

A Tale Of Dedication: FSU Hoops Signee Forrest Ready For Next Step

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CHIPLEY, Fla. -- Baseball, basketball, football. Whatever. If there was a ball within reach, the toddler had to have it.

A child who loves toys. It's hardly a surprise. That's what Barbara Lee thought.

Years passed, and her son, who went from toddler to young adult, developed a fondness for basketball. Soon, the fondness turned into something much bigger.

"He sleeps with his basketball. He's been sleeping with it since he was big enough to get in the bed with it," Lee recalled. "He has such a work ethic. I do have to say that. When I would get up at 5 a.m. and have to be to work at 6 a.m., in all of his high school years I know for certain, he would get up and say, 'I'm going outside to work out.'"

Lee would watch her son set up his training routine. He'd lift weights in their yard. From there, he would strap an athletic parachute to his back and run sprints to increase his speed.

Then, her son would arrange small cones so he could work on his agility.

This is only part of Trent Forrest's story.

Forrest, 17, is a composite four-star prospect and one of three signees who will play basketball next season at Florida State. His journey isn't like that of his future teammates.

He's from Chipley, a small town located nearly 100 miles west of Tallahassee. The most recent census data states Chipley has a population of 3,574 people. The Donald L. Tucker Civic Center -- where Forrest will play next season -- can fit Forrest's hometown and still have room for almost 9,000 more people.

Essentially, he has accomplished everything a high school basketball player could ask.

Forrest already has one state championship and is seeking another. The Tigers entered the Florida High School Athletic Association playoffs as the No. 1 team in Class A, according to the Florida Association of Basketball Coaches-Source Hoops Poll.

He has led Chipley to a 26-3 record while averaging 28.8 points, 9.3 rebounds and 5.2 assists per game. Forrest, who has led Chipley in scoring since he was a freshman, and the Tigers will play Tuesday in the state semifinals.

"It's been pretty good. It's been kind of different because we had a coaching change at the beginning of the year," Forrest said. "But it was somebody that we knew very well and he's been around. It's been pretty good." Mike Gates, who has been an assistant for 32 years, took over the program to start the season.

Like Forrest said, there's a familiarity. Gates coached Forrest when he was in middle school and knew what he was capable of doing.

Gates vividly remembers Forrest's freshman year when Chipley played Holmes County and its star post player, Chris Walker, in the playoffs. The 6-foot-10 Walker was a McDonald's All-American as a senior and later played at the University of Florida.

"Trent put 30-something on him," said Gates, who graduated from FSU in 1983. "This kid was ranked No. 6 in his position in the country. Trent did not back down on him at all."

Forrest, who scored 30 in the loss to Holmes County, was still growing into body and developing his game. He's now 6-5 and says he weighs 200 pounds after adding more muscle to what is still a slender frame.

Gates remembers getting phone calls from Forrest when he was younger. It was summer time, and every night Forrest would ask Gates if he was going to the gym the next morning.

"I would say I am getting there at 8 or 9, and I would come pick him up and he would stay until 11 or 12 and leave the place dripping in sweat," Gates said. "He's worked to get where's at."

Forrest described his senior year as smooth. The only bump came when he collided with a player during a game and injured his knee. Forrest sat out two games as a precaution, and the Tigers split those games.

Forrest was still on the bench, cheering on his teammates. Even on the bench, he continued to hear about how he's "the guy going to Florida State" next season.

"I was out with my knee and we were playing and I was on the bench and the other team was beating us," Forrest said. "Their fans started doing the 'warchant,' and I started doing it with them. Even though I wasn't playing, I was taking it as they were fans and I did it with them." Forrest said he chose the Seminoles because he felt like the coaching staff, program and school all felt right.

Once he committed, he began establishing relationships with IMG Academy forward Johnathan Isaac and Indianapolis (Ind.) Arsenal Technical guard C.J. Walker. The three started a group chat via texting, something they still do to this day.

Isaac, a consensus five-star prospect, and Walker, a composite four-star, hadn't committed to FSU by that point. While Forrest wanted them to choose FSU, he explained that he didn't want to pressure them into making a decision.

"You kind of have to mix it in because you don't want to overdo it to where they feel like you're being aggravating or annoying," Forrest said. "I just kind of mix it in and was myself with them. I just established that good relationship with them first, and then talk basketball on the side."

Forrest said the three future Seminoles spoke when Isaac was debating whether to come to FSU or attempt to become eligible for the upcoming NBA Draft. Forrest said he and Walker told Isaac he had their support regardless of what he decided. Isaac then announced on Feb. 9 he would be coming to FSU.

As much as Forrest likes the university and coaches, another reason he selected FSU is so his family could watch him play.

Lee certainly is happy it worked out that way, although she says she advised her son to keep his options open throughout the process. Numerous schools were after him, including Stanford, and she said the Cardinal coaching staff attended at least "five or six" of her son's games (Forrest is a very good student who is taking calculus among other courses).

"I didn't want him to feel obligated to stay close to here," she said. "When he made that decision, it took a huge load off. I'll never forget when he said, 'I want to commit,' and I held my breath before he said 'FSU.' I said, 'Thank You Lord,' and I slept better that night than I had in a long time."

Attending FSU is something of a family rite of passage for Forrest.

One of his cousins is former Seminoles running back Amp Lee, who played three seasons at FSU before having a nine-year NFL career. He's also related to twins Terrance and Terrell Whitehurst, who are both sophomores on the FSU men's tennis team.

These are details provided by Lee and Gates, as Forrest isn't the type to talk much about himself. It's part of a personality that leaves an impression on those who've known him his whole life or only met him once.

Lee said her son was a joy to parent and that she never had to get on him once about doing his homework. When it came to sports, Gates said Forrest never thought of himself as being better than his teammates.

"He's probably one of the most popular kids on campus," Gates said. "He treats everybody with kindness. He treats them with respect. Every kid, they acknowledge him around school.

Trent is one of the most humble kids I have ever been around. He doesn't let all this get to him."

When Forrest was recently named a McDonald's All-American Game nominee, a small ceremony was held at the McDonald's in Chipley.

Dennis Lareau, who owns the restaurant, said about 15 people showed up to see Forrest presented with the honor. What made the turnout so surprising to Lareau was that the event was not publicized.

"For someone who can score between 25 to 50 points a game, he did not act like he was a big deal," Lareau said. "He was very modest. Very polite. He was dressed professionally. He would be the kind of kid you would want to have working for you and representing you."

The mark Forrest has left on his hometown is why many people in Chipley hope he can succeed at FSU.

So much awaits Forrest. He'll be making the jump from playing in Florida's smallest high school classification to playing in the nation's most demanding basketball conference in the ACC.

Forrest has prepared for the transition by watching FSU games. He said he records every one so he can watch and re-watch them to learn everything he can about the Seminoles' system.

"There's a kid from Chipley who is at Louisiana Tech right now," Gates said of Bulldogs leading scorer Alex Hamilton. "Artis Gilmore is from Chipley ... Amp Lee is from Chipley.

Now, we hope we can say Trent is from here, too."