

Mom's Influence Helps Trent Forrest Lift Florida State Into Elite Eight

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LOS ANGELES — Terance Mann didn't mince words.

During Friday's breakout interview session at the Staples Center, I asked the Florida State senior about Trent Forrest, his sophomore teammate. Mann's eyes lit up.

"Trent, in the last month, saved us, big-time," Mann said. "He's been giving us a great spark off the bench and scoring a lot of points for us, getting a lot of assists, getting a lot of rebounds. He does everything. What he does for us is key, and it doesn't go unnoticed."

That pattern repeated itself with every Florida State player I spoke with during the media/practice day between the Sweet 16 and Elite Eight: Ask about Forrest, eyes light up, glowing review about their teammate.

C.J. Walker: "He's just playing with a lot of confidence. I feel like he's found his mojo. He's making shots, making good defensive plays. I feel like he's the reason we're winning right now. He comes into the game and is able to take over the game and impact it in so many ways. He's been able to help me out, being able to play off each other."

Christ Koumadje: "Trent has put in a lot of work. Just seeing him in the summer, he's always in the gym. Always. He's the first one in, last one in, literally. Always in there, working with Coach Jones. He really stepped up at the time we really needed him."

Phil Cofer: "He has the length guarding point guards that probably most point guards haven't had before. That definitely helps up, him being active on the court, on the defensive side more than the offensive side. He's been making more winning plays."

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OK, so now you've heard the testimonies. Here's what Forest, a 6-5 guard, has done to earn the praise. In his past nine games, he's averaging ...

- 13.2 points
- 5.1 assists
- 5.3 rebounds
- 2.1 steals

He's coming off the bench, but he's playing starter minutes.

Against Missouri in the NCAA Tournament opener, Forest had 10 points, eight assists, six rebounds, three steals and two blocks. Against Xavier, he had 14 points, five rebounds, four steals and three assists. Against Gonzaga, seven points, six assists, six rebounds and two steals.

"This summer, he was doing this in pickup and workouts," Mann said. "We knew what he was capable of. Everyone knew what Trent was capable of. Everyone knew he could be a starting ACC point guard."

The Seminoles thought they would be seeing this version of Forrest all season. But a knee injury caused him to miss a huge chunk of the preseason, and even though he returned early in the regular season, he wasn't at full speed for a long time.

"This summer, and before I got hurt, I felt like I was in a good place," Forrest said. "Then going through the injury and all just set me back a bit. But now I feel back to myself, 100 percent, and I feel like the player I knew I would eventually be."

Another part of playing like a starting ACC point guard is being a leader on the court.

"His first year here, he didn't really talk much at all," Cofer, a senior, told me. "But this year, he's taking the initiative, getting guys in the right position, taking that leadership. Correcting people for calling out teammates and stuff like that. I think that really helps us."

Forrest might not have been talkative early in his career, but he absolutely was paying attention. That's something he's learned from his mom, Barbara Lee.

"Growing up, she would always be on me not to be a follower, but to be a leader," he said.

For Forrest's entire life, his mom held leadership roles in their church. She was a youth pastor, a dance-ministry leader or however else she could serve.

All the while, Forrest learned from his mom.

"She's an amazing woman, to me. Just sitting back and watching how she deals with people, how she deals with kids, adults, parents," he said. "It was amazing to see how she could make good relationships and how she could get the best out of people, really, and how she could motivate and do things like that. I feel like just watching her from a distance, that was an influence on me and I was able to learn a lot."

Lee is a pastor at a church she started, All New Things Worship Center in Chipley, Florida, where Forrest grew up. And his mom is a regular at Florida State games, as you can imagine.

"She's a really nice lady. She's really cool," Walker said with a big smile. "She's so supportive, she's there for every game. She's just really nice, giving out hugs to everybody. It's the little things that just make you feel good about yourself. I feel like that's what she's done with Trent."

And that's a big reason Florida State is playing for a spot in the Final Four.