

## Here's Hoping FSU Fans Love Forrest As Much As The Head Coach Does

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March 3, 2019

I've been asking Leonard Hamilton questions for well over a decade now.

So I've gotten pretty accustomed to his responses. He doesn't want to take any bows. He doesn't ever criticize one of his own players publicly. We all know that. But he also typically shies away from being too glowing in his praise. He'll compliment a player, but he almost always follows up by talking about how much more room there is to grow.

But on Saturday, after his team held off a pesky North Carolina State team, 78-73, to improve to 23-6 overall and 11-5 in the ACC, I asked him about Trent Forrest. And how impressive it is that the junior guard continues to show up, continues to play hard at both ends, continues to make winning plays, despite a painful turf toe injury that won't be able to heal until after the season.

That's when Hamilton started heaping praise in Forrest's direction.

It was unlike anything I can recall from the longtime FSU head coach (other than maybe when discussing Toney Douglas back in the day?), and it illuminated perfectly how much he appreciates, values, respects and admires his junior point guard from Chipley, Fla.

"He's a competitor," Hamilton said. "He loves basketball. He represents what the 'unconquered spirit' means. He's a Seminole through and through. He's a legacy guy. He had relatives that played here. He's Amp Lee's cousin. It means an awful lot to him.

"He's not 100 percent, but he gives you what he has every time he walks on the court. And that's the true measure of a person's character -- is how do they respond under adversity? When things are going well, how do you respond? It's easy to be happy when everything is going great, when you feel wonderful. But how do you respond when you're not quite at your best.

"That just says a lot about his character and what being a basketball player at Florida State means to him. Because he gives us everything he has every day."

I legitimately can't remember Hamilton ever talking about another Florida State player like that immediately after a game. It's not to say he hasn't, or he hasn't felt that way about other guys. I just don't remember him ever being so effusive in a press conference about one of his players.

When Hamilton started talking Saturday about an unconquered spirit and character in that way, it crystallized something for me I had already been thinking for a while: Trent Forrest is one of Leonard Hamilton's all-time favorite players.

And with what he's doing this year, with that injury, with that pain, he should be one of yours, too.

Forrest is probably never going to be an All-American. He's not going to score 20 points per game or pull down 12 rebounds a night with 11 assists. But he'll get you 13 and 6 and 4. With a couple of steals. And he'll do it in immense pain. And he'll guard the other team's best perimeter player for 94 feet. With turf toe. And never complain. Never use it as an excuse. Never let it keep him from playing as hard as he possibly can.

That's how programs are built.

I think that's why Hamilton likes him so much. He knows, better than any of us, just what kind of example Trent Forrest is giving to the other players on the team.

He knows how that can permeate a locker room, how it can have a monumental impact on the other players who see what he goes through each night to put on the uniform and play in the toughest conference in America. It matters.

And it resonates. Just read what his teammates had to say about him Saturday.

"He's everything," sophomore Mfiondu Kabengele said. "It gives guys a sense of a standard. With Trent, if he's hurt, there's no excuse for guys who are dinged up as well to not give second effort. Because he's one of our leaders. So it's important for us to continue to bring the same effort that he does, because he dedicates to this team the same way we should dedicate to the team."

"He's a dawg, man," sophomore M.J. Walker said. "He doesn't let the injury he has, or whatever is going on, affect what we have going on. Because he loves us so much, and the pride he takes in the team, it shows on the floor. We definitely love him and we definitely need him on the court."

"He's our engine. We feed off of him."

Forrest is one of those rare players who can dominate an opponent without taking shots. That's the beauty of his game. He doesn't need to score 20 to make an impact. He puts his imprint on games in every way imaginable. Even these last two months, as he has tried to fight through his foot injury (he hasn't participated fully in a practice since early January), he's managed to have an impact.

Not quite to the level he did last March when he was one of the key factors in the Seminoles' Elite Eight run. But enough to make a difference. Enough to help this team produce 23 wins with just six losses.

Because so many of us are focused on scoring, I feel like we -- and I'm including myself in this one -- take the junior from Chipley for granted. We just assume he's going to play through excruciating pain to be out there with his teammates, to play for his university.

We don't even take the injury into account at times. How sore he is during and after games. And how much stress he puts on it when he's on the floor for 30 minutes, having to chase around some of the best guards in the United States.

Because that's just what we've come to expect this year from Trent Forrest.

He just gets the job done. No matter what.

On Saturday, despite the injury, he was the Seminoles' best player in the second half. FSU doesn't win that game if not for his defense and his decision-making.

And in the postgame press conference, his head coach showed just how much he appreciated that effort.