

Florida State Freshman Guard Devin Vassell Stands Tall Against Clemson

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Tallahassee Democrat

January 23, 2019

No. 23 Florida State needed someone to step up with its three most experienced defenders sidelined or limited with injuries.

Enter true freshman guard Devin Vassell.

Vassell was called upon to guard Marcquise Reed, one of the ACC's most dynamic scorers, because of the foot injuries affecting Trent Forrest, Terance Mann, and Phil Cofer.

"We wanted some length on Reed because he's almost virtually unstoppable," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said after the game.

"He has such a unique way of making tough shots. He's one of the best 1-on-1 players in the league. Devin is long and he did a good job. Length, we thought, would be a factor there because he was averaging 20 points per game and no one seemed to be able to stop him. So Devin's opportunity came as a result of need."

Reed hadn't scored less than 14 points in any ACC game so far this year. He came into the game averaging 18.8 points per game in conference play. That's a tall task for any player to deal with.

Vassell was up for the challenge.

He played a season-high 20 minutes and was on the court with Reed for 19. During that time Reed scored six points and had three turnovers.

All three turnovers came in the second half where FSU outscored the Tigers 42-27 to take home the 77-68 victory. Reed finished the game with 13 points on 4-11 shooting.

"That's what we've come to expect from him," FSU guard David Nichols said.

"When he's not playing at that level it kind of looks like something's wrong. He plays hard and gives effort. He just does what he's asked to do. That's huge for him to come into a game like this as a freshman and do what he did." Vassell hasn't had much of a role this season. He came into Tuesday's game against Clemson averaging 8.4 minutes and 4.4 points per game.

In FSU's first five ACC games his minutes had dropped to just four per game.

But he was ready when his number was called.

He finished with just five points, but those points came when the Seminoles needed them the most.

He hit a jumper in the first half to cut the Clemson lead to one after the Tigers had gone up nine.

Vassell then hit the biggest shot of the game in the second half.

He knocked down a three from the right corner to give FSU a 56-55 lead with 9:11 left in the second half.

The Seminoles never relinquished that lead.

It was a big-time shot in a big-time moment and the freshman answered the call for the Seminoles.

Of course, it wasn't all perfect. Vassell had a bad turnover right before the end of the first half when he threw the ball out of bounds looking for Mann.

That turnover allowed the Tigers one more possession, which they converted to take a six-point lead into halftime.

But Vassell didn't let that play get him down and kept up the same energy in the second half.

"There's a lot of ups-and-downs as a freshman," FSU forward Mfiondu Kabengele said.

"He was struggling a bit. I understand he had a lot of sometimes doubts, but we're connected as a team. We always give him confidence in practice and out of practice. To see him play that way is going to boost his confidence throughout the ACC. It's going to help us a lot."