

Atlantic Coast Conference

Operation Basketball

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Jim Larranaga

Miami Hurricanes



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by coach Jim Larranaga with Miami.

Q. Just what you can say about over the past few seasons how you've seen that influx in recruiting, just what you're getting successfully on the recruiting trail as you continue to improve this team and go forward.

COACH LARRANAGA: Well, recruiting in the ACC basically means you're going to be competing against NBA-caliber players every single night.

And I have a great assistant coaching staff. They're always out there searching for players that we think can compete at the highest level.

We've been very, very fortunate since arriving at Miami to find the guys that we think fit our program, fit our style of play and are also terrific students who fit the profile for a University of Miami student-athlete.

We've got a good group right now led by Ja'Quan Newton and Bruce Brown, D.J. Vasiljevic. Guys who have experience and are doing a great job in terms of leadership with our team. And we're excited about getting the season started.

Q. You spoke the other day in saying that you believed you were coach number three in the FBI investigation. My question is you said that nothing wrong had been done. Have you spoken to your athletic director? And how do you kind of try to prevent that from being a distraction as we enter the season here?

COACH LARRANAGA: Well, first of all, I would just like to say I appreciate and understand any questions in regard to the issue. But, quite frankly, I'd like you to just go back to my comments on Monday.

In terms of my conversations with our athletic director, we met with our team the day that this broke in the news for three minutes. That conversation is the last conversation we've had with our players. We've been very, very focused on practicing and getting ready for this season.

Q. You lost a couple of important players, Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy -- Murphy particularly

scored points inside for you. As you mentioned you return two fine all-court players. Are you going to be more perimeter oriented this year or do you see someone else scoring inside as Murphy did?

COACH LARRANAGA: I think the two seniors we lost, Davon Reed and Kamari Murphy, where we're going to miss them the most is at the defensive end of the floor. Their individual defense, their team defense and their rebounding are going to be very, very hard to replace because young guys, as talented as I think our young guys are, they're not used to playing against NBA-caliber players every single day at the defensive end.

But on the other end of the court I think we have more offensive firepower than we did last year and maybe as much as we did last year when we had Angel Rodriguez, Sheldon McLellan and Davon Reed all on the perimeter, with a Ja'Quan Newton coming off the bench.

Our freshmen and sophomore class is very talented, and I think we're going to be able to score points. Just don't know if we're going to be able to stop anybody.

Q. They're going to put together a bunch of task forces and commissions to study the situation in college basketball here pretty soon. If they come to you, do you have any ideas? What are they looking for? How are they going to fix this?

COACH LARRANAGA: I have no idea. And anything in regard to this issue, I have to go back and just say I appreciate and understand questions in this regard. But at this point in time I don't have any answers. I don't know all the circumstances and feel like it's inappropriate because it's an ongoing investigation.

Q. You talked about a good crew of young players and they have to be the right fit. Bruce Brown, his freshman year, academic honor roll, first time he admitted this morning that he's ever been on an academic honor roll. Talk about him as a person both on and off the floor.

COACH LARRANAGA: I think many of the guys on our team have very unique personalities and are so much fun to be around. Bruce Brown is a very high-energy young man. He's always smiling. He's a tremendous competitor. He loves playing. He's worked so hard on his game. He's projected at some point in time to be an NBA first-round pick. And I think he is that.

I think he's talented offensively, defensively, rebounding-wise, and his super enthusiasm and energy is very evident every day in practice.

Q. With such a dominant back court with Bruce Brown and Ja'Quan Newton, will it be challenging or easy to fit your new freshman class into the rotation with Chris Lykes and the other players?

COACH LARRANAGA: We feel like we've got a lot of talented guards. We'll starting three of them, two of them coming in off the bench. I don't think it matters whether you start or come in off the bench, you'll play a major role for us.

When you look at Ja'Quan Newton, Bruce Brown and DJ Vasiljevic, they're our veteran players. They have the experience. And we have Chris Lykes and Lonnie Walker who are just tremendous kids and athletes and terrific basketball players. So we're going to find plenty of playing time for them as well.

Those five guys are going to be a major part of our offensive attack. But for us to be successful, they've got to become great defensive players.

Q. Izundu, I believe, went to school here in Charlotte. What do you look for from him this year? Certainly had some moments last year.

COACH LARRANAGA: Ebuka Izundu, originally from Nigeria, played at Victory Christian here in Charlotte. Came in as a freshman. Only weighed 201 pounds. He couldn't bench even 200 pounds at the time. He's now 230 pounds, benching over 300 pounds.

He's grown into a man and he's playing like that in practice. We're very, very confident in him. He's doing a great job. And I think offensively, if he had the same confidence in himself that I have in him, he'd be an all-league player. He could be that good.

Q. Are there postmarks during the course of preseason or during the season in which you want to be here by this time or there by that time?

COACH LARRANAGA: Well, we always have short-range and long-range plans. We have goals that we set for ourselves. One of the things we do is we try to track our numbers to see if we're improving in the areas that we want to improve in.

One of the challenges for our players is we have a drill that's named after Kevin Durant. So the KD three-minute shooting drill. And our goal is for our guys to score 100 points in three minutes. And most of them can't do it.

D.J. Vasiljevic scored 159 yesterday. That was pretty

spectacular. If all our guys could reach that, we'd be awfully hard to beat.

Q. What was the secret for him hitting 159?

COACH LARRANAGA: He didn't miss for three solid minutes he missed four shots in three minutes. I don't know how many -- I was not watching. I was watching the big guys shoot.

I think if you combined our six big guys they didn't get to 159. That's a joke. Don't tell them I said that. Thank you.