

## Ex-St. Paul's Star Harrison 'The Weatherman' Prieto Wants Sweet 16 Win in FSU Forecast

By Rod Walker  
New Orleans Times Picayune  
March 27, 2021

Meet "The Weatherman," Florida State's 6-foot-8 storm-chasing forward from Mandeville.

He's Harrison Prieto, a fifth-year walk-on senior who grew up watching The Weather Channel just as much as he watched ESPN.

We'll get to his nickname in a few.

But before we talk about Prieto the weatherman, you first should know a little about Prieto the basketball player.

Chances are, Prieto won't score a point or grab a rebound on Sunday when Florida State plays Michigan in the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament.

He's scored just three points all year, draining his only 3-point attempt of the season in the final seconds of a Senior Night victory over Boston College. He's scored just 22 points since he's been at Florida State and may not get to add to that total unless the game becomes one-sided. He's played just 12 minutes all year.

But his presence on the Seminoles is invaluable. How else do you explain a guy who has never been on basketball scholarship being chosen as team captain for two straight seasons? Well, just ask the guys who play with him.

"Honestly, I've never had a better teammate, especially a non-scholarship guy," said forward RaiQuan Gray. "He's well respected and a super fun dude to be around. He's smart and just has such a high basketball IQ. He's like another coach when you come to the bench. He's even better off the court."

Prieto doesn't take his duties as one of the team's three captains lightly.

"It's definitely an honor to be a team captain on an ACC team, especially as a walk-on," Prieto said. "It speaks to the trust they have in me to do what's right and to know what the team needs to hear and what to do. And it shows our coaching staff's commitment to treating everybody on the team the same way."

This is Florida State's seventh trip to the Sweet 16 and third since Prieto joined the team as a walk-on freshman in 2017. He didn't have to walk on there. He had offers to play at some smaller schools after his senior season at St. Paul's when he averaged 13.4 points, 8.5 rebounds and 3.3 blocked shots, earning a spot on this newspaper's all-metro team. But it was his love for meteorology that made him choose Florida State, a school with one of the best programs in the country in that field.

"I decided to make my decision based on academics first," Prieto said. "If basketball could fit into that, I'd do it. I was fully prepared not to play college ball. It had never been something that was necessary for me. I just had a passion for meteorology. I'm thankful that it worked out."

Where did he get that love for the weather? He traces it back to growing up in Mandeville.

"Just all the hurricanes coming through," he explains. "Then Katrina hit and that was it. From that moment on, I knew I had to figure out how it works. What could have made something like that happen? I was 7-years old and I was in a state of awe. You don't understand the human toll at that age, but you're fascinated with how that happens." So his love for the weather continued. Former Fox 8 weatherman Bob Breck was the local personality Prieto often watched. He also looked up to Jim Cantore and Stephanie Abrams of the Weather Channel.

Prieto got the opportunity to be on The Weather Channel in 2019 when the network featured him in a segment that focused on him juggling basketball and his meteorology aspirations.

"That was very fulfilling to me because they (Cantore and Abrams) are the faces of the network and are your childhood heroes," Prieto said.

Former Florida State assistant coach Dennis Gates started calling Prieto "The Weatherman" a few seasons ago. The name stuck. It's a name his teammates say is more than fitting for the guy working on his master's degree in meteorology.

"We don't even use the weather app on our phone," Gray said. "When a storm is coming, we just send him a text message in the group chat."

That's what happened on Jan. 27 when tornado warnings were issued in Tallahassee. Prieto's phone began getting messages non-stop. They wanted to know if they should be worried.

"I'm out chasing it, Y'all are fine," Prieto responded.

Prieto had been lying in bed watching the radar and the flashes of lightning that morning. He knew a tornado was coming. So he jumped up and headed to his car and got one of his friends to join him.

"So I would have a co-pilot," he said.

They drove towards the airport because it was one of the few places Prieto could have a good line of site to watch the storm. He parked on the side of the road. The storm got close and he realized he wouldn't be able to see the tornado, so he left the area for about 15 minutes and came back. The tornado damaged the airport and many thought it had also destroyed the weather service's radar. Prieto took photographs showing the radar was just fine. His photos of the storm damage went viral on Twitter.

Prieto compares the adrenaline rush of storm chasing to winning a basketball game, something he hopes happens on Sunday against the No. 1 seed Wolverines. A victory would send Prieto to the Elite Eight for the second time.

So does "The Weatherman" have any predictions for Sunday's game?

"I hope we make it rain 3's against Michigan," Prieto said. "That would be nice. That's my wishful forecast."