

## **Caleb Mills: One-Time Kickball Star Now Excelling On The Basketball Court**

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (seminoles.com) – Caleb Mills was a light-hitting outfielder with a great glove as a Little League baseball player. He was a fast and nimble wide receiver when he played Pee Wee football. He developed into a skillful scoring guard with great dribbling skills when he began playing basketball at age nine.

So, who would have guessed that he wanted to be a professional kickball player while growing up in the mountains of North Carolina?

“Playing kickball was something I really enjoyed when I was in middle school,” Mills said. “I loved being outside and competing against the other kids. Kickball was a sport I felt I was really good at – better than all of the kids in my class. While the other kids wanted to be firemen and police officers, I wanted to play kickball my whole life. It was fun and I enjoyed how fast-paced it was.”

Fresh from their victory over Tulane on Wednesday in Tallahassee, Mills leads the Seminoles against Loyola Marymount in the Inaugural Jacksonville Classic on Sunday at 5:30 p.m. at the UNF Arena. Florida State hopes to make its first trip to Jacksonville since the 2008-09 season a successful one as they compete against LMU, Missouri and Southern Methodist for a tournament championship. It has been since 1971, when the Seminoles defeated Stetson and Jacksonville to win the championship of the Florida Sunshine Classic, that they have played for a tournament championship on Florida’s acclaimed First Coast.

For Mills, playing for the Seminoles in the Jacksonville Classic is exactly where he wants to be. He’s in his first season at Florida State, he’s worked himself into the Seminoles’ starting lineup, and he is thriving as one of the top players on one of the top teams in the nation. Mills scored 14 points in his Florida State debut against Penn and was a standout in the Seminoles’ victory over the Green Wave.

“Florida State was the right decision to make,” said Mills of his decision to transfer from the University Houston to Florida State in January of 2021. “The coaches do a great job (here at Florida State). I grow every day as a player and a man. That’s all you can hope for.”

The college basketball world began to take notice of Mills as a high school star. He was ranked as the No. 6 overall player and the No. 17 combo guard in the state of North Carolina as a senior. He was named to the NCSAA Large-School Division All-State First-Team as a sophomore in 2017 and to the Southeast Super-Region Team as a junior in 2018.

As a highly recruited prep star, Mills chose to attend Houston out of high school. He was the Cougars’ leading scorer as a redshirt freshman in 2020, was named the American Athletic Conference Player of the Week twice during his freshman season and was named as the 2021 preseason AAC Player of the Year. In two seasons and 35 games at Houston, he averaged 12.8 points, 2.9 rebounds and shot better than 36 percent from the 3-point line.

His transition from Houston to Florida State has been easy according to Mills.

“It wasn't too hard for me, having been in college already, being able to pick up on stuff fast,” Mills said. “I feel like I've grown as much as I ever have in the short time I've already been here as far as being a complete player, making plays for other people, and for myself, just being more efficient.”

Mills noted that he was recruited by Seminole Head Coach Leonard Hamilton and his staff before choosing Houston coming out of high school. He was working on setting up his official visit to Florida State when he decided to commit to Houston.

"I wanted to play for Coach Ham, knowing he is a great coach ... glad I'm here now."

The transition to becoming one with his new teammates has also been seamless.

"They embraced me coming in," said Mills. "It's a brotherhood here (at Florida State) -- something different and special."

As Mills continues to develop and display his basketball repertoire to his Seminole teammates and the college basketball world, he thinks back to some of the things that made him a successful kickball player on the playgrounds of North Carolina. He's looking for that same edge for Florida State on the basketball court.

"One of the things I did when I was playing kickball was I wore my Timberland boots whenever I knew we were going to have recess," said Mills. "My boots were my secret weapon – I kicked a home run just about every time we played."

Mills' teammates will be on the lookout for his secret weapons on the basketball court during his career as a Seminole.

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