 11.8 points, 7.9 rebounds and 2.2 blocks per game last year at Polk State College. "Because like coach (Stan) Jones always says, you don't get to play just because you're wearing a jersey. It has to be how you practice. And when you get on the floor you have to show that you deserve to be out there

"And then coach will keep coming back to you. He's a very fair coach."

Hamilton said Gilchrist's groin injury in December really halted his progress and the athletic forward is still learning where to be on both ends of the court.

But the upside is there. The potential is there.

"He's more than capable," Hamilton said. "He's what you call a stretch forward. He has a tremendous perimeter shot. He has athleticism. He can block shots. Plays with a tremendous amount of energy.

"I just think that now he's got to get in sync."

Against Miami, Gilchrist finished with five rebounds. But he had his hands on at least four more that he couldn't corral. It's all part of that learning curve he's experiencing in his first real minutes of college action.

"Just being out there you get used to being tired, playing through that," Gilchrist said. "Stuff like that. The quickness you have to have to get those rebounds like that. In the Miami game there were a lot of rebounds where I was just getting tips.

"My next step is to start securing those rebounds."

Miller's skills, instincts give him edge

FSU might give junior guard another shot at running point

Jan 31, 2013

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat sports editor

Michael Snaer might be Florida State's version of "Mr. Big Shot," but there's a very good reason Ian Miller had the ball in his hands for the final play Wednesday night against Maryland.

And it's the same reason he would like

Even though he is still slowed by a bone bruise in his foot, FSU's coaches say Miller possesses a rare combination of skills that are ideal for end-game situations: He can shoot, he can attack the basket, and he has excellent court vision.

"He has a natural gift for being able to read the floor and make decisions while going full speed," Florida State men's basketball coach Leonard Hamilton said. "Sometimes it takes guys a while to learn that."

And all of those skills were on display on Wednesday's final play, which culminated with Snaer hitting a game-winning 3-pointer just before the final buzzer.

Because Miller is a quality 3-point shooter (he hit two of four from that distance in Wednesday's game), the Terrapins had to respect his outside shot. Then once he dribbled past his defender and into the paint, Maryland's players collapsed to keep him from driving in for a layup.

And that's when he delivered a beautiful wraparound pass to Snaer, who was waiting all alone on the left wing.

"That's just always been natural for me, to see the whole floor and create for people," Miller said.

Miller actually expected to do much more of that this season -- he entered his junior year hoping to win the Seminoles' starting point guard position after playing shooting guard as a freshman and sophomore.

But a preseason foot injury forced him to miss valuable practice time, and the Seminoles instead decided to rotate freshman Devon Bookert and Montay Brandon.

"It was kinda hard because by not practicing, your teammates are not used to seeing what you're gonna do and feeling you out," Miller said. "And we got so many new players that that was kind of hard to adjust to. But now, everybody pretty much knows what I do."

Miller is actually practicing less now than ever. Most days, he simply rides a stationary bicycle to stay in shape, while his teammates work on offensive and defensive drills.

But because the younger players have a better understanding of FSU's system, Miller knows where they are going to be at all times, and they know where he is going.

"If the ball is in a certain position on the floor, and a man is in a certain position, then you have to adjust to where the ball is and the man is," Hamilton said. "Then if the ball moves and your teammate moves, then you have to make an adjustment. Once we get it, we have it. But it takes a while for everybody to be in sync."

Said Miller: "The more we communicate, the easier it is. Whether I practice or not."

Now that all of the Seminoles' players are getting on the same page, Hamilton is tinkering with the idea of letting Miller try to play point guard once again.

"Ian is a very instinctive player," Hamilton said. "He has a good feel for the game. He is extremely confident. He is one of the few guys that could ride a bicycle and not practice all week, and come in and make the kind of plays that he's making."

"He has the ability to find people. He might be as good as we have. In fact, we're thinking about playing him some at the point as well, because he seems to be a lot more comfortable than he was earlier in the year."

It's unclear when that might happen, but Miller said he is eager to get the chance.

"I told him (Coach Hamilton) the other day, I'm ready whenever he is," Miller said. "But we still want Montay and Devon to be able to learn and gain experience. So when the time comes for him to put me at the point, it won't be a problem."

Assist numbers up?

"Even if I don't bring the ball up the court every time, I still play the point guard role," Miller said. "I'm usually doing the creating or the facilitating."

"

The last pass – knew where to be

Shot coming around too

Had to change it because of the pain

Still working on it

Knew

"That's just one of our principals," Miller said. "I didn't even look at him. I just wrapped it around."

On court with subs, Miller made plays at the end of first half to keep them there. Faltered at end of first half at Miami

FSU's first-year, foreign-born big men finally easing into college transition

Michael Ojo, Boris Bojanovsky played key roles limiting Maryland in low post Wednesday

By Coley Harvey, Orlando Sentinel

9:09 p.m. EST, January 31, 2013

TALLAHASSEE — The energy coursing through Florida State center Michael Ojo's body was at an all-time high as he made the long walk down court to the free-throw line.

Fueled by the rowdy spirit of a modest-sized home crowd that gave him a standing ovation, he raised his arms and beckoned for more.

Wednesday night, for the first time since donning a Seminoles uniform, the freshman was feeling it. "He was showing emotion, which he's never done in a game," FSU veteran forward Okaro White said.

During one two-minute, 24-second, stretch in the first half of the Seminoles' 73-71 win over Maryland, Ojo was the king of the Donald L. Tucker Center. All eyes were on his every move. Whenever a play went his way, squeals erupted from the crowd cheering on the show the 7-foot-3, 290-pound athlete was putting on.

When Ojo wasn't backing down the Terrapins' hefty forwards and centers in the low post, it was his sidekick, Boris Bojanovsky, who was slipping around them tossing up layups and mid-range jumpers and drawing fouls.

In 26 combined minutes of action, the foreign-born freshman pair began to grow. The maturity off the bench, the comfort, the level of game understanding that coach Leonard Hamilton has been seeing in practices for weeks now was finally surfacing in a game.

One of Hamilton's favorite refrains all season has been: "If only you could see what we see in practice. They're getting there."

Against one of the ACC's best big men, 7-foot-1 Ukraine native Alex Len, the Seminoles (12-8, 4-3 ACC) combined to have the best performance of any opposing defense the Terrapins' center has seen all season. Averaging more than 13 points and eight rebounds entering the contest, Len left with just four points and five boards.

While juniors White and Kiel Turpin had a big hand in stopping him, particularly on Maryland's second-to-last possession when they disrupted a lob pass thrown in his direction, Ojo and Bojanovsky enjoyed their share of success against Len and Maryland's other interior players, too.

"When you're determined, you're like, 'Hey, it's about time I put my whole body, my whole head into the game situations,'" Ojo said. "I have to do something to help my team out."

Bojanovsky finished with a career-high eight points. Ojo only had two, but they came on a hard, unopposed dunk. He also had three key defensive rebounds, drew a pair of charges and swatted a clutch shot to preserve a halftime tie.

"We needed that. We need guys to step up and come in and play with confidence," senior guard Michael Snaer said.

The timing of such play may be perfect for the duo. When No. 5 Duke (18-2, 5-2) comes to Tallahassee on Saturday, the Blue Devils will be without veteran big man Ryan Kelly. The injured forward can both post up and shoot from the outside.

Bojanovsky is playing in the United States for the first time. Born in the Slovak Republic, he played competitive ball in Spain for the same basketball academy that originally brought former FSU offensive tackle Menelik Watson stateside.

A native of Lagos, Nigeria, Ojo had a breakout season at Tennessee Temple School in Chattanooga, Tenn., last year. Raw and mostly undeveloped, he arrived at FSU with much to learn.

"The biggest challenge for him is mental and emotional," Hamilton said. "You can see it. He just really wants to help his team."

Building Around Bookert

As the health of his left knee continues to improve, freshman Devon Bookert looks more and more like the Seminoles' true point guard of the present and the future.

By Brandon Mellor
Seminoles.com

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Twenty-eight games into the season with just three left to play before the start of the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament, it's tough not to play the "what if game" with freshman point guard Devon Bookert .

Since entering the starting lineup five games ago, Bookert has provided something that the FSU men's basketball team hadn't had all season: a true facilitator consistently running the show. For the first time since Luke Loucks controlled the ball-handling duties en route to the program's first ACC championship, the 'Noles have their point guard.

So, what if he hadn't been injured in a scooter accident? What if the lasting effects of that injury hadn't slowed him down through the better part of a difficult season for the Seminoles? It's hard to predict just how different this season would have played out if a rookie had been 100 percent -- but it's an interesting question because of how comfortable Bookert looks at times as Florida State's on-court quarterback.

"I think he gives us a true point guard," junior forward Okaro White said. "He's the only true point guard on our team and I tell him all the time that he is going to be really good. He's already good now but he's just going to keep getting better and better. He's a great decision maker and he enjoys that role of being the point guard and facilitating to all of the players on the court."

The injury to his left knee hasn't stopped Bookert him from playing in every game this season, but it certainly affected his ability as that facilitator until recently when he made his move into the starting lineup.

Over the course of the last five games, the Anchorage, Alaska native has averaged 8.2 points after scoring at a 5.1 points-per-game clip in 23 contests as a reserve off the bench. He's averaging nearly 30 minutes as a starter after playing just 17.9 minutes per game in the first 23 games.

Oh, and he's still not completely healthy.

"I think we are still having a hard time really trying to judge him because he is still recovering," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said. "He is not 100 percent yet. I think mentally he understands but physically he has not been able to do what he has wanted to do. As he improves and recovers from his injury it seems as though he's starting to play and giving us a little bit more of what he is capable of doing."

And Bookert, who enters Sunday's game 2 p.m. game at North Carolina, has experienced firsthand the effects that his knee can have on his game.

"I can see that I am improving and the my leg has gotten a little bit stronger," Bookert said. "It's helped me a lot to feel better as time goes on."

As that knee continues to progress, it gives the Seminoles hope not just for the remainder of a season that still features a league tournament appearance and potentially a berth in the NIT but for the future as well.

When he's feeling good, moving smoothly and in a rhythm, the offense simply runs better when he's the one serving as its guide.

In addition to his role as a passer, he's also showed off a deft shooting touch in recent games. As long as Duke's Ryan Kelly is sidelined with an injury, Bookert is the only actively-competing ACC men's basketball player that is

shooting .500 or better from 3-point range, according to FSU's sports information office. He's also shooting 90 percent from the free-throw line as a starter and nearly 84 percent from the charity stripe over the course of the year.

"I think Devon has always been a solid, fundamental player," Hamilton said. "He dribbles, shoots jump shots, makes quick decisions."

Much of that fundamental-based ability stems from Bookert's youth when he spend countless hours working on his shooting touch with his father. Now as his knee continues to improve and his game continues to develop, Bookert figures to be a centerpiece of the Florida State lineup now and in the future.

No more "what ifs" for the young guard; just "what's next."

Shannon returns to court for FSU

Injured forward was worried career might be over

Mar 3, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — He only played three minutes.

But it sure was a positive sight for the Florida State Seminoles to see junior forward Terrance Shannon back out on the court during the Seminoles' 79-58 loss here Sunday afternoon.

The 6-foot-8 forward hadn't played a second since he was rushed to the University of Virginia hospital after a scary fall in Charlottesville.

He admitted on Sunday, the first time he has talked to the media in the last six weeks, that he wasn't sure he would ever play basketball again.

"Most certainly there was a major chance I thought I wasn't going to play again," Shannon said. "It was a good thing to be out there, but I didn't feel too good. I felt a step slow on everything. I wasn't bouncy or energetic."

Which shouldn't come as a surprise. Shannon was just cleared to practice with the team last week and his conditioning isn't anywhere close to what it was before he was injured.

"It's been tough," Shannon said. "I wasn't able to do anything for a month of that time."

He's been trying to work himself back in playing shape as much as possible, so he can provide his typical energy and spark off the bench for the Seminoles.

He scored three points on Sunday, making an and-one layup in the final minute of the first half.

Shannon didn't play in the second half.

"We're thinking about the future and finishing the season," FSU head coach Leonard Hamilton said.

"Just getting him into the game, and obviously getting him a feel was encouraging. I think however little time he was out there will give him a little more confidence that he can go out there and play and compete.

"So I'm excited about that. We kind of go from here."

Shannon was far from excited on Sunday afternoon after the 21-point loss to North Carolina, but the Georgia native said he was quite emotional two weeks ago when he learned he would be able to play again.

And when he got the second opinion from the spinal specialist out in Los Angeles, which confirmed he would be cleared for physical contact, he couldn't hide his excitement.

“Oh, I hugged him,” Shannon said with a wide smile. “I was really happy. I hugged him.”

Just having him back out on the court, even if it was for only three minutes, was a positive for the Seminoles on Sunday afternoon.

“It was good,” junior center Kiel Turpin said. “It kind of energized the group a little bit. Just happy to have him back. He’s been working hard and hopefully he can give us some more minutes later on this week.”

As Florida State finds its facilitator, 'Noles look for tough win at NC State

Freshman Devon Bookert's starts in last two games has coincided with better team play
February 18, 2013 | By Coley Harvey, Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE — Until a neck injury sidelined him late last month, Terrance Shannon had been Florida State's intense, high-energy sparkplug off the bench.

Some four weeks later, after mixing up their mojo in an attempt to reverse the trend of mostly lethargic and inconsistent team-wide play, the Seminoles appear to have found his replacement in the form of freshman guard Devon Bookert.

By no means is the newly starting 6-foot-3 native Alaskan the same type of player as the larger, heavier and more physical Shannon. But Bookert's ability in recent games to find open teammates and make key shots has loomed just as big, if not bigger, than Shannon's presence did.

"Having Devon at point guard is going to be a big, big difference in our game and in our team," senior guard Michael Snaer said. "That's one of the pieces that we've been missing that can really, really take us to the next level."

When the Seminoles (14-11, 6-6 ACC) travel to NC State (18-7, 7-5) Tuesday game, they hope the young rising star can continue his strong play of late. Tipoff is at 7 p.m. and the game will air on ESPN2.

All season, Bookert has played through painful and slow-healing scar tissue in a knee that was injured during a preseason moped accident. As a result of it, coach Leonard Hamilton had been playing Bookert off the bench and bringing him along slowly.

"It set him back and it probably set us back as a team as well," Hamilton said.

But with turnover totals mounting and sensing the need for a more adequate point guard on the floor ahead of last Wednesday's game against rival No. 2 Miami, Hamilton decided to tinker with the lineup. It was time to give Bookert a chance to start.

"There's no question that Devon has a good grasp of what we're trying to do," Hamilton said. "The ball is safe in his hands. He's moving it, making pretty good decisions.

"He's probably the only real, true point guard on our team."

Against the Hurricanes, he scored 12 points. Even though the Seminoles ultimately lost that game in the final minute, 74-68, he hit a key free throw that closed the game to within three with 51 seconds to go.

In the win over Boston College last Saturday, he distributed a career-high eight assists without turning the ball over once.

"He controls our team so well, controls the tempo," Snaer said. "He doesn't let anybody speed him up. He makes great decisions and the right decisions. The ones he makes that are wrong, I can live with."

Part of Hamilton's decision to start Bookert stemmed from the fact that trainers believed he'd be better served playing warm from the opening tip, rather than getting warm in pregame and then stiffening up on the bench before he got on the floor.

"Starting has been good for him," Hamilton said. "It's allowing him to play a little more free and not as inhibited."

It has been good for the Seminoles, too. Although they are 1-1 in games he has started this season, their overall energy appears to be back. With the ACC tournament rapidly approaching, now is as good a time as any for it to return.

"Now that he's a little healthier, hopefully this will be just the start of something good to come," Hamilton said.

Schoffel column: FSU's Bookert blossoming before our eyes

Feb 17, 2013 |

0 Comments

Written by

Ira Schoffel

Democrat

On the surface, it almost sounded like a diss. But in reality, it might have been perfectly understandable.

Just before wrapping his postgame press conference Saturday afternoon, Boston College men's basketball coach Steve Donahue was asked to evaluate the play of Florida State freshman point guard Devon Bookert.

The soft-spoken Donahue listened to the reporter's question, glanced quickly at the stat sheet in front of him and appeared almost embarrassed to admit that the numbers were news to him.

"To be honest with you, I didn't notice his contribution, as great as it was," Donahue said. "Eight assists, no turnovers ... with no disrespect to him, that's a tough pill to swallow when you allow a guy to get eight assists, no turnovers, and then find those guys wide open as well."

It's actually not that surprising that Bookert's performance went unnoticed by some, including an opposing head coach. The freshman from Alaska was making just his second career start, so he probably wasn't at the top of the Eagles' scouting report. And as point guards go, Bookert appears more suited for the role of silent assassin. Think John Stockton, not Magic Johnson.

He can take defenders off the dribble, but it's not always with the intent of scoring — he showed that in the second half when he attacked the paint, drew Boston College's defenders toward him and then lobbed an alley-oop pass to teammate Okaro White.

He also has a tremendous outside shot — shooting a team-high 52.5 percent from 3-point range — but often seems more interested in creating for his teammates than himself. During Saturday's 69-66 victory against the Eagles, Bookert tied a career high by playing 31 minutes but attempted only two shots from the field. The one he hit, a 3-pointer early in the second half, came as the shot clock expired ... after all other options had been exhausted.

Even in postgame interviews, Bookert deferred to his teammates as reporter after reporter asked questions about his big night.

"I just think that we're all moving the ball real well and playing good, unselfish basketball," Bookert said. "So the ball's really moving (and) everyone's getting good opportunities and open looks."

Worth the journey

Jan 16, 2013 |

Written by

[Corey Clark](#)

NoleSports.com editor

There are so many questions you want to ask Devon Bookert when you first talk to him.

Like, how did he end up here, at Florida State, 4,600 miles from his home in Anchorage, Alaska?

What kind of competition did the freshman point guard face way up there in the country's biggest, coldest, most remote state?

How many months of the year can he stand outside and avoid frostbite?

But, first, let's start with the daylight.

How long is the sun really up during those Alaskan summers?

“It goes down around 3 (a.m.),” Bookert said matter of factly. “And it comes back up around 5. Because of the way the earth is tilted the sun is right over Alaska from like the beginning of June to the Fall.”

Which begs the next question: How do you go to sleep with the sun up 22 hours a day?

“With blinds,” Bookert said with a smile.

So, OK, maybe that question didn't need to be asked. But it is rather ironic that the Seminoles' soft-spoken freshman turned himself into that rarest of commodities - a true point guard – partly by playing on outdoor courts in Alaska.

He was a star at Anchorage West High School, and was named the Gatorade Player of the Year for the state in 2011 after averaging 25 points and eight assists per game.

But being the best player in Alaska doesn't quite come with the same notoriety as being the best in Texas. Or Florida. Or North Carolina.

To get attention from major Division I schools as an Alaskan prep star you typically have to be a McDonald's All-American type prospect– like current Miami Heat guard Mario Chalmers or Chicago Bulls forward Carlos Boozer – and Bookert was not quite on that level.

“Most coaches aren’t going to come visit you unless you’re a really highly touted guy,” Bookert said. “They’re not going to fly all the way up there (otherwise). And especially if they don’t get you it’s a super waste of time.”

With that in mind, Bookert decided to attend the Impact Prep Academy school in Las Vegas after his senior year at Anchorage West.

Not only would he play against better competition during the regular season, but he would finally get to be a part of the summer AAU scene.

That’s when Florida State assistant Corey Williams noticed the 6-foot-2 guard for the first time. At an AAU tournament in Las Vegas.

“He was playing a real good team out of California,” Williams said. “They had three or four high-major kids on their team. And Devon had a decent team, but he was the best player by far. He was unbelievable. The best player on the floor.

“So I called back Coach (Leonard) Hamilton and said, ‘This kid is the real deal.’ And he did his homework, talked to some people he knew were credible and we got the ball rolling from there.”

Bookert said his time in Las Vegas was invaluable. As much as he had accomplished in Alaska, it was a bit like the age-old question about that tree falling in the forest: If a point guard is a legitimate Division I basketball player but no one ever sees him, is he truly a Division I player?

So with that in mind, Bookert moved away from his family and friends to further his college prospects.

It paid off when he signed with Florida State, choosing the Seminoles over California, Oregon and Oregon State.

And even though he’s been slowed all season by a severe knee contusion, Bookert has impressed Florida State teammates and fans alike with his natural point-guard skills.

He’s currently averaging 5.4 points and 2.5 assists per game while splitting time with fellow freshman Montay Brandon.

Bookert is shooting a remarkable 51.7 percent from 3-point range (15 of 29) and has already proven to be a clutch free-throw shooter as well. He has all the makings, when he’s fully healthy, of being a solid point guard in the ACC for years to come.

“Definitely,” Williams said. “He can score. He’s tough. He can get past guys. And he loves the game. Loves it.”

At first, White admits he was skeptical of the new point guard. During the recruiting process, the FSU junior forward – who said his fellow teammates routinely joke with Bookert about Alaska not being a real state – watched a highlight tape of Bookert from back in Anchorage.

He wasn't impressed.

“I was like, he's all right,” White said. “But then again he was playing against teams that had centers that were like 5-11. He's not playing anybody.”

“And once he got here,” White said with a laugh, “I was thinking, ‘This is American basketball. You're not going to be able to do what you've been doing.’ But no. He can play. He can really play.”

Which is what Bookert has been confident in all along.

He knew he was talented. He knew he could be a productive player at the high Division I level. He just needed a chance to prove it. Even if it meant moving away from the family and friends he had grown up with.

“It was hard,” Bookert said. “But it was something I wanted to do if I was going to follow my dream.”

Terrance Shannon Ready For ACC Tournament

By DANIEL SHIRLEY — dshirley@macon.com

Macon Telegraph

March 14, 2014

Terrance Shannon has had a long wait between appearances in the ACC tournament. So it is only fitting that he will have to wait until the final game of Thursday's first round to get out on the court in Greensboro, N.C.

When he does, the former Mary Persons standout plans to take it all in and make the most of his appearance. Shannon and the Florida State Seminoles will face Clemson at 9 p.m. on Thursday in the tournament's first round after finishing sixth in the conference's regular-season standings. Shannon didn't play in the tournament last year after going down with an injury.

"It's going to be crazy, just to get out there on that floor and enjoy everything about that game," Shannon said. "I'm really looking forward to it. It's been a long time."

Shannon has had a long career with the Seminoles, and it has been a career that has been slowed more than once by injury.

As a junior in the 2011-2012 season, he went down with a dislocated shoulder in the Seminoles' seventh game. He missed the rest of the season, including last year's ACC tournament when the Seminoles won their first championship since joining the conference.

This season, he was injured again in a game Jan. 19 against Virginia when he suffered a neck injury. He missed 11 games and came back against North Carolina on March 3.

He entered that game with 8:35 left in the first half and finished with three points.

"It was really devastating when it happened," Shannon said. "It all happened so fast, and I didn't really realize what was going on until I got to the emergency room. That was kind of scary, but every year, it has been something.

There's just been some kind of adversity for me to overcome."

That started in high school when Shannon missed his senior season at Mary Persons with a knee injury. Still, Shannon has continued to work and fight through his string of injuries to be a productive player for the Seminoles.

"It was weighing on me to sit there and watch my teammates play and not be able to get out there and help them," Shannon said. "But it's just another learning experience. I see everything I've gone through as something that will make me a better person and a better player."

Florida State head coach Leonard Hamilton is certainly happy to have Shannon back in the lineup. Shannon is averaging 8.2 points and 5.9 rebounds per game and is playing 21.2 minutes per game, which is third on the team despite coming off the bench.

"We necessarily had to take our time with Terrance's injury," Hamilton said. "That was the absolute correct thing to do. But we are glad to have him back in the lineup because we need his toughness. We are going to bring him along to ensure that he is completely healthy while at the same time monitoring his conditioning. We are glad he is healthy and expect him to contribute to our success."

The Seminoles, while they do have the sixth seed, are the defending tournament champions, and Shannon said they have played better as the season has gone along. Florida State is 17-14 overall and finished 9-9 in conference play. The Seminoles beat Clemson in both meetings during the regular season, winning by five at Clemson and three in Tallahassee.

“I can’t wait to get out there and provide some energy and give my team a boost,” Shannon said. “We’re playing more as a team now, and we’re starting to play the way we need to play. I feel like we have a good chance in this tournament.”

FSU's Shannon eager for 'fresh start'

FSU forward returns from season-ending injury in 2011-12

11:54 PM, Oct 9, 2012 |

Written by

Natalie Pierre

NoleSports.com multimedia reporter

Florida State's No. 15 was one of the Seminoles' most aggressive rebounders at the beginning of last season.

Averaging more than eight points and 4.4 rebounds a game in just over 17 minutes of action, Terrance Shannon's strength, leaping ability and fiery personality were on display for the first seven games of the 2011-12 season.

But now that he's returning from a season-ending shoulder injury suffered last November, the 6-foot-8 forward will don the No. 2 this season after three years of wearing No. 15 for the Seminoles.

"I just chose something different," Shannon said. "But I like the way it looks on me. I actually like it more than 15. I just needed a fresh new start."

The Forsyth, Ga., native is hoping the dislocated shoulder he suffered during last year's UConn game ends a series of injuries that date back to the summer before his senior year of high school. That was when he tore his ACL and was sidelined for the entirety of his final season at Mary Persons High.

"I've been knocked down plenty of times," Shannon said. "Every time I come back stronger and better, so I guess it's a blessing in disguise."

During his sophomore season with the Seminoles, Shannon missed five games with a knee injury and had to have surgery. And before he could begin his Florida State career as a freshman, he was held out for the first four games with a scratched cornea.

"It wasn't as bad last year because I learned how to cope with it. But in previous years, mainly my senior year (in high school), it was tough," Shannon said.

It was tough on Shannon's teammates as well. He not only was the Seminoles' second-leading rebounder at the start of last season, but he was also a guy FSU coach Leonard Hamilton could turn to when his team needed a spark.

"I can't tell you how much we missed Terrance last year. Terrance is just the ultimate competitor," Hamilton said. "He enjoys playing extremely hard with a lot of emotions. He's an emotional leader.

"He loves to do all the dirty work."

In FSU's season-opening win over Jacksonville last season Shannon scored a career-high 15 points and grabbed a career-best 12 rebounds, setting the pace for what many expected to be a breakout season.

“I’m ready to come back. I feel like I’ve got to pick up where I left off. I had a lot to prove to people. I feel like I didn’t show them enough last year,” Shannon said. “Just got to bring more energy; it sucked not being the energy guy last year, like when we needed it most. It kind of bothered me. That’s the only thing that kind of got me last year.”

While Shannon did what he could to be an emotional leader for the Seminoles from the sideline, he looks to step into an even larger leadership role as one of the most experienced players on FSU’s roster this season.

For Shannon, the No. 2 represents a new beginning.

“New look, new number, new attitude,” he said. “Same results.”

Shannon shines in Seminoles' win

11:34 PM, Dec 29, 2012 |

Written by
Corey Clark
NoleSports.com editor

SUNRISE — It had been the worst offensive stretch of his career.

Florida State junior forward Terrance Shannon had scored just 17 points in his last four games heading into Saturday afternoon's matchup against Tulsa at the BB&T Center.

He had hit just four of his previous 22 shots from the floor. And in the Seminoles' narrow win over Charlotte last Saturday, Shannon didn't make a single basket from the field and finished with three points, four fouls and four turnovers in 21 minutes.

"Coach (Leonard Hamilton) called me out and challenged me," Shannon said. "So I had to step up to the challenge. He was displeased with the way I had played the last few games so I had to step it up.

"I respect him and I respected everything he said. I knew if he was calling me out he was wanting me to respond."

Which is exactly what he did against the Golden Hurricanes.

Shannon hit his first three shots from the floor — all jumpers — on his way to a breakout 16-point, 10-rebound performance in the Seminoles' 82-63 victory.

"Terrance is consistent with his effort and energy," FSU head coach Leonard Hamilton said. "He wasn't very pleased (with his performance against Charlotte), but he affects the game with just his live body and his energy — moving, setting screens, creating havoc.

"Today the ball was falling for him. And he's worked very hard on his jumper and he's very confident in his scoring ability."

With good reason. Earlier in the year Shannon had a three-game stretch, against St. Joseph's, Minnesota and North Florida, where he averaged 14 points and nine rebounds per game.

But he suffered a "stinger" in his neck in the Florida loss and hadn't looked like the same player since.

Until Saturday.

"He's a very talented basketball player," Tulsa head coach Danny Manning said. "He comes in with a motor and he's able to give them second-chance opportunities on the offensive glass. He runs the floor hard. He rebound well. He played exceptionally well."

It was the type of performance senior teammate Michael Snaer expects to see every night from the Georgia native, who is just now rounding into normal shape according to Hamilton.

“If there is one element that we really, really need from our big guys it’s toughness,” Snaer said. “And that’s what he brings. We need him to bring that every single game.”

For Shannon’s part, he said he expects Saturday’s performance to be a springboard into the New Year.

“I feel like the second half of the season we’ve got to step it up,” he said. “So I want to be that driving force.”

Postseason is new test for young 'Noles

ACC tourney will present challenge

Mar 11, 2013 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

They've seen plenty already in their first year.

They've played in the storied Dean Dome, they've played against the NCAA all-time wins leader in Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, and they've played with a senior guard who has so made many game-winning shots his last name has become a verb.

But the six Florida State newcomers have yet to experience this.

Their first ACC Tournament begins on Thursday night when the No. 6 seed Seminoles take on No. 11 Clemson in the first round.

Florida State head coach Leonard Hamilton was asked on Monday afternoon if he worried about his team's lack of experience in the postseason.

"We try to concentrate on those things we can control," said Hamilton, who cut down the nets in Atlanta last year after winning the program's first ACC title. "I'm sure that's easy for me to say as a coach, but I just know I've looked out at some of these games on the road when we have not played very well — and for the first time since I've been here, I can just tell that some guys were affected by the exposure, the challenge of being in those situations.

"And that's understandable. Three international players and five true freshmen. Some of these venues are a little bit challenging, but that's part of the youthfulness of this team."

Freshman Montay Brandon grew up in Charlotte, N.C., and has been to a number of ACC Tournament games.

But this will be his first chance to play in one.

"It's definitely something I've been looking forward to for the whole year," Brandon said. "So I'm excited."

That sentiment is likely shared by all of the freshmen, but particularly one who grew up along Tobacco Road.

"I've always wanted to play in the tournament," Brandon said. "The thing that makes them fun is that you know if you lose you're done. So you go out there and you give it all you got at all times. Because each play, each possession is very important."

Snaer named to All-ACC third team

FSU senior guard Michael Snaer was named to the All-ACC third team on Monday. Snaer, who has hit four-game winning shots this season and six in the last two years, led the Seminoles with 14.5 points per game and was second in assists, steals and 3-point percentage.

He scored 17 points in Florida State's 71-67 win over North Carolina State on Saturday afternoon. All-ACC team announced

Duke's Mason Plumlee, Virginia Tech's Erick Green and Miami's Shane Larkin headline the All-ACC first team. The teams were announced Monday following a vote of 77 members of the Atlantic Coast Sports Media Association.

They were joined by Virginia's Joe Harris and North Carolina State's Richard Howell.

Green led the nation in scoring with a 25-point scoring average. Plumlee was second in the league in scoring (17.2 points), rebounding (10.3) and field goal percentage (58.9 percent). Larkin averaged 13.7 points while leading the Hurricanes to the No. 1 seed in this week's league tournament. Howell was the ACC's top rebounder with an average of 10.6 and Harris averaged 17 points for UVA.

Duke's Seth Curry, Miami's Kenny Kadji, North Carolina State's Lorenzo Brown and two North Carolina players — Reggie Bullock and James Michael McAdoo — comprised the second team.

Joining FSU's Snaer on the third team were C.J. Leslie of N.C. State, Ryan Anderson of Boston College, Virginia's Akil Mitchell, Clemson's Devin Booker and Duke's Quinn Cook, Duke.

Larkin was the leading vote recipient on the league's all-defense team, receiving 46 of 77 votes. He averaged 2.0 steals while leading a Miami defense that fueled the Hurricanes' rise to the top of the league standings.

He was joined by Georgia Tech's Daniel Miller, Miami's Durand Scott, Maryland's Alex Len and Virginia's Jontel Evans.

Boston College's Olivier Hanlan was the only unanimous selection to the league's all-freshman team. Joining him were Duke's Rasheed Sulaimon, N.C. State's T.J. Warren, Wake Forest's Devin Thomas and North Carolina's Marcus Paige.

First-year learning for Brandon at Florida State

By Jeff Mills

Greensboro News and Record

March 14, 2013

GREENSBORO — Montay Brandon always considered himself a good defender.

Then the lean 6-foot-7 point guard from Greensboro arrived at Florida State as a freshman.

And he found out he was wrong.

“I’ve definitely learned a lot about defense,” Brandon said. “Just playing better man-to-man defense, better help-side defense, every aspect of playing defense. I actually thought I was a good defensive player until I got here. It didn’t take long to realize: ‘Oh, boy, I’ve got a lot to learn.’”

Turns out, all the Seminoles had a lot to learn. The defending ACC tournament champion got six first-place votes in the preseason poll. Miami, North Carolina and Virginia combined for none.

Sixth-seeded Florida State (17-14) will open the ACC tournament against Clemson (13-17) at 9:30 p.m. today at the Greensboro Coliseum. It’s been a long season for the Seminoles, who must get to Sunday’s final to have even a sniff at returning to the NCAA tournament.

“We had seven new guys, and we thought we were ready,” Brandon said. “All of us are confident players, and we really thought we were ready. Well, we weren’t. We’ve been humbled. But now we’re ready now.”

Brandon, 19, grew up in Greensboro and went to Frazier Elementary and Allen Middle schools before his freshman year at Northeast Guilford.

He transferred to High Point’s Wesleyan Christian Academy as a sophomore, and he blossomed into one of the nation’s best guard prospects, averaging 19 points and four assists as a senior.

He is averaging 3.6 points per game for Florida State, but only three players on his team have played more minutes. Injuries to Devon Bookert and Ian Miller thrust Brandon into the starting lineup at point guard early this season.

Maybe too early.

“Montay was thrown right in before he had proper time to adjust,” Seminoles coach Leonard Hamilton said. “And it’s a huge adjustment to go from being the attack-type of finisher his high school needed to now being in a lead position. You’re trying to lead people when you really don’t even know what you’re supposed to be doing yourself. ... He’ll be better down the road for having gone through the experience. Even now, he’s playing a lot more relaxed.”

Brandon has 55 turnovers this season, but just one in his last seven games – a span of 90 minutes on the court. And he’s embraced Hamilton’s defense-first style of play.

“You can never relax playing defense at this level. Never,” Brandon said. “Sometimes at the high school level you can take breaks. You can get away with letting your mind lapse. But here, if you blink for a second, somebody is going to score on you. ... I’ve grown to love defense. My juice used to come from scoring. But this year, playing defense is where I get my juice from.”

Freshman guards Brandon, Thomas and Bookert playing key minutes

1:25 AM, Jan 2, 2013 |

Comments

Written by

Jim Henry

Democrat assistant sports editor

Florida State's three freshman guards have been all ears this season. When Seminoles men's basketball coach Leonard Hamilton teaches one, he's teaching all three.

The trio is tuned in, too.

"That's because most of the time we all messed up on the same thing," Devon Bookert said and smiled.

FSU's development at guard continues tonight, when the Seminoles (8-4) open a three-game road swing at Auburn (5-7) in its final non-conference game of the season.

Winners of four straight, FSU's trip includes its first two ACC games — Saturday at Clemson and next Wednesday at Maryland.

Despite a veteran nucleus, the Seminoles have also relied on their youth this season. A foot injury to junior guard Ian Miller, who has played in just seven games, also has pushed Hamilton to force-feed his young backcourt.

Montay Brandon, Aaron Thomas and Bookert, who continues from a preseason leg injury, have played valuable minutes and made key contributions.

Brandon has started 11 games, Thomas shared ACC Rookie of the Week honors last week after he averaged 17 points and 4.5 rebounds in wins over Louisiana-Monroe and Charlotte, and Bookert has a trio-high 30 assists and 12 three-point field goals.

"You've been able to watch their growth, visibly see their confidence grow, their execution grow, the aggressiveness grow over a period of time," Hamilton said.

"You get a feeling that these guys are moving in the right direction and it's coming together for them."

Of course, the players' transition to Division I continues daily. The trio is in quick agreement on the group's talent, athleticism and intensity. The learning process has also included defensive and offensive intricacies, specifically at point guard.

"It's really about how each play matters and how much energy you have to exert through each play," said Bookert, the program's first recruit from Alaska.

"You have to really play hard through the whole possession or else it's not good enough and you will have to go sit down (on bench) because you are not going all out.

"Everything counts. You could lose by two points and it might be because of a layup you missed or a pass that you threw away or because you didn't get back on defense. They are all momentum shifts."

Bookert and Thomas each played one season at a prep school following high school — Bookert at Impact Basketball Academy in Las Vegas and Thomas, from Cincinnati, at Brewster Academy in New Hampshire.

The 6-foot-7 Brandon, who grew seven inches over one summer in high school, played for former Maryland star guard Keith Gatlin at Wesleyan Christian Academy in Greensboro, N.C.

Brandon knew college basketball was a different brand of ball during FSU's summer workouts.

"I had to guard Mike (Snaer) and he was killing me," Brandon said and laughed.

"I knew then I had to start playing harder. The speed of the game is so much different than high school. You really have to make your reads and decisions faster. It hasn't affected my confidence because I know I can play, I just have to keep working and getting better."

Hamilton admits his patience has been tested at times by his young backcourt, but the veteran coach also understands that's part of the growing process. And he also points out it's a group that has had to contribute quicker than anticipated.

"Early on, they seemed to be always thinking, in that I mean they weren't being quite as quick and assertive as you'd like them to be," Hamilton said. "It has been challenging, but their attitude has been tremendous. I've been encouraged by what I've seen."

Thomas, of course, says it's also important for the group to understand what they hear from Hamilton.

"We kind of stubbed our toe early on but we are getting better as the days go by," Thomas said.

"Honestly, I thought I was going to come in and like nothing was going to change (from high school). But I've had to learn there are more things than just scoring. You have to really know basketball; you just can't go out there and freelance. We are learning and working.

"Everything is coming along."

Schoffel column: Youngest 'Noles forced to pick up pace

12:05 AM, Dec 10, 2012 |

Comments

Written by

Column sig for Ira Schoffel

For a few weeks, they were mostly just dipping in their toes, checking the temperature, trying to see how different this pool was from the ones they knew so well.

Then after some early successes, they started venturing out to the middle, while never drifting so far that they couldn't bounce back off the bottom and quickly steady themselves.

On Sunday afternoon, however — four days after a humbling home loss and with two key veterans sidelined by injuries — the feeling-out process officially ended for the first-year players on Florida State's men's basketball team. Ready or not, they were thrown head-first into college basketball's deep end; it was time to sink or swim.

And despite some occasional mistakes, they more than made it out alive. The seven first-year Seminoles — a group that includes five true freshmen, redshirt freshman Kiel Turpin and junior college transfer Robert Gilchrist — scored 43 points and grabbed 20 rebounds in a 91-59 rout of visiting Maine.

Yes, OK, it was Maine.

We never said this particular pool was shark-infested. But for players like Gilchrist and freshmen Aaron Thomas and Michael Ojo — each of whom set or tied career-highs for minutes played — these certainly were uncharted waters.

"It put them in situations where they had to step up and make it happen," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said. "Today, the thing I was most impressed with (was) I thought that we showed signs of adjusting. We were all almost on the same page."

Hamilton and his staff didn't intentionally create this situation to speed up the learning process. The Seminoles' veteran head coach almost always proceeds with caution when it comes to mixing in young players.

He doesn't like to ask them to do anything they're not prepared for, and he certainly wouldn't have drawn up some of the rotations he ended up with at times on Sunday. My personal favorite featured four first-year players — freshman point guard Devon Bookert, freshman center Boris Bojanovsky, Gilchrist, Thomas and sophomore shooting guard Terry Whisnant as the lone veteran. Of course, we're using the term "veteran" extremely loosely here.

Before this season, if you had added up all of Whisnant's career playing time, it would have amounted to less than five full games. But here he was in the ninth game of 2012-13, directing traffic to a bunch of teammates who still aren't quite sure what they're supposed to be doing.

"It feels kinda weird," Whisnant admitted. "I was in (their) situation not too long ago, and I'm still learning."

But Whisnant had to step up Sunday, with junior shooting guard Ian Miller on the shelf with a foot injury. And he did just that, scoring a career-high 14 points on 5-of-7 shooting; he also played a career-high 30 minutes. Miller's absence also opened the door for Thomas, who scored a career-high 15 points, grabbed five rebounds and played a career-high 24 minutes.

At the same time, the Seminoles' most inexperienced post players found new opportunities with junior forward Terrance Shannon sidelined by a minor injury in his back. Gilchrist had scored only four points all season before Sunday, and he set career-highs in points (7), rebounds (6) and minutes (12). And the Seminoles' three young centers — Bojanovsky, Turpin and Ojo — all seemed to benefit from the extended action as well.

Of course, this didn't all happen by chance. After watching the youngsters get bogged down mentally in Wednesday's loss to rival Florida, Hamilton talked about "paring down" his offense to help the newcomers better understand their assignments.

There's no way of knowing exactly how much tinkering FSU's coaches did in that regard, but one obvious change was the pace with which the Seminoles played. They attacked more off the dribble, they forced the issue at both ends of the floor, and they seemed determined to not get stuck in a half-court game. After getting up just 46 shots against Florida, the Seminoles took 73 against Maine — 15 more than in any other game this season.

While some of that tempo can be attributed to the fact Maine tried to score in transition as well, it clearly was a major emphasis of Hamilton's game plan. And it might be just what these youngsters need. While they still made plenty of mistakes and have much room to grow, they also seemed to begin to relax and just play ball.

"I think they were just thinking too much," Whisnant said. "So we prepared them better in practice, and tonight I think they just came out and played their game."

There still were some forced shots. There still were moments of indecision, and some careless fouls. But there was tangible progress as well.

"What do they say, 'The cake's still in the oven?'" Hamilton said with a laugh. "We're still working it. But I saw a lot of positive signs."

The good news for the Seminoles is they still have time to develop. After taking a few days off for final exams, they return to action next Monday against Louisiana-Monroe, a team that is winless this season and won only five games a year ago. Then they have three more non-conference games — at Charlotte, vs. Tulsa (in the Orange Bowl Classic) and at Auburn — before ACC play heats up in early January.

Sunday's win didn't change the fact that the sharks will be circling the ACC's defending champions.

But despite what we all witnessed last Wednesday, these guys might be ready to fight back after all.

Seminoles' Ojo a sight to behold

Seminoles' freshman stands 7-1, 290 pounds

12:29 AM, Oct 11, 2012 |

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

Just hearing about him doesn't do it justice.

Even reading quotes from his teammates won't paint the proper picture.

No, to fully comprehend just how big Florida State freshman center Michael Ojo really is, you have to see him in person.

On Friday night at the Civic Center, Ojo and the rest of FSU's 2012-2013 men's basketball team will be in uniform for the first time for the annual "Seminoles Madness" event, which will officially kick off practice for the defending ACC champions.

It will be the first chance for Florida State fans to see the muscular, 7-foot-1, 290-pound Nigerian in person.

Expect a few dropped jaws. Just like his teammates had when they saw him for the first time.

"It's insane," said junior forward Terrance Shannon, who isn't exactly a lightweight at 6-8, 240. "It's ridiculous. It's like Solomon (Alabi's) height and more muscular and bigger than Jon Kreft. Put together.

"It's crazy."

Junior guard Ian Miller, never one to shy away from a challenge, says he wrestles with Ojo all the time in the locker room.

"I lose," he said with a smile. "But I'm not going to back down."

Miller not only played with the likes of Kreft and Bernard James in college, but he saw countless big men during his days on the AAU scene in high school.

Ojo is, by far, the biggest one he can remember.

"Matter of fact, I don't think I've seen another human being, other than Shaquille O'Neal, that big," Miller said. "For him to be that big and can move, no fat, all muscle, and do those things? It's crazy."

Okaro White first met Ojo when the big man was on an official visit from Tennessee Temple High School in Chattanooga. He noticed he was tall, obviously, but White didn't think much of it. He had seen seven-footers before, after all.

It was when he saw Ojo in a sleeveless shirt for the first time that left him staring in disbelief.

“I was like, ‘Man,’” White said with a laugh. “He basically has no fat to him. He’s very cut. I thought most Nigerians were like me, tall and lanky. But he’s huge.”

And he possesses big-time potential as well, White said.

Ojo might have the body of a pro wrestler, but he’s a legitimate basketball talent as well. And he’s got a chance to be a major contributor for Leonard Hamilton’s program down the road, even perhaps this season as the Seminoles try to replace a frontcourt that featured Kreft, James and Xavier Gibson.

“Ojo is a Ryan Reid-similar type guy, who plays with a lot of effort,” Hamilton said. “I’m sure he’s going to make a lot of mistakes, but he’s a big, strong youngster.”

Or as White put it: “It’s definitely like hitting a wall.”

Ojo getting comfortable

Jan 31, 2013 |

Written by
Corey Clark
NoleSports.com editor

The growth is obvious.

Two weeks ago, when Michael Ojo would catch a pass under the basket there seemed to be two possible outcomes: The FSU freshman would either miss a wide-open layup. Or he would have it swatted by someone much smaller.

On Wednesday night against the Maryland Terrapins, the seven-footer corralled a pass from teammate Terry Whisnant and in one motion slammed the ball through the rim.

There was no hesitation.

"I don't know if he's been working with Coach (Stan) Jones after practice," FSU starting center Kiel Turpin said. "But it's like, 'if you get the ball you're going to dunk it.' Every time he gets it he's not looking to throw up a hook. He's looking to pummel you."

There was a sign of that in the Seminoles' previous game, a 24-point loss at Miami, in which Ojo got the ball deep inside the paint, turned and tried to tear the rim off with a dunk while being fouled. The dunk missed, but the new aggressiveness was clear.

"It's coming," Ojo said. "We practice so hard. We compete against each other just like game speed. I was getting a little bit anxious in previous games. I'm getting myself together now, getting with the pace of the game."

On Wednesday night Ojo received multiple standing ovations. He scored just two points (on that emphatic dunk) and pulled down three rebounds, blocked two shots and was credited with one steal in a season-high 14 minutes. His stats weren't overwhelming by any means, but he made a difference.

He grabbed some tough rebounds in traffic – something the rest of the Seminoles were struggling to do. He drew two fouls. He guarded well. He set screens. He dove on the floor. He energized the entire building.

"He's not that rah-rah type character," Turpin said. "And when he got that block and did that muscle-man pose, we were all kind of shocked. Like, 'OK. Ojo. We see you.'"

What everyone saw was a player who is getting more and more comfortable with the college game. There are surely still plenty of growing pains to come. But Ojo's potential was flashed on Wednesday night.

"The biggest challenge for Ojo has been the ability to relax his mind so he can think clear and also be extremely competitive," FSU head coach Leonard Hamilton said. "It's almost like (Wednesday) night his

movement, he wasn't thinking. He was out there screening, he did all the things correctly, but he was relaxed when the ball came to him.

"He didn't fumble it."

The Lagos, Nigeria native had only played just one season of competitive basketball before enrolling at Florida State – and that was last year at Tennessee Temple in Chattanooga, where he averaged 15 points, 14 rebounds and five blocks per game.

So, quite obviously, his head has been spinning for most of his freshman season. The adjustment hasn't been easy, by any stretch, but as he proved on Wednesday night he's making some real progress.

"Coach is very patient with us in our development," said Ojo, who is splitting time at backup center with fellow freshman Boris Bojanovsky. "Especially with someone like me who hasn't been playing basketball a long time.

"We're getting there. We just have to keep fighting."

'Everything coming together' for Thomas

Freshman guard becomes scoring threat for FSU

7:52 PM, Dec 22, 2012 |

Comments

Written by

Corey Clark

NoleSports.com editor

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Heading into this season, it was unclear exactly who would be the best scoring option out of all the newcomers on the Florida State men's basketball roster.

It seems pretty apparent now.

Aaron Thomas scored 17 points (13 in the second half) to help lead the Seminoles to a 79-76 win over Charlotte on Saturday afternoon.

It was the third straight double-digit scoring effort from the Cincinnati native, who has now upped his scoring average to 8.5 points per game.

"At the beginning of the year, I was just thinking too much," Thomas said. "And not just letting the game come to me. Now I've been listening to the coaches, let the game come to me and do what I do best."

Which is score.

Thomas attacked the basket all game, finishing 5 of 10 from the floor and 7 of 9 from the free-throw line.

During one stretch in the second half, he scored 10 points in five minutes, including a dunk and an impressive "and-one" basket.

"Thomas has been coming on," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said. "He's been growing and growing. He's extremely competitive. And he just seemed more relaxed today."

It was the first true road game for Thomas and his fellow freshmen. There were 7,249 people in Time Warner Cable Arena on Saturday, but Thomas said he had played in front of similar crowds last year at his prep school, Brewster Academy.

And though he said he felt some nerves when he first checked into the game, they quickly calmed down.

"You have to act like you've been there before," Thomas said. "Just play normal. I had the jitters, but after a while it went back to normal."

And he went back to scoring.

After averaging just five points per game in the Seminoles' first eight (including zero points against Mercer), the 6-foot-5 guard has averaged 16.3 points in the last three, including back-to-back, career-high 17-point performances.

“We knew Aaron Thomas was going to be this kind of scorer,” junior Okaro White said. “It was just going to take a couple of games.”

With junior guard Ian Miller (foot) out until January, it was imperative someone in the backcourt stepped up in the scoring department.

It seems pretty undeniable now. That someone is Thomas.

“At the beginning of the year I had just a little confidence,” he said. “Out of a (scale to 10), my confidence was about a six. Now I’m feeling like a nine or a 10. Everything is coming together.”