

Making It Rain: Meet The Meteorologist Captain of FSU Men's Hoops

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On January 27th, a tornado moved through Tallahassee, Florida, causing significant damage to the airport and preliminary speculation that the twister destroyed the weather service's radar.

A few minutes after the storm, however, a meteorologist alertly went out and snapped photos of the radar, showing it was still intact despite nearly taking a direct hit from the tornado.

The meteorologist who took the viral photos also happens to captain the Florida State University Seminole's men's basketball team.

A few hours before lacing up for a game later that night, Harrison Prieto conducted an impromptu storm chase of a tornado that rolled through the heart of Florida's capital city, passing close to the Florida State campus.

Prior to capturing some of those images that went viral on Twitter, Prieto, like any good meteorologist, recognized that the likely tornado was rain-wrapped and fled the area, only to come back shortly after the storm and safely snap those pictures.

"Going out and storm chasing, to me that's the rush of winning a big basketball game," Prieto said. "I had to go back and unwind a bit for an hour or two (after the chase on January 27th). We had a big game that night."

Prieto isn't exactly having a typical college experience. And he's not exactly complaining about it, either.

For starters, he's a captain of one of the best men's college basketball programs in the country. As a 6-foot-8 forward on the Florida State men's basketball team, Prieto is a part of a side with legitimate ambitions of winning the elite Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) crown and a trip to the Final Four or beyond.

Before or after practice or while he's on the road with the team, however, Prieto is also busy working on his master's degree in meteorology. Now a redshirt senior, Prieto already earned his bachelor's degree last May.

That leaves little time for things like, say, video games or throwing around the Frisbee on the quad.

"It's extremely difficult to say the least," Prieto said of balancing playing hoops with pursuing a master's degree in meteorology. "If I'm lucky, I get to hang with friends every now and again."

"I've Always Wanted To Be a Meteorologist"

For the New Orleans-area native, Prieto's love for weather goes back about as far as he can remember, but the exclamation point came when he was only seven years old.

"I'd say (Hurricane Katrina) was the first major event where before that, I was definitely interested. After (Katrina), it was a done deal." Prieto said. "I knew I was going to try to be a meteorologist. I didn't know how I was going to do it, and I didn't know it was going to be this much math. But I knew after (Katrina) I was going to be a meteorologist." Hurricane Katrina needs no explanation, as the 2005 storm devastated coastal Louisiana and Mississippi with catastrophic storm surge-induced flooding, resulting in over 1,800 fatalities and \$125 billion in damage.

Following Katrina, Prieto set his sights on a career in meteorology. He's also really good at basketball as well of course, earning first-team all New Orleans metro honors as a high school senior at St. Paul's School in Covington, Louisiana.

Prieto walked onto the Florida State men's basketball team in 2016, quickly cementing himself as an integral part of the team's locker room and helping the team make several runs in the NCAA men's basketball tournament.

How Does He Do It?

If you've got a spare 15 minutes, you can browse Prieto's laundry list of academic achievements on his Florida State men's basketball biography page.

It's important to recognize that Florida State is home to one of the best meteorology programs in the country. Several former directors of the National Hurricane Center studied there, along with a long list of current high-profile television and National Weather Service meteorologists as well.

In other words, Prieto could be forgiven if he got a few C's while, say, cramming for an advanced physics exam while helping the hoops team win the ACC regular season crown a season ago or making a run to the Elite Eight in 2018. Forget about that.

Affectionately (and perhaps predictably) known as "the weatherman" by his teammates, Prieto earned back-to-back Golden Torch awards in 2019 and 2020, a recognition by the FSU athletic department for the best student-athlete GPA on the team.

"(Associate Head) Coach (Stan) Jones, one of his phrases is that 'winners win'," Prieto said. "If we're winning on the basketball court and I'm winning in the classroom, I'm a winner and we're winning. That's the mindset that we have around here."

What's Next?

Most people associate meteorology with television or broadcast meteorologists. However, meteorology is a field of study with several different potential career paths including public sector work at the National Weather Service or private sector meteorologists who help a wide array of weather-dependent businesses.

Prieto hasn't made up his mind about which meteorological road he wants to travel down yet, though there's no doubt The Weatherman is plenty qualified to live out his life-long dream.

"I definitely have an interest in all three," Prieto said. "I've definitely had moments where I've thought I want to (work for) the National Weather Service. Broadcast stuff, you get to make your own forecast and you get to be the star of the show. There's a lot of aspects to the private sector that I find really interesting as well. I still don't know exactly where I want to go (yet)."

Of course, there's still plenty of time for Prieto to think about exactly what he wants to do. After all, he's still got a season to go on one of the top men's basketball teams in the country.

"It's difficult, but it's rewarding," Prieto said. "I think that our culture at the Florida State basketball program really puts me in a position to where I can do stuff like that. Where I can be successful in my major, be successful on the basketball court. The coaches put me in a position to do that."