

Mandeville Native Harrison Prieto Faces Off Against Hometown Tulane University

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Seminoles.com

November 15, 2021

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (seminoles.com) – Florida State’s Harrison Prieto and the Tulane University basketball team are certainly not strangers. Not only is Tulane located near his hometown in Louisiana, but Wednesday’s meeting between the Seminoles and the Green Wave will be the third between the two teams during his career at Florida State.

Florida State plays host to Tulane on Wednesday night at 8:00 p.m. at the Donald L. Tucker Center in the third of a three-game series. The Seminoles, who were members of the old Metro Conference with Tulane, have won the first two games of the current series with a pair of victories in Tampa (72-53 on Dec. 10, 2017) and at Tulane in New Orleans (80-69 on Nov. 11, 2018).

Prieto made one of the most important appearances of his career in the Seminoles’ 80-69 victory against the Green Wave in New Orleans. Prieto entered the game with Florida State up three at 35-32. After playing a season-high four minutes (to the close out the first half), the Seminoles had extended their lead to four at halftime with a 39-35 advantage.

The opportunity he turned into success came at Tulane’s on-campus arena, which is only about 45 minutes from his home of Mandeville, La. Even more important to Prieto was that he played well in front of about 30 members of his family and friends who attended the game.

Now in his sixth season as a member of the nationally ranked Seminoles, Prieto has firmly entrenched himself as part of the incredibly solid foundation created by Head Coach Leonard Hamilton and his staff.

His longevity at Florida State is not only with the men’s basketball team, but academically as well. Prieto is currently in his graduate studies, pursuing a master’s degree in Meteorology. Along with his course work, he is also a teaching assistant, a position that he values just as dearly as being a forward for the Seminoles.

Prieto’s advancement into the meteorology field began when one of the biggest storms hit, and ultimately wreaked havoc on his hometown region. Growing up in Mandeville, he saw a lot of action when it came to the weather. Hurricane Katrina was the ultimate reason for his dedication to the field.

Experiencing first-hand the type of damage Katrina did to Louisiana was frightening, but exhilarating for the then seven-year-old Prieto. Trying to wrap your brain around it is one thing, but he’s made it his life’s mission to find out what exactly has to come together to produce something so powerful.

“There’s really nothing that I’ve seen since that compares to some of the devastation from Hurricane Katrina,” said Prieto. “Certainly, experiencing that event had a profound impact on my passion for the field of meteorology. Understanding the weather; how and why phenomena happen every day has been a really fulfilling part of my life.”

Hurricane Katrina has not been Prieto’s only encounter with dangerous weather, as he continues to search for “thrilling” experiences. Most recently, he found a weather incident in Tallahassee.

On Jan. 27, 2021, Tallahassee residents woke up knowing rough weather was on the horizon. The dark skies, flashes of lightning, high wind speeds, and uncontrollable weather had nearly all of Tallahassee on tornado watch lockdown. Except one person.

Prieto woke early that morning and decided to chase the tornado, cornering it down to the Tallahassee airport, where his post-tornado photos of the intact weather system's radar went Twitter viral. Many could not believe that the captain of the Florida State men's basketball team was out storm chasing.

"The southeast US is an extremely difficult part of the country to chase weather formations, and at times, it can be dangerous depending on what you can and can't see around you," said Prieto. "Often, trees make it difficult to see where a potential tornado might be, but I felt comfortable enough with the Tallahassee area that I would be able to get myself into a relatively safe area near the airport.

"Once I felt I was in a safe position, I could make a decision on whether I should stay or leave as the storm neared. Ultimately, the tornado was "rain-wrapped" which meant I wouldn't be able to see what was coming, so I got myself into a safer spot. I'm glad I did because when I came back to look for damage it was quite obvious that a tornado had passed through my previous location only a few minutes prior – when I was in that exact spot."

His teammates had no fear, though, as they expected this of, what they call Prieto, "the weatherman."

Prieto not only excels in storm chasing, but his combined role of being a basketball star, a teaching assistant and a graduate student have all come together to benefit him in numerous ways. One of these ways is his understanding that everyone has a different learning style, whether this be courtside or in class.

"I think basketball has helped me in so many ways," said Prieto. "Being one of the leaders on the team has taught me how to interact with so many different people from so many backgrounds. Not everyone reacts to criticism or coaching on the basketball court in the same way, which parallels teaching in that not everyone will learn to understand meteorological principles the same way."

Not only has his cognizance taught him the different responses of his teammates and students, but it also added value to his leadership position in both areas.

Prieto was a team captain of the Florida State men's basketball team in both 2020 and 2021. This season's captains have yet to be named by the Seminoles' coaching staff.

On top of being team captain, he simultaneously managed to keep his studies up to par and made the ACC Academic Honor Roll five years in a row (2017-21).

"Being a team captain for Florida State is without a doubt one of the biggest honors in my life," said Prieto. "The opportunity to lead, be a role model for younger guys, and handle the responsibilities that come with being a team captain has, in my opinion, helped prepare me for my next phases. Difficult, yes. Rewarding? Absolutely."

His career as a Seminole has not come without personal sacrifice.

"The biggest thing that you sacrifice is your time; we spend hours on end practicing, watching film, team building, traveling, playing, and that makes it challenging," says Prieto.

Although this seems taxing, Prieto assures that it's all part of the deal of being a college athlete. In return for giving up a "normal" college experience, he has made lifetime friendships and a spot in the history of a one of the nation's top programs, one that enters its game against Tulane ranked No. 19.

"We love each other, and we like being around each other," said Prieto. "It's easy to make the unselfish play in a game when you're doing it for your best friends. This is a special program, and I hope that helps illustrate why."