

## **FSU's Scottie Barnes Thriving As 6-9 Point Guard; South Florida Native Drawing Magic Johnson Comparisons**

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Let's start with the smile and the unbridled enthusiasm. Then the hugs for his teammates, whether on the court for making a big play or in the dining hall, where Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton has seen his freshman guard, Scottie Barnes, make sure to show how much he appreciates every teammates by giving each of them a hug before they sit down.

"He's always been like that," said Kathalyn Wilkins, Barnes' mom who lives in West Palm Beach.

Now to his size and style. A wiry 6-foot-9 with ball-handling skills and quickness that allow him to facilitate, take a defender off the dribble or back down smaller, helpless opponents.

We're talking about Barnes, but close your eyes and image that same player wearing a green Michigan State uniform four decades ago.

"I watched Magic Johnson a lot," Barnes said last week. "Highlights, Instagram. You see how much of a great point guard he was, how he could find people, get them shots, how flashy he was. Just what he brought to the game. He played with so much excitement. You could see the smile and joy on his face. That's something I got, smile and joy and bring a lot of fun and passion to the game.

"Get assists, score when he wants to score, rebound the ball, push it in transition. You could see all that."

Some get offended when young players are compared to legendary, once-in-a-generation Hall of Famers. Nobody is saying Scottie Barnes is on the same track as an NCAA champion, five-time NBA champion, 12 time All-Star and three-time NBA MVP.

But watch video from FSU's season — or tune in Wednesday when No. 11 Florida State (13-3) and Miami (7-13) tip off at 8:30 p.m. at the Watsco Center in Coral Gables — and when you see Barnes jumping into the arms of center Balsa Koprivica during the Georgia Tech game, you could be watching Magic hugging Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in his Lakers debut. Or when Barnes easily gets to the basket to beat Indiana or send the Wake Forest game into overtime, that could be Magic in the old Boston Garden crushing the Celtics.

### **Barnes Bound For NBA Draft Lottery**

When you hear coaches say of the uber-versatile that they can play 1 through 5 ... Barnes can play 1 through 5.

Which means he can be un-guardable at times.

And with 6-9 point guards a luxury, don't think the NBA hasn't noticed. With a 7-2 wingspan and 9-foot standing reach, Barnes is a virtual lock for the lottery and likely a top-10 pick in this summer's draft.

"His best basketball is ahead of him," Hamilton said. "He's in the transition period and he's doing pretty good."

That transition from power forward to point guard is not one you typically see. Barnes grew up in West Palm Beach, attended Cardinal Newman High School for one year, moved onto University School in Fort Lauderdale for two years before completing high school at Montverde Academy.

While coaches saw a post player and a wing, one who could facilitate but still a forward, Hamilton knew immediately what was best for this unique talent.

“When you see him playing as a high school kid you see an athletic, hard-nosed, tough, physical guy who loves contact, who can rebound, drive,” Hamilton said. “But what I saw was a high-IQ basketball player, a guy that has the ability to make everybody around him better. I saw unselfish spirit.

“He had ball handling skills, dribbling and passing skills unique for a guy of his size.”

Hamilton’s vision is a big reason Barnes chose FSU, becoming the highest-rated recruit in school history, No. 5 overall.

“At point guard the ball’s in my hands I just make a lot of great plays,” Barnes said. “Being here it’s helped me develop a lot more. It’s helped my game out a lot.”

Barnes is averaging 10.3 points, third on the team behind M.J. Walker and RaiQuan Gray. He leads the Seminoles with 4.2 assist and averages 3.9 rebounds. He is second in the ACC with a 2.33 assist-to-turnover ratio. Twice he has been named the conference Freshman of the Week.

Looking for a weaknesses: Barnes is shooting .549 from the free throw line (25 of 51) and .258 on 3s (8 of 31).

“He’s had to make more of an adjustment than anybody in America,” Hamilton said. “Most guys playing point guard at this level on a nationally-ranked team, they’ve been playing point guard since they were in eighth grade.”

### **Hoops Day and Night In West Palm Beach**

Kathalyn Wilkins gets emotional talking about her son. She was overwhelmed when she walked into the Donald Tucker Center in Tallahassee for the first time to watch him play, and she was emotional last week talking about him during a phone interview.

“It brings tears to my eyes,” she said. “I’m so proud of him. When I see him on TV, I say ‘This is my son,’ because I know how hard he worked for it.

“Ever since he was in the third grade he always walked around with a basketball. He’d run track. When he got home from track practice, he went straight to the Salvation Army to play basketball. I used to see him in the middle of the night in the road just practicing.”

Wilkins raised Barnes and his three siblings alone from the time Scottie was around 11. They lived downtown, just north of what is now Rosemary Square. It wasn’t easy. At times she doubted herself, saying sometimes as a single parent “you feel like you may have let them down.”

But it was that reinforcement from her children that kept her strong.

“It was hard for her to raise four kids by herself,” Scottie said. “We’ve been through a lot of things together. To see how strong she is, how she maintains herself. She gives it all for her kids.”

Scottie would play at Alice Mickens Park or the Salvation Army, which is where he was discovered by a travel team, giving him his first real exposure. His one year at Cardinal Newman did not work out, at least on the court, although he still was named to the Palm Beach Post’s All-Area Small Schools second team. He said he met a lot of great people and made a lot of friends at the school and loved school but ...

“I was a little immature coming in,” he said about his basketball experience.

But he matured quickly and by his senior year at Montverde, he was finalist for the MaxPreps National Player of the Year and selected to play in the McDonald’s All-American game, the Jordan Brand Classic and the Nike Hoop Summit. Barnes started the first seven games this season at FSU before turning an ankle and missing one game. Since, he’s been coming off the bench, usually about two minutes after tipoff or after he has warmed up on the exercise bike.

“I think it’s really helped him for a couple of minutes seeing the flow of the game and seeing how the other team’s playing,” Hamilton said. “In two minutes he’s coming in giving us a lift.”

For Barnes, it does not matter. He may not start, but he is certain to be on the floor at the end of a close game ... and probably towering over another smaller defender while making a pinpoint pass or backing him down for another crucial basket.