

FSU Forward Terance Mann Credits Mother For Turning Him Into Strong Leader, Floor Coach

By Safid Deen
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When Florida State forward Terance Mann roamed his mother's college basketball practices, he had one simple job he took to be extreme.

Mann's duty growing up was to just be a ball boy and give basketballs to the players when requested, but he took his work to another level.

"He would protect that ball rack like it was his life, and the girls literally had to come up to him and ask me nicely for a basketball before he would give it to them," said Daynia La-Force, Mann's mother who has who has spent 22 years as a Division I women's basketball coach.

"He felt like those were his prized possessions and he would not give them up. He thought the ball boy was supposed to protect the basketballs."

Mann added with a smile, "Yeah, I guarded that ball rack with everything. I remember those days. They were fun."

As coach Leonard Hamilton and the Florida State men's basketball team prepares for Tuesday's season opener at home against George Washington University, the Seminoles will rely heavily Mann to lead by example and from experience this season.

Behind Magic rookie forward Jonathan Isaac, Hornets rookie guard Dwayne Bacon, Knicks G-League guard Xavier Rathan-Mayes, fifth-year center Michael Ojo and Mann last season, the Seminoles (26-9) went undefeated at home, finished second in the ACC and were a win short of tying the school record for victories in a season.

While their first trip back to the NCAA Tournament in five years was spoiled by a second-round exit to Xavier at Amway Center, the Seminoles hope Mann can be a pillar on a team that will be without a clear-cut NBA prospect and depending on a cast of developing players to compete in the vaunted ACC.

FSU will need Mann to shoot more from the outside, but his gritty multi-faceted play combined with his firsthand knowledge from his mother's practices make him an ideal candidate to lead the Seminoles.

"He was pretty much born on a court, and raised on a court," La-Force said. "He's learned everything from being on a basketball court, everything about life."

After playing at Georgetown, La-Force climbed up the women's coaching ranks up and down the East Coast at Long Island University, St. John's, New Haven and Northeastern. She is now entering her fourth season at the University of Rhode Island. Mann, 21, and his younger brother Martin, 19, have been fixtures on the practice courts, learning along the way.

During quiet moments together, La-Force would ask Mann which players were wearing certain jerseys so he could learn his numbers.

As practice was underway, Mann and his brother were on the sidelines imitating the players' actions. When La-Force blew her whistle to coach up a player, Mann listened to the yelling intently until it was time for him to also resume practicing.

When it was time to head back home after road games, Mann and his brother would ask if they could go sit in the back of the bus with the girls on the team.

As they got older, they would travel with La-Force on her recruiting trips to scout for new players — something Mann surprisingly loved. More than the traveling to new places and going out to dinner, Mann enjoyed sitting in basketball gyms for high school and AAU games like a coach himself.

“Believe it or not, I like going recruiting with her,” Mann said. “Since I was younger, I would give my mom little tidbits of players I would see.”

If La-Force’s team suffered a loss on a certain day, Terance and his brother knew to keep their distance. Mann said he would often check in with his mother after the games, hear her “coaching spiel” about the unfortunate outcome and then head back to his room to play video games to let her finish stewing.

“If I lost a game, he may not have had dinner or help with his homework,” La-Force said with a laugh. “They knew to give me at least an hour after a loss to cool off.”

As Mann has gone through prep school and is now entering his third season at FSU, he and La-Force have to stay connected from afar.

Before every FSU game, La-Force loves to send Mann a special text letting him know it is game day. While they might speak briefly before tipoff, they like to save their 20-minute debriefing for after the games.

“He always listens, wants to talk, sometimes giving me his side of the story. Then I have to say, ‘No, no, no, this is what I saw,’” La-Force said.

Mann admits there may be times when he’s not ready for his mother’s honesty. But it’s more than appreciated.

“I wouldn’t say it’s like a coach and player relationship. I feel like she’s my mentor,” Mann said of his mother. “She’s my mom of course. But I feel like she’s always trying to give me life lessons like a mentor.

“Whatever happens, I’ll go to her and ask her for advice and she’ll have the right answer. Sometimes it’s not the answer that I want, but it’s always right.”

Luckily for Mann and his mother, La-Force’s schedule lined up perfectly, allowing her to visit FSU for the team’s two exhibitions. She will also be in the stands for the season opener after her first two games of the season, but she won’t be able to see Mann in person again until the ACC or NCAA tournaments later in the year.

“It just worked out that way — it’s God giving me an opportunity to watch him grow, watch him play,” La-Force said.

She said her proudest moments as Mann’s mother are when she hears how respected and valued he is as a leader in FSU’s program.

Mann hopes to make her even more proud this season, with high hopes for the Seminoles and himself this season. “I have to step it up this year, definitely, on both sides of the ball,” Mann said. “I’m trying to not only get defensive player of the year, but I’m definitely trying to get on the ACC All-Defensive Team. That’s one of my big goals.

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