

## **Lindner And Prieto Return For Sixth Year**

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### **SEMINOLES' PRIETO AND LINDNER RETURN AS SIXTH-YEAR SEMINOLES**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (seminoles.com) -- When Justin Lindner and Harrison Prieto joined the Florida State Basketball team in 2016, Seminole fans could not have known the role they would play in the success of the program during their careers. Once the chance to return for a sixth season arose, they were ready to lead the team for the 2021-2022 season.

Lindner and Prieto have been members of four NCAA Tournament teams, the 2020 ACC Championship team, a school-record 29 wins during the 2019 season, and a school-record 16 ACC wins in 2020. The Seminoles have won 122 games, earned the No. 1 seed in the 2020 ACC Tournament and played in both the 2019 and 2021 ACC Tournament championship games with the two-sixth year seniors in Garnet and Gold.

In 2020, when the COVID pandemic shut down the NCAA Tournament, the Seminoles were a trendy pick to win the National Championship.

With both players earning their bachelor's degrees and both on their way to earning their master's degrees, why would they choose to return to the court for the Seminoles?

For Lindner, the decision to return was easy.

"I was about to go into a Division II coaching job, but when I got the opportunity to come back on scholarship, it was a no-brainer for me," said Lindner.

Lindner has received two degrees from Florida State: a Bachelor's in Applied Mathematics with a minor in Psychology and a Master's in Sport Management. He is currently pursuing a Graduate Certificate in Coaching at Florida State.

Returning to the team this year has not only given Lindner the opportunity to obtain a coaching certificate, but also build connections with his Seminole teammates who are heading to the National Basketball Association (NBA).

After spending time with the newest additions to the Florida State basketball team over the summer of 2021, Lindner noticed how naturally they integrated themselves into the program. He did not want to let them down and opted to play a sixth season.

"They told me I was really important to them," said Lindner. "Only knowing the new players for a couple of weeks felt like years."

Athletes such as Lindner continue to come back due to the incredible culture that is the Seminole basketball team under 20<sup>th</sup>-year Head Coach Leonard Hamilton.

"I think our famed Green team has been so instrumental in the success we have had in our program -- in helping us with our game preparation, helping us in practice, and helping us improve in our skills," said Hamilton. "There are many days when we are going against them offensively and defensively that they give us all we can handle. The leadership that those two guys are capable of is going to be invaluable."

"I felt that learning how to be a coach from a high program, the coaching program itself, and things that go into scouting would help with my future," said Lindner.

The hands-on internship experience Lindner will receive as, "a fourth assistant to the coaches" also influenced his decision to return. Coming into the program and witnessing firsthand the ins-and-outs of collegiate basketball made him want to be a college coach.

"Seeing the impact coaches' have on and off the court has influenced me to want to become a college coach," said Lindner.

Lindner will take what he has learned from the coaching staff to help him in his future career.

Prieto's decision to come back was a different story.

The decision to come back for a sixth year was not as straightforward for Prieto. Following the 2020-21 season, Prieto had to think about two things: If [he] could do it academically and if [he] wanted to play another season of college basketball.

Prieto has received a bachelor's in Meteorology from Florida State and is currently attending graduate school for Meteorology. Learning to balance a rigorous academic schedule and basketball was challenging this past year for him. Although Prieto knew he would be at Florida State University this season, he still took a significant amount of time to evaluate his decision to return to the basketball team for another season.

"It is not talked about enough how much of a toll last year took on student athletes," said Prieto. "We spent a lot of time in isolation. At a tournament, once the door closes behind you, there is no outside world besides your phone.

Having just your immediate team was difficult for Prieto.

He shared, "it was really hard to get through."

Could he do it again?

In the end, he knew he might regret not playing his last year of eligibility. He chose to return to the team as a leader for his sixth season.

When Lindner and Prieto first joined the team in 2016, the basketball team was not as victorious as they are today. At first, the team was trying to win enough to get into the NCAA Tournament. They had not made it to the tournament since 2012. Now, they are working to strive for a national championship and compete for the Final Four.

"We went from the hunters to the hunted. All the teams are trying to beat us now," said Prieto

What changed?

"The perspective," said Lindner. "We can see the team has enough talent to get there. The mindset changed from trying to win enough to get to a tournament to just getting a deep run."

Learning how to play like this has been a challenge for the team. Prieto and Lindner agreed the secret of achievement is having everyone on the team be best friends with each other, harmonizing together on and off the court, and knowing their roles.

“We keep getting better people coming into the program. All around, not just as players. It is a huge part of the success and the culture of being friends,” said Prieto

Not only has the team evolved, but Florida State has adapted.

“The student section used to be empty, and now you can’t get a ticket,” said Prieto. “It is one of the coolest things to see all the work we put in paying off.

After these athletes put in so much time into the program and development of the culture, they felt like they were not only investing in the team, but themselves.

“We wanted to see it through and make sure the program kept going in the right direction for as long as we could see it happen,” Prieto said.

Prieto and Lindner felt that being walk-ons gave them a different perspective they may have not gotten otherwise. When they first joined the team, the athletes recalled trying to soak everything in and learn about the program, including how to win. They were there to learn plays and assist from the side. Now they are two of the team leaders in practice and at the forefront of every drill.

“We know we may not play much, but it feels like we are a big part of the success,” said Lindner.

From experience, they learned how to run practices and the differences in how people played. During the off-season they help the younger players improve their fundamentals. During practices, they run plays from the opposing teams and aid the coaches by observing and guiding the team. After watching older guys for many years and being around coaches every day, Prieto and Lindner gained knowledge and learned how to capitalize on their roles.

“We went from sitting in the stands for games and asking security guards to go into the locker room (as true freshmen) to earning a couple of minutes in real time games. I never would’ve thought that would happen to go from having nothing to a huge role on the team,” said Prieto.

For the first three years of his basketball career, Prieto came in everyday ready to do his job and be a good teammate. He took the time to learn college basketball and manage personalities. The time and investment Prieto put into the basketball program helped him in earning the title of team captain

Besides being leaders and passing knowledge to the younger guys on the team, Prieto and Lindner learned from their younger teammates as well.

“Learning about everyone else’s culture is one of the most eye-opening experiences over this crazy journey,” said Prieto.

As they are constantly surrounded by people with similar interests as them, their contrasting backgrounds help them learn about and how to deal with different people. Having a diverse basketball family is an important part of being on a team. Everyone works to support and encourage each other, on and off the court.

As Prieto and Lindner return for the 2021-2022 season, Seminole fans look forward to how Lindner and Prieto will lead the basketball team to success, once again for a sixth year.

“Harrison and Justin are both very capable at this stage of their careers of going into the game, playing and being productive,” said Hamilton. “We are very fortunate to have two experienced guys like that around.”