

Peachtree Ridge Grad Devin Vassell Turns Into Super Sub As Florida State Freshman

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Eight minutes.

That's all Florida State assistant coach Charlton "C.Y." Young said he needed to see of Devin Vassell — then just a high school junior — during a scrimmage at Peachtree Ridge before deciding that he would be a fit for the Seminoles.

"He offered me on the spot and after that I kind of knew where I wanted to go," Vassell said.

Vassell's AAU coach, Steve Bouye, had called Young a few days earlier to let him know he had a diamond in the rough. Former Peachtree Ridge head coach Keith Arrington confirmed Bouye's report and told Young he thought in two years that Vassell had the potential to be one of the best players in the state.

So Young, who was the head coach at Georgia Southern before joining Leonard Hamilton's staff at FSU in 2013, went to Suwanee to see for himself.

The first three defensive possessions he saw Vassell play, he had a deflected pass, a blocked shot and a rebound. When he finally touched the ball on offense he promptly drained a 3.

Young called him over to offer a scholarship. He also gave Vassell, then just 6-foot-4, 161 pounds, some simple instructions on how to proceed.

"I told him, 'You're going to eat some Whoppers, you're going to do some pushups, you're going to grow two inches and a half, and you're a pro. If you listen to me and stop being a Huxtable, and get a little tougher, you will play in the NBA.' He was trembling," Young said.

It was part honest assessment, part recruiting pitch. Young also had to give another passionate pitch when he returned to Tallahassee.

Vassell only held offers from Presbyterian and North Florida when Young offered him, and with a veteran roster, the FSU coaches knew they were likely to only sign one prospect for the 2018 class.

"I came back and I told (Hamilton), 'I offered a kid named Devin Vassell, I don't care what nobody says in this room. I offered,'" Young said. "They were like, 'Who is he? It says he's a two-star player.' I said, 'Don't worry about that. Listen to me. I'm telling you what I saw.'"

A few weeks after Young's visit the secret was out about Vassell. Texas Tech and Miami dropped in on Peachtree Ridge to visit. But Vassell had already made up his mind that he wanted to play for FSU.

Young's initial assessment proved correct as Vassell was the Daily Post Player of the Year last season as a senior, leading the team in scoring (21.6) and rebounding (8.9).

Initially, the plan was for Vassell to redshirt this season. FSU reached the Elite Eight last season in the NCAA Tournament and returned the bulk of its roster.

But Vassell had a growth spurt and spent the summer in the weight room. Now measuring 6-foot-6 and 187 pounds, he's played in all but four games this season as a true freshman.

"He's just continued to try to get better," Young said. "He bought in to the defensive side of the ball, he bought in being a non-ball dominant impact guy and he improved the speed of his jump shot. His shot was always pure as the driven snow, but in a short period of time he improved how quick he gets it off. So now he gets a look and his feet are going and it's gone. He's special. I think he's a pro. I really do."

Vassell took a pro's approach to playing limited minutes early in the season, routinely getting in a quick post-game workout with Young at the team facility if he didn't get much game action.

His work has paid off, as he enters this week's game against Virginia Tech having played double-digit minutes in five of the last six games for FSU and averaging 4.6 points per game in just 9.7 minutes per game.

It started with a critical second-half 3-pointer in a Jan. 22 win over Clemson. Then he scored a team-high 11 points in a win at Georgia Tech on Feb. 16.

In a 68-61 win over Notre Dame last Monday, he showed flashes of the player that the FSU coaches believe he will grow into. Vassell led FSU in scoring with 11 points and rebounds with seven as he sparked a second-half comeback.

With 7:04 left in the game, Vassell put back a thunderous dunk on an offensive rebound, collected a rebound on the other end of the floor and knocked down a 3-pointer on offense to give FSU its first lead since the game's first five minutes.

"It was special," Vassell said. "Just going out there being able to play for Florida State and just being able to help the team is always great. We just needed some energy and coach had faith in me to just go out there and play to my ability and everybody had confidence in me. Whenever I had an open shot, they told me to shoot it and it just was a good moment."

With the ACC Tournament starting next Tuesday and the NCAA Tournament after that, the freshman will continue to be a crucial weapon off the bench for the Seminoles.

"Obviously Devin plays with a tremendous amount of confidence and spirit," Hamilton said. "There's no doubt he's growing up and maturing. He's been a very positive man from Day 1. He doesn't ever have a negative moment. He's eager to learn. He's a sponge ... sometimes it's hard for a high school kid to come in, who's been a starter on his high school team to now start over again and now compete, but it's been all about learning for him and growing."