

Q&A: Vassell Loves Defense, Ready For Expanded Role

By Bob Ferrante

The Osceola

October 21, 2019

Florida State opens the 2019-20 season on Nov. 6 against Pittsburgh. But fans can get an early look at the Seminoles on Tuesday night when they play their first exhibition game against Barry University at 7 p.m. at the Donald L. Tucker Center.

As a freshman last season, Vassell led the team in 3-point shooting (41.9 percent). He averaged 4.5 points per game but consistently brought energy and defense off the bench. Vassell may not start this season but could be a sixth man off the bench, a role that in past years has seen a player make significant contributions.

Vassell went one-on-one with the Osceola to discuss what he is working on going into year 2 and how he has made improvements.

What was your focus in the offseason?

Vassell: I was just trying to focus on getting a lot stronger to be able to guard one through four (point guard, shooting guard, small forward or power forward). Coach (Leonard) Hamilton, that's the type of defense he likes being able to use, just interchange with everybody. So just focusing on getting stronger and conditioning myself and just being able to be ready to play whenever my number's called.

So being able to guard one through four means add a little bit of weight but still be quick? How many pounds have you added?

Vassell: Over the offseason, I gained probably about 10, maybe 15 pounds. All good weight. I still can move and run and jump. I feel good. I just had a good work ethic this summer with trying to focus on getting bigger and working out three or four times a week.

How much of an adjustment was it college basketball and how comfortable are you now?

Vassell: I would definitely say that my freshman year went by superfast, but it was just a great opportunity for me to be able to go out there as a freshman and you know get big minutes, especially in big games, ACC games. I feel like that's going to be one thing that's helped us this year, we have a few key players that played in big games or we'll have experience for this upcoming year.

I'm sure you would like to start but how much do you enjoy being the spark plug guy on the bench and to have that opportunity to provide quality minutes off the bench?

Vassell: It really doesn't matter to me if I start or come off the bench. I'm just trying to help the team however I can. Whatever happens happens. I'm just ready to get out there and work and help my team however I can. Defensively, come out with energy just whatever I had to do.

Is there a little Terance Mann in how you play, the well-rounded and versatile traits?

Vassell: I've always looked up to Terance. I came in and he was the first person I talked to, as a senior, he always helped me out, with just the little things, offense and defense. Talking to him really about anything. He's a great player.

You have a good jump shot. How hard have you worked on your jumper?

Vassell: Ever since I was young, my dad put a ball in my hands. And you know, he just really taught me to spend countless hours of me in a gym just shooting with my dad or my trainer. Really just focusing on my shot. As soon as I came here, CY (assistant coach Charlton Young) helped me with my shot. I just want to say thanks to coach CY and coach Jones (assistant coach Stan Jones) for really helping me out with that too.

How has your dad helped you as a basketball player?

Vassell: My dad played basketball. He played in high school, won a few state championships and then in college went to Stony Brook. He was doing pretty good. We make jokes about each other all the time, saying who's better in college and stuff like that, but you know, it's all love at the end of the day.

How old were you when you beat him one-on-one in the driveway?

Vassell: I would say probably about 13. Got a little taller than him and I was able to beat him in one-on-one. He tried to have a smile on his face but I could tell he was a little upset.

A lot of first-year guys, whether they're transfers, freshman, junior college guys, it's going to be our first look at them in the exhibition. What have you seen from those guys?

Vassell: I would just say everybody that came in is bought in. They all came in work hard. You come into the gym, it's always somebody shooting. I'll just say that we've all come in and bought into our program. I'm ready to see how they play on Tuesday, too. And I'm just thrilled for this opportunity that we all have. And I'm just excited for the season coming up.

Best defender on the team is?

Vassell: Devin Vassell. I just I love playing defense. Whenever I see the best player on the floor, I want to guard that person, I want to step up to the challenge. My freshman year, just watching Trent (Forrest), he was one of the best defenders in the ACC. I was just watching him and learning from him asking a lot of questions about what his techniques are.

Who is the toughest guy to defend one on one?

Vassell: Trent Forrest. Definitely. Even with the bad toe you wouldn't be able to tell.

Who is the best shooter?

Vassell: M.J. Walker. M.J. has unbelievable confidence. Once that shot is gone, it's hard to stop him.

You are the captain. You have the first pick. Who do you take?

Vassell: Trent Forrest. Definitely. He is a floor general. He knows so much about the game. He just knows all the little things and just the stuff that will help you out.

Who's the best rebounder?

Vassell: Malik Osborne. He's just played with so much energy and he has a high motor. Whenever he sees a loose ball, he's always trying to go get it.