

## **Caleb Mills Rounding Out His Game Ahead Of Long-Awaited Florida State Basketball Debut**

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Florida State basketball's 2021 signing class stands out in program history.

The class of three blue-chip high-school prospects and one of the most highly-touted junior college transfers spent much of the recruiting cycle as either the No. 1 or No. 2 ranked recruiting class in the country.

It settled in at No. 8 nationally and No. 2 in the ACC according to the 247Sports composite class rankings. It's the Seminoles' second-best recruiting class of all time, behind the 2016 class, which was the fourth-best in the country.

But perhaps even more impressively, this class ranking neglects the new addition poised to make the biggest instant impact. Houston transfer guard Caleb Mills is set to finally make an unofficial FSU debut nearly a year in the making Thursday night when the Seminoles hold the first of two preseason exhibitions against Mississippi College at 7 p.m.

Mills left Houston just a few months into his second season with the program in January. Less than a week later, he announced he would be transferring to FSU on Jan. 12.

"I just felt it was the best fit out of all the options I had," Mills told the Democrat.

"I wanted to play for (FSU coach Leonard Hamilton), knowing he is a great coach... Glad I'm here now."

Mills was recruited by FSU when he was a three-star point guard just inside the top 200 of the 2019 class out of Asheville Christian Academy in Swannanoa, N.C. He says he spoke to Hamilton quite frequently and was planning an official visit to FSU but wound up taking just the one to Houston.

During his time at Houston, Mills quickly surpassed expectations. He averaged 13.2 points, 2.6 rebounds and 1.1 assists as a true freshman in 2019-20, earning an AAC All-Freshman Team honor as well as a nod to the All-AAC second team.

Dealing with an injury, he left Houston early in his sophomore season, desiring a spot at a new school closer to home. How quickly FSU reached out and convinced him to transfer to FSU allowed him to join the team before the season was over.

The injury kept him out of practice and he wasn't allowed to play in games per NCAA rules, but when he arrived on campus in late February, he was able to get acclimated to the players, the coaches, the culture and the expectations surrounding the program.

"They embraced me coming in. It's a brotherhood around here, something different and special," Mills said.

FSU veteran guard Anthony Polite saw how much of a difference it made for Mills being around the program for the last few weeks of the season leading up to the NCAA Tournament bubble.

"I think he got a great feel of the program even if he wasn't able to practice. He was watching, he loves the game and he's always studying so I think it made it easier for him to transition into our program and you can see it," Polite told the Democrat.

"In practice, he always picks up things extremely quickly. It might be a new drill and he will try to get in the front of the line and be that instant leader. That's something that with this team, Florida State, there's always a bunch of guys that go out on the court and are able to perform and he's gonna be one of those guys this year. He's been showing that during practice and it's awesome..."

"He does stuff that I haven't seen before. It's cool that he's on my team."

While his scoring average may not indicate it, Mills showed himself to be a very capable volume scorer during his time with the Cougars. He had eight games as a true freshman where he scored 20-plus points and six more where he scored between 17 and 19 points.

FSU does have players that occasionally go on scoring sprees, but Hamilton has established a roster that relies on its depth over a smaller number of productive scorers.

Only one Seminole over the last four seasons, Mfiondu Kabengele in 2018-19, has averaged over 13 points per game over the course of a season.

This adjustment hasn't been an issue for Mills, who saw up close last season how much of a strength FSU's depth can be.

"I knew that coming into it. You're gonna be on a great team with a lot of good players, it's a sacrifice you have to make if you're going to be great..." Mills said.

"It just relieves the pressure. It's an easy game surrounded by so many players. You can get easy baskets a lot. We play freely, we're unselfish guys. We all want to win for each other."

Mills has now been in Tallahassee for over eight months. Over that span, he's seen significant growth in developing his all-around game, a staple of Hamilton-led teams.

"I knew they would develop me into an all-around player," Mills said.

"I'm becoming more of a complete player than I've ever been as far as facilitating and still doing what I do, scoring, and then helping them defensively, disrupting a lot of things."