

Mentally-Tough M.J. Walker Ready To Build Off Miami Outburst

By Curt Weiler
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When a slump is finally snapped, it can happen in a big way.

That's how it was for Florida State sophomore M.J. Walker.

He entered Sunday's game at Miami having hit just four of his 22 three-point attempts (18.2 percent) in the Seminoles' first six ACC games.

All he did against the Hurricanes was hit a career-high six threes with a season-high 22 points, snapping him out of a slump he's been struggling with for over a month.

Although this was a surprise to many following FSU, it wasn't to Walker himself.

"I had a good game, but that's not shocking for me," Walker told the *Tallahassee Democrat*.

"I know what I can do."

He'll have a chance to show the UM game was the beginning of his upswing Saturday when the Seminoles (15-5, 3-4 in ACC) host Georgia Tech (11-10, 3-5 in ACC) at 12 p.m.

"I don't really trip about any bad games or anything like that," Walker said when asked about his recent struggles. "I knew it was going to come eventually, just had to stay positive in attitude, do what I can just to keep helping my team."

Arriving at FSU as a four-star prospect and McDonald's All-American, Walker was thrown into action last season as a true freshman.

He averaged 18.8 minutes per game and his 7.0 points per game were seventh-most on the team.

The departures of Braian Angola and C.J. Walker thrust Walker further into the spotlight as he's started all 18 games he's played in this season after making just one start as a freshman.

For the early portion of the season, Walker looked to have taken the next step. He scored in double-figures in five of the Seminoles' first eight games and was a well-rounded player who excelled on defense and in off-ball offensive situations.

After a hot start, Walker missed a pair of games with a foot injury and a nasty flu bug. His shot never came back from this as he had scored 10-plus points just once in his last nine games before breaking out against Miami.

Even when the shot wasn't falling, there was never a sense of worry from the FSU coaching staff.

"Normally a kid like MJ, they have a chance to come in and mature over four years. Being a McDonald's All-American and a five-star guy, I think sometimes he weighs some things on his shoulders, but we believed in him," FSU assistant Charlton "C.Y." Young told the *Tallahassee Democrat*.

"We live in a microwave generation. Everybody wants everything in 30 seconds, but the best meals take time to prepare...When it's ready, it's a hell of a meal and that's how we view M.J. He's a special talent, a big-time player."

Over that nine-game stretch, Walker averaged 4.2 points per game, shot 25 percent from the floor and 17.9 percent from three-point range.

Even when little was going right for Walker, he was able to maintain the belief that he could turn his recent tough stretch around.

"C.Y. has been telling me just to keep my confidence, not to let a missed shot rattle me," Walker said.

"Basically just try to do the little things so that when the big things come, it just comes naturally."

Added FSU head coach Leonard Hamilton, "If you can do all the things right and the ball doesn't go in, sometimes you have the tendency to doubt yourself, but more matured, experienced players that have gone through it enough, they believe in themselves and they don't allow themselves to get discouraged when they go through those patches.

"(Walker) has been positive, he hasn't been reluctant to still continue to keep taking those shots. Now that they're falling, I'm sure that he'll work his way out of it."

As anyone around the game of basketball will tell you, it only takes one game to turn that tide.

"Basketball is very fragile. It's like an egg. It's that individually and as a team," Young said.

"You have bad games, you struggle. You have one big game, you're the man now. Mentally, the light goes on. Basketball is that way. It's been like that since the beginning of time, it will always be that way. You're only as good as your last shot. You're only as good as your last win."

Young called Walker's performance against Miami "the kind of game that can propel you to a whole bunch of good games."

If that's the case, it would prove quite helpful and timely for the Seminoles.

When he's clicking, Walker is among the most consistent three-point shooters on the FSU roster.

The Seminoles have shot better than 50 percent from outside the arc in each of their last two games. A continuation of anything close to this going forward -- with Walker likely to play a role -- could go a long way towards the Seminoles further distancing themselves from their slow start to conference play.