

## **Florida State Basketball Point Guard RayQuan Evans Working Back To Form After Injury**

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Florida State is finally getting back to full strength after a number of injuries during preseason practice and this season.

FSU coach Leonard Hamilton couldn't be happier about that after going through the first six games with an abbreviated version of the team he put together.

"I'm looking forward to having a full team," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said.

"Gosh, in practice, I will be will be celebrating. I'm going to be very thankful. You know, this Thanksgiving. I might be in the Thanksgiving spirit. I'm going to be extremely thankful that I got everybody healthy and ready to go. Now, if I could just get a little practice in, we might start developing a little bit."

The player that has missed the most time so far is junior college transfer RayQuan Evans, who tore his hamstring in the first few days of the preseason.

Evans missed five weeks of practice and the first two games of the season against Pittsburgh and Florida.

He's played the last four games and his minutes have gone up in every contest he's played in. He's expected to play tonight against Tennessee in the Emerald Coast Classic semifinal in Niceville, Fla.

"I think that he's still getting his feet under him," Hamilton told the *Democrat*.

"He's a very smart, instinctive, cerebral player. Brings a lot to our team. And he just needs more reps, so that he can gain the confidence to be who he is right now. He's done a lot of thinking because he's missed five weeks of practice. So he's not in great condition. He's still trying to learn his teammates.

"All of that goes with being out for the period of time that he's been. I like what I see. He's not disappointing me." Evans is averaging four points and 2.3 assists in just under 14 minutes per game so far.

Despite not being able to practice with the team for most of the preseason, his teammates have been impressed with the way he's stepped up in games despite not being completely comfortable with a new system and not being in game shape.

"He's definitely a good leader on the court," FSU redshirt sophomore guard Anthony Polite said.

"He's able to put people in the right places, and basically direct traffic in the sense that he knows where people are. He knows where you're supposed to be. He's able to find people and put them in comfortable positions for them to be able to succeed. So it's always easy to be on the court with him."

Evans hasn't been able to show much of his skill set yet as he gets back into form, but the talent is there. He averaged 18.2 points, 7.4 rebounds, and 4.9 assists per game and was named the Northwest Athletic Conference Player of the Year at North Idaho during the 2018-19 season.

FSU's coaches and players have a very high opinion of the player that he can become for the Seminoles.

"He has great command of the floor and leadership qualities," Hamilton said.

"He's a guy that really does a great job of seeing the floor making decisions. And even though you haven't seen it, he is a really, really good shooter. We think that he has all the skills to be an outstanding point guard in our program."

FSU has been fortunate to have good point guard play for the last few years and that's because it hasn't all been on the shoulders of one player.

FSU had Xavier Rathan-Mayes, Trent Forrest, and C.J. Walker in 2016-2017, Forrest and Walker in 2017-2018, and Forrest and David Nichols in 2018-2019.

With Evans injured to start the season, Forrest, a senior, had to play most of the minutes. He averaged 34 minutes per game the first three games.

But since Evans has returned, FSU has been able to cut his minutes down to 24 over the last three games. Part of that is the level of competition that FSU has played during that span, but the other part has been getting Evans increasingly more playing time.

Getting Evans into playing shape and comfortable is going to allow Forrest to stay fresh throughout the season, which will be key to the Seminoles' postseason plans.

"I feel like we definitely need to have a good tandem at the one position just to wear out teams by playing off of each other," Forrest said.

"He's not a little small guy. He's a pretty big guard for his size. He gets after it defensively too. He'll be able to use the size to his advantage the more he gets comfortable playing. The more games he gets under his belt."

FSU's competition level is going to ratchet up this weekend as the Seminoles take on Tennessee today and either Purdue or VCU on Saturday in the Emerald Coast Classic and then at Indiana in the ACC/B1G Challenge Tuesday. Evans is going to be relied on in all three games and FSU needs him to take the next step in his development.

"He has to improve and learn and grow on the fly," Hamilton said.

"We don't have any more time to get him extra minutes where we can afford to make mistakes and not have to pay for it with the level of competition that we face next couple weeks."