

## **'Weatherman' Harrison Prieto Balancing Increased Role With FSU Basketball, Master's Degree**

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The life of a college athlete can be extraordinarily hectic.

From practice to workouts and film study to games as an athlete and a full course load as a student, it can all be a bit overwhelming.

Florida State basketball veteran Harrison Prieto is playing the college athlete game on hard mode. In addition to his role on FSU's scout team, the sixth-year walk-on from Mandeville, La. is in his second year as a teacher's assistant while pursuing his master's degree in meteorology.

This semester, in addition to a larger-than-expected role for the Seminoles due to a rash of injuries, Prieto is teaching a pair of "Intro to Meteorology" labs and working on his thesis.

"I've just got to go one by one," Prieto told the Democrat Monday when asked about his busy schedule.

"Today, I taught my class and I went upstairs for about an hour and graded about a week's worth of labs, just knocked it out. I did that, came here to get ready for practice and then after I'm done, I'm going back to my office and I'll be doing some coding and MATLAB for an assignment I've got to get done.

"It's just the way it goes. Then I'll head on home, get some sleep and do it all over again."

Prieto wasn't originally going to play for FSU basketball this season

Originally, Prieto was set to run out of eligibility at the end of last season. However, the fact that some college athletes received an extra year of eligibility due to the 2020-21 COVID-affected season meant that he could return for one final season if he wanted.

Prieto was going to be at FSU anyway to finish his master's, so the idea was enticing. A conversation with his major professor to make sure one more season balancing basketball and school would be acceptable led Prieto to a comforting conclusion.

"It really came down to I wanted permission for my major professor to come back and do it again just because research for a thesis is going to take a lot of time and effort and it has taken a lot of time and effort," Prieto said.

"I talked to him, he's from overseas in England, and he was saying that he played rugby in college and he quit his fourth year to focus on his thesis and stuff, and he regrets it. He's like, 'I don't want you to have those same regrets later on.' That was pretty cool having him talk me through that and encourage me to do it again."

So Prieto decided to return, joining fellow sixth-year walk-on Justin Lindner, who delayed the start of his basketball coaching career to return to the Seminoles. Prieto's assistantship through his work as a TA allowed FSU to give Lindner its vacant scholarship spot.

### **Injuries to Malik Osborne and Naheem McLeod paved way for 'The Weatherman'**

As it has turned out, Prieto has been a much-needed piece of the Seminoles' roster this season. Due to injuries to Malik Osborne, Naheem McLeod and Tanor Ngom, he's already played in a career-high 12 games this season. His 108 minutes this season are over 70 more than he's played in any of the last four years.

He's set new career-highs for minutes in each of FSU's last two games. In Saturday's loss to Wake Forest, he had by far the best game of his career, putting up 13 points and 12 rebounds for what is believed to be the first double-double by a walk-on in school history.

"Yesterday, we kind of joking with him that they probably didn't have him in the scouting report. He goes and gets 13 points and 13 rebounds and I told him I'm anxious to see what he's gonna do when he's in the other team's scouting report..." FSU head coach Leonard Hamilton said.

"He got 12 rebounds not because he's out-jumping anybody but he's putting himself in the right positions. He stepped up tonight and gave us great leadership. I can't say enough about how proud I am of him."

Prieto's role with the Seminoles can be a bit thankless and very challenging at times. He's a constant figure on the practice court and helps the team prepare against the unique challenges it will face in the next game. However, he can at times go multiple games without playing at all and then be thrust into action without warning due to early foul trouble from a starter or a number of injuries, as has been the case lately.

None of that bothers Prieto every time he's told he's going into a game.

"I'm not really bothered by the randomness, especially over the last few years. I think once I realized that was going to be my role for a while, then I was kind of just like, 'Alright, I'm gonna do an extra conditioning thing or two every week, make sure I'm in shape and then I'm just gonna make sure I know the game plan...'" Prieto said.

"I was telling somebody the other day that when I got here, I was playing against Michael Ojo, Christ Koumadje and Jarquez Smith. I'm not going to be scared (of anything). Michael Ojo was the most amazing physical specimen ever, Jarquez was the second strongest person I've ever been around except for Ojo and then Christ Koumadje is 7-foot-4 and can block anything you shoot.

"Learning how to play with them, I guess, and then all the other bigs over the years, Mfiondu (Kabangele), Ikey (Obiagu), you go down the list, Balsa (Koprivica). I'm as ready as I could ever be, I guess. I'm not really nervous or anything like that. Just go ahead and play my game, do what I need to do and hopefully that puts us in a position to do well as a team."

#### **'That's my TA': Prieto's students at FSU take notice**

Because of his increased role of late, Prieto has noticed more of his students are aware of what he does when he's not teaching them the basics of meteorology.

"Yeah, I've had a couple people come up to me especially this semester and go, 'Are you on the basketball team?'" Prieto said.

"Somebody last week was like, 'I saw you on the court the other day and I was like that's my TA.' That was funny." Prieto doesn't have any delusions of grandeur about his basketball future. Despite his recent success, he still sees his future being in meteorology. But he understands what it is that has led to his recent success on the court for the Seminoles.

"I know our system inside and out so it's not so much thinking about what I'm going to do. It's more just hyping myself up to be ready to fight and play as hard as I can," Prieto said.

"At the end of the day, I have a distinct athletic disadvantage compared to a lot of the guys out there so I want to make up for that by playing harder than anybody else on the court."

Whenever Prieto's season comes to an end this year, it will put an end to a long career with the Seminoles and an even longer career playing organized basketball.

In the months after, he'll finish his master's thesis, which deals with how the ozone interacts with fronts at various levels in the atmosphere, and end another chapter in his life. He says he wants to work in meteorology data analytics rather than pursuing a career as a television meteorologist.

His focus on what's next after graduating is keeping him from paying too much attention to how viral he went after Saturday's game, including an appearance on Barstool Sports for his "Weatherman" nickname.

"You know what? I think I am (not focused on that) right now because, just for perspective, in five months I'm going to have to have a job," Prieto said.

"And I don't think it's going to be anywhere in the basketball world. I think it's going to be in the meteorology world."