



2020-21 CLEMSON BASKETBALL
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What Aamir Simms' return means for Clemson men's basketball team

BY JOSH NEEDELMAN, POST AND COURIER
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CLEMSON — Aamir Simms is coming back.

The forward opted to pull his name from the NBA draft portal and return to Clemson for his final season of eligibility in a decision that elicited excitement from fans.

In a 2019-20 campaign characterized by peaks and valleys — Clemson finished 16-15 but secured three wins over top-six teams — Simms was a steady presence: He led the team in points per game (13), rebounds (7.2), assists (2.6) and blocks (.8).

In an effort to better understand Simms' on-court production — and what his return will mean for Clemson next season — The Post and Courier referenced basketball analytics database KenPom.com.

The findings reveal a portrait of a player may be more valuable to the program than previously understood.

Simms, for example, led Clemson in possession usage (24.1 percent) in 2019-20. For comparison's sake, the national leader in possession usage, Marquette point guard Markus Howard, registered 37.4 percent. But the 5-foot-11 Howard is a more traditional player for an offense to be built around.

Simms, at 6-9 and 240 pounds, played more of a point-forward role for Clemson, and the Tigers' offense often revolved around him in the absence of a more experienced high usage point guard.

Simms also led the Tigers in effective field goal percentage (53.2 percent) among players who averaged more than 14 minutes per game; effective field goal percentage adjusts for the fact that 3-pointers account for three points while field goals count for two points; traditional field goal percentage does not.

Behind Simms in that category was guard/forward Tevin Mack at 52.1 percent. Mack, who has expended all of his college eligibility, was also second in possession usage (22.4 percent). His departure creates a hole in a Tigers offense that already battled inconsistency last season.

That could mean even more responsibility for Simms, who also led Clemson in offensive rating (107.2 percent), which measures a player's efficiency by dividing points produced by possessions used.

Mack's departure could also mean more important roles for guards junior John Newman III and sophomore Al-Amir Dawes.

Coach Brad Brownell's most frequently used lineup over Clemson's last five games featured Dawes at point guard, Clyde Trapp at shooting guard, Newman at small forward, Mack at power forward and Simms at center.

With 7-footer Trey Jemison transferring to Alabama-Birmingham, incoming 6-10 freshman P.J. Hall might be the most logical choice to slide into Mack's spot in the lineup.

Hall, the No. 1 ranked incoming player from the state of South Carolina, shot 55.8 percent (24 for 43) from long range with Upward Stars (SC) on the 2019 adidas Gauntlet. Hall is also a strong post player, and his versatility could help Simms be an even more prolific offensive performer.

Simms and Hall can space the floor for one another and team up in the paint to bully opposing defenders.

It'll be interesting to see how Brownell deploys Simms as a senior. The addition of Hall — and the continued development of Newman and Dawes, who both showed flashes of brilliance down the stretch — means Simms should have options to play with as a ball-handler.

But Simms might want to use the campaign primarily to show scouts what he can do on the defensive end.

Last week, during an appearance on the ACC Network's Packer and Durham, he said NBA teams were impressed with his offensive ability but wanted to see more from him on the other side of the ball.

"They know how versatile I am on offense, playing on the perimeter, the post, the mid-range," he said. "They just kind of want to see me do a little bit more on defense. When I get switched onto a guard, stay in front of him a little bit longer. You know, protect the rim a little bit more and guard the post a little bit better."

Two keys to Clemson's success: Improved health and better shooting

BY GRACE RAYNOR, THE ATHLETIC
JULY 30, 2020

CLEMSON, S.C. — In any other offseason, the project that Brad Brownell's Clemson staff undertook over the course of these last several months most likely would have been impossible. Regular workouts would have taken priority, recruiting would have put coaches on the road and the juggling act that is coaching at the ACC level would have certainly been in full swing.

But COVID-19 forced the sports world to take a step back and look at things differently this offseason. The Clemson basketball team was no exception, so Brownell and his assistants buried themselves in a massive film project.

"We watched every shot of the whole season," assistant coach Dick Bender says. "It's rolling — every shot (of) every game."

Clemson attempted 1,717 field goals in 2019-20, and the staff analyzed every last one of them. The idea was to chart the shots, picking up on any trends that could equip returning players with more detailed data. For example, one of the things Bender says the staff noticed was that although senior forward Aamir Simms shot 40 percent from beyond the arc last season, he made just 28 percent of his 3-point attempts when he set a screen, then popped back out for the shot. Now that Simms knows shooting on the move is a priority, he can focus on that in practice.

Combine such data with Brownell believing this is one of his deeper teams in recent memory, and the Tigers have a clear path to take a step forward from their 16-15 record of last year.

The players have to do their part, though.

"We tried to break it down, that detailed, to give them some direction, and I think sometimes when you do that, it gives them extra motivation as well," Bender says. "They feel like you've taken even more interest in their game."

Clemson returns four of its five top scorers in Simms, junior guard John Newman III, sophomore guard Al-Amir Dawes and senior guard Clyde

Trapp. Among players who appeared in at least 20 games, the team also returns four of its top five rebounders, starting with Simms and extending to Newman, Trapp and junior forward Hunter Tyson. If the Tigers can stay healthy, improve their shooting and put the pieces together, a NCAA Tournament bid for a team that has struggled with consistency is feasible.

"Last year was completely different because we (had) seven new players and we (had) four senior starters all graduating, and to be honest with you, it was like starting over in a lot of ways," Brownell says. "This year, it's not. I really like our team. I think we have probably more good players than we've had in a while."

The big question

The injury bug hurt Clemson last season, so much so that it's now the most important factor behind consistent success in 2020-21: Can the Tigers stay healthy?

Though Trapp played in 21 of 31 games last season, he tore his ACL last summer and was never 100 percent when he returned to the court about six months later. Bender says it's possible Trapp's role in 2019-20 as a facilitator first and a scorer second could have been because he did not fully trust his knee for explosion around the basket. Trapp got out of his brace last week, and Brownell expects him to be 100 percent by the start of the season.

Then there's senior forward Jonathan Baehre, who suffered two ACL tears in an eight-month span. The first came in May 2019, just after Baehre had completed his sit-out requirement as a transfer from UNC Asheville. He was diagnosed with another ACL tear in the same knee in January, capping his number of games played last season at two.

"It'll be close," Brownell says. "I don't know if he'll be ready right at the beginning of the season. It may take another month or so to get him all the way."

Newman had his knee scoped during the offseason and sophomore guard Chase Hunter was limited to nine games and four starts last season because of a foot injury. Both should be ready by the start of the season, a promising sign for Brownell.

"Against some of the better teams in our league, I don't know if we have as many great players. But we have a lot of good players, I think," Brownell says. "I just think being healthy for depth — and us improving our shooting to be more consistent scoring — are probably two things that are really important for our team."

Roster analysis

Guards

The Tigers return their backcourt duo in Al-Amir Dawes, the point guard, and Clyde Trapp, a senior whom Bender thinks will play off the ball more in an effort to make him a more assertive scorer. In 31 games with 26 starts last season, Dawes averaged 9.0 points, 2.8 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game. Trapp averaged 6.0 points, 3.9 rebounds and 2.5 assists.

"The best part about Clyde is his basketball IQ," Bender says. "He's a versatile player. There are things he has to improve on, but you can plug him in at almost three positions."

To complement the duo, Clemson can rotate in junior Nick Honor and Chase Hunter. A transfer



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from from Fordham, Honor sat out last season because of NCAA rules. Two seasons ago he led all Atlantic 10 freshmen in scoring with 15.3 points per game and made 70 3-pointers in 32 games. Bender says Honor is probably the most fundamentally sound player on the team and can dribble through any situation, including a full-court press. That gives Clemson an option to have him and Dawes on the court together under pressure, while also giving Clemson a chance to wear down teams with a one-two punch. Bender says Honor will also help with offensive spacing because of how well he shoots from deep. Defensively, because Honor is 5-10 and 205 pounds, he's difficult to screen. He excels, Bender says, as an on-ball defender.

As for Hunter, his potential has not yet been fully tapped given the stress fracture in his foot he dealt with last season. He is 6-3, 200 pounds and chose Clemson over several powerhouses, including Virginia and Michigan State.

"I think Chase Hunter is a really talented guy," Brownell says. "He was highly recruited as a freshman. If he can stay healthy, I think he's going to be a really good player and could have a good year for us."

Wings

The best news Clemson got this offseason was that its senior leader, Aamir Simms, would return for his final year. Encouraged by Brownell to test the NBA waters, Simms got professional feedback but ultimately decided to return to school to make a few more tweaks in his game. Offensively, Simms will be Clemson's leader again, having averaged 13 points per game last season. At 6-8½ and 240 pounds, he can both attack the paint and shoot from range. One of the things he wants to improve this season is his perimeter defense in order to show NBA scouts he can defend multiple positions.

"If the opportunity came that a team was probably showing heavy interest, you would have probably seen my name stay," Simms says. "But overall, I just wanted to get the feedback. It was definitely in the works to come back to school."

Brownell says he is looking to Simms, who was a third-team All-ACC selection last season, to continue to step up as a leader for the younger players. Clemson opened up its offense for Simms last year and will continue to put the ball in his hands.

Joining Simms as wings are John Newman III and Hunter Tyson. Newman averaged 9.5 points per game as a sophomore and delivered in each of Clemson's biggest wins. He had 14 points and a "SportsCenter" Top 10 dunk in a win over No. 3 Duke, scored a career-high 23 points against No. 5 Louisville and had 18 points in a one-point victory against No. 6 Florida State.

To fill the void left by the departure of second-leading scorer Tevin Mack, the Tigers will turn in large part to Tyson. Olivier-Maxence Prosper, a freshman, and Jonathan Baehre are also options at that position, although they could project more as true forwards. Baehre most likely will need time to trust his knee again and regain confidence.

"I think we'll have a couple of guys, (but) probably Hunter Tyson is certainly the first guy that you would think that would get an opportunity as a junior," Brownell says. "He's a guy who has waited his turn and hopefully is ready to take advantage of that."

Biggs

P.J. Hall, a 6-10, 235-pound freshman, was arguably the biggest recruiting pickup of Brownell's career. Hall and Baehre are the tallest players on the roster.

Last season, Simms led the team in rebounding, with 7.2 boards per game, but the Tigers could use Hall's help on the glass. They ranked 14th in the ACC in offensive rebounding and ninth in defensive rebounding in 2019-20.

"I think (Hall) can help right away," Brownell says. "It'll be a little different for him getting used to the physicality and the speed of this game at this level, but he's a competitive kid, he's a hard worker. I certainly think he'll play and contribute as a freshman."

The Tigers also picked up a surprise addition Tuesday, when IMG's Lynn Kidd re-classified and joined the 2020 group. Kidd is 6-10, 220 pounds and is the nation's No. 103 overall player. His commitment now gives Clemson a top 20 class in the country.

Spotlight on: P.J. Hall

According to the 247Sports Composite, Hall is the highest-ranked recruit of the Brownell era. He was the No. 1 player in South Carolina, the No. 11 center in the country and the No. 54 overall prospect. Dating to 2005, 247Sports ranks Hall as the third-best Clemson recruit, behind only Milton Jennings and Noel Johnson, each from the Class of 2009.

Hall comes from Roebuck, about an hour and 20 minutes from campus. He chose Clemson over about 20 other schools, including South Carolina, Maryland, Tennessee, Florida and Texas Tech.

His signing got Clemson over the hump with the state's top player after it notably lost out on Zion Williamson in 2018 and Josiah-Jordan James last year. Williamson's stepfather thought Clemson would be the "ideal" landing spot, but Zion signed with Duke. James told The Moultrie News that playing for Clemson "would've been amazing," but he went to Tennessee.

"We finished second with a couple of really good players in our state the last couple of years and P.J. was another guy that we recruited for two years and just really liked him," Brownell says. "It's just really good to be able to get a player of his stature and somebody who comes from an extremely winning program (at Dorman High School). He has won several state championships at Dorman and is well-coached by Thomas Ryan. So yeah, he was a big get for us."

In addition to bringing buzz to the program, Hall's signing could have a domino effect with future recruits. Hall is a power forward who can shoot. In 14 games with grassroots team Upward Stars in 2019, he shot 59.1 percent from the floor and 55.8 percent from 3.

"P.J. definitely brings a bigger feel to the game," Simms says. "He's a big guy, big frame, so defensively he'll help us a little more in the post, especially when I come out of the game."

Recruiting

Even before the Tigers added Kidd on Tuesday, Brownell believes his freshman were as talented as any recruits he has had in his 10 years at Clemson, and it's not hard to see why.

Hall signed alongside Prosper, who is from

Canada but played at a prep school outside of Chicago before transferring to the NBA's Latin America Academy in Mexico City.

Prosper is the No. 99 player in the country and the No. 17 power forward on the 247Sports Composite. Assistant coach Anthony Goins discovered Prosper in Chicago, then Brownell watched him at a camp in Connecticut not long after.

"He was just very inquisitive and bright and we really thought he was a good player and probably better than some people thought at the time," Brownell says. "He was a little under-recruited because he was from Canada and people didn't know if he was going to be in which class (between 2020 and 2021) and I remember telling his dad, 'We'll take him in '20, we'll take him in '21, we'll take him whenever he wants to come to Clemson.'"

Kidd only adds to a class that was already one of Brownell's finest and gives the Tigers more versatility down low. Now that he is on board, Clemson's 2020 Class is ranked No. 20 nationally and No. 4 in the ACC.

Schedule analysis

Year in and year out, the toughest part of Clemson's schedule is the conference in which it plays. That's not going away. Brownell has been vocal about how tough it is to play in the ACC on a nightly basis.

COVID-19 could change things, but Clemson is scheduled to face Florida State, Georgia Tech, Miami, North Carolina, Pitt and Syracuse both home and away. Home-only is projected to be Boston College, Louisville, N.C. State and Virginia, with away-only planned to be Duke, Notre Dame, Virginia Tech and Wake Forest. Last season the Tigers picked up top-10 wins against Duke, Louisville and Florida State, while also winning at UNC for the first time in program history. Those types of wins go a long way in crafting an NCAA Tournament case, and 2020-21 will be no different. The Tigers will need some splashy wins to help pad the résumé.

In the nonconference, Clemson is scheduled to play Bucknell at home, then Mississippi State and either Illinois State or Purdue in a Thanksgiving tournament. There's also a December date with Alabama.

The ceiling

If they can stay healthy, the Tigers have the tools to be an NCAA Tournament team. They beat some of the top teams in the country with a less-experienced team last season and should only build on that this season.

The floor

Missing the postseason altogether would be the worst-case scenario. If the Tigers don't make at least the NIT, the pressure will be on Brownell.

Final report

So much of how the Tigers perform will depend on the depth they are able to develop and the way they acclimate back to basketball after four months away from one another. Health is vital. So is a respectable showing in the ACC.

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College basketball's top 20 bigs for the 2020-21 season

BY BRENDAN MARKS, THE ATHLETIC
NOV. 19, 2020

"Big."

What an all-encompassing, means-nothing term. College "bigs" nowadays fall under the widest of umbrellas (no pun intended). On any given team, you're just as likely to find a stocky, 6-foot-5 forward as you are a rail-thin sharpshooter who happens to be a 7-footer.

So clearly, any list of college basketball's best big men will have a wide variety of body types and a wider variety of skill sets. Which, cool. This season of college basketball will be unlike any other, so anything goes. Bring on the point-forwards and the proverbial cinder blocks on the blocks (pun intended).

Into the paint we go.

11. Aamir Simms, 6-foot-8½ senior, Clemson

It's hard not to love watching Simms play. The dude quite simply does everything. The Tigers were a weird team last season — they beat Duke, Louisville and Florida State while losing to dismal Wake Forest — but Simms was a star regardless. In helping Clemson record its first win over UNC in Chapel Hill, he had 20 points, eight rebounds, six assists, four blocks and three steals. That sort of versatility, plus more consistency from the Tigers, will make Simms an intriguing NBA Draft sleeper.

Clemson basketball needs Dorman High product PJ Hall to help right away as freshman

BY TODD SHANESY, GREENVILLE NEWS
NOV. 25, 2020

Grow up quickly, young man.

That's what Clemson basketball is hoping freshman P.J. Hall will do.

The Tigers open their season 8 p.m. Wednesday against Mississippi State at the Space Coast Challenge in Melbourne, Florida, and they want the former Dorman High standout to be dependable right away.

"We're trying to be as patient as we can be," Clemson coach Brad Brownell said. "But we also know that we need him to play this year and be ready and be good."

Hall is a 6-foot-10 post presence who was rated as the No. 1 high school player in South Carolina and 10th-best nationally at his position. He's already finding out, though, that the leap from top prospect to major college basketball is quite a distance.

"He's getting a lesson in the difference between high school basketball and high-level college basketball," Brownell said.

Clemson hopes -- and needs -- former Dorman High star P.J. Hall (24) to contribute immediately this season.

The teacher is often Clemson senior forward Aamir Simms, first-team preseason All-ACC and a grown man who will play in the NBA.

"Aamir has done a great job of mentoring," Brownell said. "(Hall's) first scrimmage was not very good, to be frank. He played about 25 minutes and didn't get much of anything done. Some of that is because of Aamir.

"The big challenge for high school kids is that you go from not being able to touch anybody under the basket because you're always called for a foul to high-major basketball where there's full-contact karate going on sometimes down there and no calls. So you have to get used to the physicality of the position. You've also got to get used to the speed of running up and down full court. Sometimes the center position is the position that is involved the most. The five man almost has to be in the best shape of anybody on your team. And so I think there has been a little bit of an awakening to that."

Hall was part of a Clemson recruiting class that ranked No. 20 nationally. It includes other big men in 6-11 Lynn Kidd from Gainesville, Florida, and 6-8 Olivier-Maxence Prosper, a Montreal native who was considered one of the top international signees.

Clemson went 16-15 overall, 9-11 in the ACC last season, which ended with the Tigers on the court warming up for a league tournament game against Florida State as the Coronavirus began its sweeping shutdown of sports. Clemson was picked to finish 10th among the 15 teams this season.

The return of Simms and the potential of Hall are two reasons the Tigers believe they can finish in the top half and make the NCAA Tournament for only the third time in Brownell's 11 seasons.

"P.J. is going to help. No doubt about it," Brownell said. "He certainly has the talent and the ability to shoot the ball and catch and finish and play around the rim and block some shots. He's big and strong and smart. There are times when we can play him and Amir together. There are times when Amir will start and (Hall) will be the backup. We'll just see how it goes from game to game.

"P.J. has tremendous upside. He's going to be a great player at Clemson."

Clemson will play Thanksgiving Day against either Purdue or Liberty in the Space Coast Challenge. The Tigers will then be off until the home opener Dec. 2 against South Carolina State. They will host Maryland a week later in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

The 'wake up call' that helped Clemson's top recruit take his game to another level

BY MATT CONNOLLY, THE STATE
DEC. 2, 2020

P.J. Hall arrived at Clemson as the top-ranked prospect from the state of South Carolina for the class of 2020, a top-60 recruit nationally and the third-highest ranked player to ever sign with Clemson.

Fans weren't the only ones with high expectations for Hall entering his freshman season. He also had high expectations for himself.

"I think with my skill set, with my physicality, I'm able to stretch the defense and shoot from beyond the arc and then get down low and do some dirty work. That'll really translate to the ACC," Hall told The State this summer. "I really can't wait. It's going to be fun."

Shortly after arriving at Clemson, however, Hall wasn't having a ton of fun going up against Aamir Simms every day at practice. Hall received

what he describes as a "wake-up call" from the All-ACC senior forward.

Simms and Hall were matched up against each other in scrimmages and practices throughout the preseason, and it didn't take Hall long to realize that he wasn't in high school anymore.

Simms is 6-foot-8, 245 pounds and versatile. He can take you outside and knock down a jumper with his silky smooth stroke, drive to the hole and finish at the rim using his length and athleticism or bang in the post and get a bucket with his soft touch around the basket.

In short, Simms is a nightmare to defend, especially for a freshman.

"He's getting a lesson in the difference between high school basketball and high-level college basketball dealing every day with Aamir Simms," Clemson coach Brad Brownell said this preseason. "His first scrimmage was not very good, to be frank. He played about 25 minutes and didn't get much of anything done. ... Aamir didn't allow him to get much done."

Fast forward a few weeks to Clemson's season opener against Mississippi State in the Space Coast Challenge and you'd have no idea Hall was a player who struggled initially adjusting to the college game.

With Simms in foul trouble, Hall came off the bench to score 10 points, pull down seven rebounds and lead Clemson to a 53-42 win over MSU. Clemson went on to win the Space Coast Challenge, knocking off Purdue the following day. After battling Simms all preseason and putting in a lot of extra time in the gym on his own, Hall was ready when his number was called.

"Our team needs him to be really good sooner rather than later. That's the message I gave P.J. and have been giving P.J. for months now," Brownell said. "Ironically, the first game of the season, we really needed him to be good. If he doesn't play well, we're not going to win. He played well and we won."

'GYM RAT'

Hall describes himself as a "gym rat," so it's no surprise that when he wasn't initially having the results that he wanted at Clemson, he put in the work to get better.

Hall was so addicted to improving during his time at Dorman High that his dad was given a key to the gym so that coaches wouldn't always have to drive to the school and unlock it. Hall says he would sometimes be there until 1 a.m. when he didn't have school the following day.

"There's something about being in the gym alone," he said. "I walk out onto the court and start dribbling. You can feel the vibration in your feet."

This summer, with no gym to go to with everything shut down due to COVID-19, Hall put in work on his outdoor goal in his driveway. He would move the cars from blocking the basket and spend hours a day on the concrete working on his shooting and ball handling.

The two issues Hall had with those driveway sessions:

1. If he missed, he might have to climb the fence and chase the ball into the backyard.

2. His feet became sore from spending so much time on the concrete surface.

Still, he enjoyed the work and it made him a better player.



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"It was weird getting back to my roots, because I grew up always playing out here. Me and my brother always played out here, and my sister," Hall said. "You lose track of time. You do your workout and then you just keep shooting and shooting."

It wasn't ideal, but it helped him.

ARRIVING AT CLEMSON

Hall regularly worked on his game on his outdoor goal throughout the spring and into the summer, before arriving at Clemson in June.

After a week of isolation, he was able to participate in workouts and see where he stacked up with Clemson's other players.

From early on, he was usually matched up with Simms, a matchup he describes as "very frustrating and mentally challenging."

"I've not only never played against someone who's as skilled as Aamir, I've never played against someone who's as smart as that guy," Hall said. "Knowing that he knew exactly what to do and where to be every play was rough. But I knew it was making me better."

Hall's early battles with Simms were "a wake-up call that you're not the best player anymore," Hall said.

How did he handle the mental and physical challenge?

"It was more just a reassurance that I needed to stay the course and make sure every day I was getting in extra work," he said. "And knowing if I stayed the course me and Aamir would make each other better, not just him making me better. Every day I was just trying to get a little better than I was the day before."

The last couple of weeks leading up to Clemson's opener, Hall turned a corner and gained confidence going up against Simms.

He started having some success against the senior and knew that if he could make plays against Simms, he would be just fine during games. Hall averaged 7.5 points and four rebounds in the Space Coast Challenge while playing about 15 minutes per game. He had eight points and five rebounds in the first half of Clemson's opener, knocking down mid-range jumpers and battling on the boards.

"After going up against Aamir for four months, I knew that not a whole lot of people were going to be as good as him," Hall said. "I had a lot of confidence that I could go out there and showcase what I've been working on."

'THE SKY'S THE LIMIT'

Hall still has plenty of areas where he needs to improve, but he's off to a good start. Just in the first four months of his college career, he's made big strides.

"For a freshman to do what he did in his first couple of games, that's pretty impressive," Brownell said. "P.J.'s got tremendous upside. He's going to be a great player at Clemson."

Hall is likely to play a bench role during his freshman season, giving Simms a breather and stepping up when he's in foul trouble. It's also possible Hall and Simms will play at the same as the year goes along.

"Having P.J. there, who can come in and play smart and just fill the void when I'm not on the court and do his thing is very major," Simms said.

"I think he'll be very key for our team, especially when I'm out of the game. The offense can still flow through P.J. and he'll be just fine."

With Simms leaving after this season, the offense will likely flow through Hall. It's a role Hall should be ready for after getting his feet wet this year.

Clemson guard Nick Honor, who is Clemson's second-leading scorer at 12.5 points per game, believes "the sky is the limit" for Hall.

"Man, P.J. Hall's going to be good," Honor said. "He brings a lot of versatility to the team. He has a willingness to learn. By the middle of the season, you'll see the real P.J. Hall."

Honor has already seen big improvement from Hall in his first few months on campus and said it's fun to watch him battle with Simms at practice.

"They've been going at it," Honor said. "P.J.'s been going at him as well. So definitely good to see, because it only makes both of them better." Clemson is 2-0 entering its home opener against South Carolina State on Wednesday, and there is excitement around the program, not only for this season but for the future. Hall is a big reason why.

"I've probably coached P.J. as hard as anybody on our team so far this year, because I think he can be really good," Brownell said. "Aamir's done a great job of mentoring him. ... If you wanna be a great player, you just watch that guy every day."

And practice against him.

Tyson developing into versatile forward at Clemson

BY JEREMY VERNON, THE ENQUIRER JOURNAL
DEC. 4, 2020

Three games into the 2020-21 season, former Piedmont High star Hunter Tyson has carved out a significant role with the Clemson men's basketball team.

The 6-foot-8, 215-pound swing forward started the first two games of the season for the Tigers (3-0), and had his best performance of the season in Clemson's last game over South Carolina State while coming off the bench — leading the team with 13 points (on just 5 field goal attempts) and six rebounds in 17 minutes of playing during a lopsided win. Three games into the season, he's averaging 7 points and a team-high 6 rebounds in just under 18 minutes per game of playing time.

Last season, Tyson averaged 5.5 points and 3.0 rebounds per game, and he scored 20-plus points on two separate occasions. Tyson spoke with The Enquirer-Journal on Friday about the adjusted offseason, his expectations for this year and his younger brother, Cade.

Question: How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect what you guys were able to do this offseason in terms of preparation for the upcoming year?

Answer: During the spring, we typically would have had a lot more workouts than we were able to have this year. I was actually (at Clemson), and me and Aamir Simms (6-8, 245) were working out every day just trying to get better every day. When it came to the summer time, they opened up the gym for us and we were able to work out on our own the month of June, and then July came and

everything was pretty much back to normal. When the fall came, the NCAA actually upped our hours. Typically we only have eight-hour weeks, and they upped them to 12 so we were able to have a few team practices a week, and the preseason was a little longer. There was a big gap we had where we all tried to improve our games. I think that was very helpful for us, because I think we really took advantage of that time.

Question: Last season was an improvement on your freshman year. What were some of the biggest focuses for you this offseason in terms of individual improvement?

Answer: I was trying to improve everything I could. One thing I really put an emphasis on — working out with Aamir every day, he's so good around the rim — we worked on a bunch of different types of finishes around the rim. And then it was a lot of shooting off the move. Those were the two big points of emphasis this offseason.

Question: The first two games of the season, you started at power forward, but this last game against S.C. State, you played well off the bench. Do you prefer one of those roles to the other?

Answer: I'm a team-first guy, so whatever the team needs me to do, that's what I'm going to try to do, whether its start or come off the bench. One thing about our team this year is we have a lot of depth, so I think a lot of different guys are going to get starts in different places every game. I'm not really worrying about whether I'm starting or not. I'm just focused on the opportunity I do have and I'm trying to make the most of it and play as hard as I can.

Question: Things didn't end quite how y'all hoped from a team perspective last season. How excited are you about the team's prospects in 2020-21?

Answer: We're super excited. Everybody in this program, up to the coaches, has worked so hard this offseason. I think everyone is really excited about the opportunities we plan on having this year as long as we work hard and continue to do what we can.

Question: Your younger brother, Cade, just picked up a Division 1 offer from Charlotte. How have you seen his game improve over the last few years, and what kind of advice have you given him?

Answer: He definitely has what it takes. He works very hard. It's kind of expected in my family that whatever you do, you work hard at it. He chose the route of basketball like I did, and he's been working his tail off trying to get as good as possible. The recognition will come for him. He's made huge strides in his game from watching him last year to me watching him this year. I'm really excited for what the future holds. I've told him to just worry about the task at hand and not get ahead of himself. He's a junior in high school (Carmel Christian) and his team's really good, so he just needs to continue to work and get better every day. The recognition and all that will come if you keep working hard. I've just told him to take it one step at a time.



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Zinger, jammer and the ball-hounding defense that has made Clemson elite

BY CJ MOORE, THE ATHLETIC
JAN. 8, 2021

After watching his team score 51 points in a 16-point loss to Clemson last month, Maryland coach Mark Turgeon kept repeating the same line in his postgame press conference: “We were out of sync.”

That’s the ultimate compliment to a defense, and Turgeon admitted “Clemson had a lot to do with that.” Turgeon might not have realized it at the time, but he just so happened to be facing what could be the best defensive team in college basketball. Through 10 games the Tigers rank No. 1 in adjusted defensive efficiency, a spot usually reserved for Tony Bennett’s pack-line defense at Virginia or one of the game’s other Goliaths.

The undersized Tigers, whom Ken Pomeroy’s projections now have as the ACC favorite, have knocked their opponents out of sync on a nightly basis. It was Maryland’s worst offensive efficiency mark of the season, and the same has been true for five of Clemson’s 10 opponents. Mississippi State had its lowest efficiency mark since 2015, managing only 42 points (or 0.65 points per possession) in the season opener.

So how are the Tigers, a team without an elite rim protector and admittedly undersized, pulling this off?

“Really, it’s nothing elaborate,” Clemson coach Brad Brownell told The Athletic. “It’s just man-to-man full-court defense.”

Brownell is being modest. Because his defense has elements of some of the best we’ve seen in recent memory in college hoops. The Tigers pressure the ball for 94 feet with strong denials one pass away. That’s how they force turnovers — at a rate of 26.7 percent, seventh-best nationally — yet they have avoided a high rate of fouls, which is typically a consequence for pressing teams. In the half court, they bring heavy help and try to keep the ball out of the paint, like Texas Tech’s no-middle defense. And then they close out strong on shooters, reminiscent of Bennett’s pack line.

This isn’t an imitation of another program, however. It was Brownell’s creation, and it has been a few years in the making.

In the summer of 2019, Clemson represented the United States in the World University Games. Brownell went into the tournament knowing he wanted to play a lot of guys and make that a strength. So he went back to his early days at Clemson, when the Tigers applied a lot of defensive pressure and picked up full court.

The experiment worked. Clemson went 9-1, won gold, held opponents to 57.6 points per game and forced 17.9 turnovers per game. He wanted to carry it into the 2019-20 season, but when the waiver request for Fordham transfer Nick Honor, who had played for the Tigers in Italy, was denied, Brownell abandoned his plan. He had one point guard, freshman Al-Amir Dawes, and no choice but to play a more traditional defense.

With Honor, a bulldog of a defender, on board this season, the decision was an easy one. Brownell just had to figure out a way to communicate the expectation to his team. He started with his best player, telling senior star Aamir Simms, who played 31.6 minutes per game last year,

he was going to play less. (He’s averaged 25.9.) Same with Dawes. To pressure like Brownell wanted to pressure, the Tigers were going to have to play at least 10 guys and substitute often.

“I thought this was the perfect year for it because of COVID and because of preaching team and sacrifice and all the things our kids are already doing in order to have a season,” Brownell says. “This is kind of the ultimate sacrifice.”

“If you’re not good with that,” Simms says, “it says a lot about you as a player. At the end of the day, it’s about winning, and if you’re not OK with winning because you’re not getting a lot of playing time, something’s wrong with you. This team has that selfless attitude and that selfless mentality, and I think that’s what makes us a great team.”

Out of necessity, Brownell has been a chameleon during his 11 years at Clemson. He admittedly cannot recruit at the same level of the blue bloods in his league, and he says he often has built his style around his personnel. Last season, for instance, he went to a five-out look because of Simms, forcing opposing bigs to chase the 6-8 center out to the 3-point line.

Similarly, Brownell’s defensive approach has changed year to year, but the Tigers have been consistently good. This core, in particular, has graded out well. Over the previous three seasons the Tigers ranked seven, 14th and 33rd in adjusted defensive efficiency nationally.

That end of the floor became a priority for Brownell when Jerry Wainwright hired him at UNC Wilmington to be an assistant in 1994 and put him in charge of the defense. When Wainwright left for Richmond in 2002 and Brownell was promoted to the head chair, the Seahawks had the best defense in the Colonial in three of his four years in charge. When he moved to Wright State in 2006, his teams continued to thrive on that end — ranking second, fourth, second and third in the Horizon League. (It’s worth noting this was during the timespan when Brad Stevens was at Butler, making the first of back-to-back Final Four appearances.)

Brownell was never a pressing coach until he took over at Clemson and hired assistant Rick Ray away from Purdue. Ray helped him employ some pressing tactics he’d learned in West Lafayette, and Brownell’s first team, which made the NCAA Tournament in 2011 and ranked 11th in adjusted defensive efficiency, thrived at applying pressure and forcing turnovers.

But because of personnel and sometimes limited depth, Brownell got away from pressing. This group, however, could be changing his vision. “I like it,” he says. “I think our players like it. We’ve got really good guys. They’re selfless people. We talk about a culture of commitment here. That’s kind of our slogan and that it’s about integrity, work ethic and sacrifice. So we try to recruit that when we’re recruiting players and we talk about it with our players, the importance of it. I felt like this style of play really fits that.”

The defense starts with the zinger and the jammer, two Brownell originals. The zinger defends the inbounder and is in charge of communicating screens in the backcourt and helping slow down the ball. The jammer is the point guard, trying to “jam” the ball by turning his man multiple times.



“It wears down teams,” senior guard Clyde Trapp says. “You may not see it in the first 25 minutes of a game, but those last couple minutes of a game you can see a noticeable difference.”

Brownell has an elite jammer in Honor, who leads the team in steals and has been a pickpocket in the backcourt. Ideally, Honor would have endless energy and he’d hold down the jammer spot all the time, but it’s the most exhausting position to play on the floor. “That guy is kind of the head of the snake,” Brownell says. “He’s the guy that really starts your defense, and if he doesn’t do a good job, it’s not going to be very effective. You can’t do it with one guy. You’ve got to have two and really you’re better if you have three.”

Creating backcourt turnovers is a perk, but the primary responsibility of the jammer is to delay the start of the offense. Every second of the shot clock is precious, especially against a defense as disciplined as Clemson’s. The other incentive that wasn’t necessarily anticipated is that the guards are so good at slowing the ball early that the transition defense, which was a weakness last year, has been elite. Opponents are averaging 8.9 transition points (third-fewest in the ACC) and a league-low 0.817 points per possession on transition opportunities.

Then opponents not only are operating with less time once they get into the half court, but they’re also often not starting their offense where they want to because of Clemson’s strong denials. Notice how far up the floor Florida State’s Sardaar Calhoun (No. 24) is forced to move as the first option for a pass when M.J. Walker comes off a ball screen:



While the Tigers are aggressive in denials on the ball side, they sag off big time away from the ball because of the importance placed on help. “We’re not as big as a lot of teams, so for us, it’s a little more challenging,” Brownell says. “We don’t have an elite shot-blocker, so we need to take some charges and we need to be able to scramble and need to be able to rotate.”

This is another area in which the Tigers have thrived and why it’s hard to get easy baskets against them. Maryland had a possession early in the game where it appeared it would get multiple good looks. It started with Dawes gambling for a steal, leaving Eric Ayala open in the corner. When the ball was kicked out to Ayala, two Tigers closed hard, running Ayala off the 3-point line. He drove,

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was cut off and kicked it out to an open Daryl Morsell on the left wing. Jonathan Baehre, who was inside the charge circle when Morsell went to pass, closed and was there on the catch. When Morsell drove, he again was met by help with Trapp cutting off the baseline, as seen below:



This play ended with Morsell kicking the ball to the corner to the baseline drifter, Wiggins, who settled for a contested 3-pointer that missed. Maryland made most of the right plays on this possession, and against a lot of defenses, the Terps would have ended up with a great look. But the sustained efforts by the Tigers resulted in a low-percentage shot.

“A lot of teams are used to people picking them up full court, denying them a couple of passes, but I don’t think a lot of teams are used to that happening at a certain level and intensity for the entire game,” Trapp says. “I think it’s aggravating to other teams, and they get a little frustrated after a while.”

Brownell is big on scouting and emphasizing that he wants his players to dictate where shots are coming from — or rather, where not to allow them. The priority is limiting shots at the rim. You’re going to allow 3s when you help as much as the Tigers do, but for a team that sells out as much as they do in help, their defensive 3-point rate (37.7) is good and holding opponents to 29.9 percent on those attempts is even better.

Clemson is also holding opponents to an effective field-goal percentage of 44.7 percent, which ranks 30th nationally and is the second-best mark in Brownell’s 11 years at the school. The top team in that statistic was his 2015 squad, which featured wing K.J. McDaniels, who was an elite shot-blocker at his position. The Tigers ranked seventh in block rate that year, which is typical of a great field-goal percentage defense.

“We don’t think we’re ever going to lead the country in any of that stuff just because I think you need elite shot-blocking and size, and we’re actually kind of small,” Brownell says. “We’ve got smaller guards. We’ve got a smaller center. But I think we’ve been disruptive and do some things that have taken a few things away from people and hopefully not allowed them to play right to their strengths.”

Or, as Turgeon put it, the Tigers get you out of sync.

While Brownell calls his defense nothing elaborate, the level of execution takes extraordinary discipline and communication. The Tigers have been well-drilled in practice and have benefited from having no COVID-19 interruptions since June. Like any good defense, they move as one, which is even more impressive considering the amount of substituting they do. Brownell has mixed and matched a bunch of lineups, and at times he has even gone with line changes: five in, five out.

“You’ve got to want to play guys, and they’ve

got to play really hard,” he says. “And sometimes if they’re not playing until they’re uncomfortable and they’re not asking to come out some, then they may not be playing hard enough.”

The Tigers are loving it. They’re used to focusing on defense. “One thing about Coach Brownell,” Trapp says, “if you don’t play defense, you probably won’t play.” But the intensity level has ramped up simply watching guys such as Honor and Dawes go to work.

“I don’t think fans and casual watchers of basketball realize how much energy that really takes,” Trapp says. “Them knowing that we’re behind them and we’re going just as hard as them, I think that pushes them to the extra level and gives them the confidence to continue to jam the ball.”

The buy-in and selflessness remind Simms of his freshman year, when the Tigers made a Sweet 16 run. An NCAA Tournament appearance is the expectation now, and although it’s still early, it’s worth considering what March could look like. If Clemson can continue to have the league’s best defense and an offense that has benefited from playing faster and scoring off of turnovers, then why not an ACC championship and a high seed in the NCAAs?

“There’s clearly not a frontrunner (in the ACC), and a lot of teams are battling to be that front team,” Simms says. “I think our team has a great chance to do that.”

Nick Honor leads Clemson charge, and it’s all because of heart

BY DAVID HOOD, TIGERNET
JAN. 8, 2021

Clemson basketball coach Brad Brownell followed Nick Honor’s high school career and was intrigued but didn’t recruit the 5-10 guard out of Orlando because of his size. Brownell admitted this week that the one thing that couldn’t be measured, Honor’s heart, is what makes him a perfect fit at Clemson.

Honor has started just two games this season but is second on the team in scoring at 10.7 points per game. He’s also fourth in minutes played, leads the team in 3-point field goals made (38), and leads the team in assists with 25.

Honor played a huge part in Clemson’s comeback win over Miami a week ago, and then scored a game-high 21 in the comeback victory over NC State Tuesday night as the No. 19 Tigers improved to 3-1 in the ACC. Honor sat out last season after transferring in from Fordham, where he played his freshman season. During his time at Fordham, Honor started all 32 games and led the team with 15.3 points per game (489 total points) in 36.1 minutes per contest (1,155 minutes).

However, he always had the confidence he could play at a higher level and now is making his dreams come true at Clemson.

“It gives me a good feeling and thanks to God for making everything happen,” Honor told TigerNet this week. “As a young kid, I wanted to play at the highest level. The path to Clemson wasn’t always clear out of high school, but God always makes a way. I am glad to be here and just thankful to be in this position.”

“Out of high school, I was kind of in-between on recruiting. I had some mid-major offers and I had a few that were of high major interest. Coming out of high school I wanted to go somewhere

where I could contribute right away and have that experience under my belt. So I committed and went to Fordham. Unfortunately, I had a family emergency towards the end of my freshman year, so I sat and prayed about it and realized that it would be a lot easier to be closer to home in Orlando, Florida. So that is how I was led to this destination.”

Brownell said the Tigers’ coaching staff didn’t measure Honor’s best attribute — his heart.

“He is a confident guy. He is a little bit of an overachiever just based on his size. We didn’t recruit him coming out of high school,” Brownell said. “We weren’t sure because of his size if he was going to be good enough. I liked his game but I didn’t know if that would translate. And the hardest thing about recruiting is measuring a kid’s heart. Measuring their heart and even their smarts and their confidence. You don’t know sometimes. And that is a credit to Nick and his family and how he was raised. He is a big-time player and he is going to make big-time plays if he gets a chance.”

Honor isn’t the most vocal player, so Brownell had him call two of his teammates each day over the summer in an effort to help him become a leader.

“It definitely helped. I am usually a laid-back guy and keep to myself, especially when I am back home,” Honor said. “It really wasn’t as important when I was sitting out last year, but when I was coming up on playing, Coach said that being a point guard I had to be more vocal so he challenged me to do the FaceTiming. I definitely became closer to my teammates in figuring out what they were doing during quarantine and what they were doing to get better. Each day I am trying to get better and becoming a better leader for this team.”

Castle graduate Hemenway makes first two collegiate starts for No. 19 Clemson

BY GORDON ENGELHARDT, EVANSVILLE
COURIER AND PRESS
JAN. 9, 2021

CLEMSON, S.C. -- As an awestruck freshman, Alex Hemenway looked up and saw Michael Jordan’s jersey hanging from the rafters of the “Dean Dome.”

“Walking into the gym the first time was surreal,” Hemenway said. “It’s an unique gym, a cool place to play.”

Clemson and Hemenway snapped a 59-game losing streak at North Carolina, posting a 79-76 victory last January. But another chance to win at Chapel Hill on Saturday was put on hold.

Clemson men’s basketball program announced a temporary pause of all team activities after a positive COVID-19 test result and subsequent contract tracing within the program on Friday. As a result, Saturday’s game at North Carolina and Tuesday’s game at Syracuse were postponed.

Hemenway, a 6-foot-3 sophomore guard from Castle High School, remained undaunted.

“Just a little speed bump along the way,” said Hemenway, who made his first two collegiate starts against visiting Miami on Jan. 2 and at North Carolina State last Tuesday. “Nobody wants to contact COVID of course but it seemed to just

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find its way in sometimes. At Clemson here we have the saying 'Clemson grit' and this is another circumstance where I know we'll show some grit and push through this obstacle."

Ranked No. 19, Clemson has won four in a row to improve to 9-1 overall and 3-1 in the Atlantic Coast Conference. It marks the second-best start in Harrison graduate Brad Brownell's 11 seasons as Tigers head coach.

Brownell said Hemenway had the skill set to play in the ACC but needed to improve his strength. Hemenway said an opposing team's scouting report would call him a 3-point shooter, first and foremost.

"I need to put it on the ground more and create more off the bounce," he said.

Hemenway has blossomed in more ways than one, sprouting a mustache and surrounding facial hair. He started growing facial hair during off-season quarantine.

"I got a few compliments and ran with it," he said. "It seemed like it was a good fit."

Hemenway's parents, Todd and Chris, made the eight-hour drive from Newburgh to Clemson for the Tigers' 77-67 win over then-No. 18 Florida State on Dec. 29.

"I'm proud and thankful that the hard work and commitment by Alex and many others, including his coaches, trainers and family is paying off," his father said.

Hemenway was 2-for-4 from 3-point range in scoring eight points in their 66-65 decision over Miami, his first collegiate start.

"It was a great feeling," he said. "Right off the bat I could contribute to the team. Honestly, I didn't think too much about it. I don't think anybody cares who starts."

Brownell said this Clemson team doesn't boast outstanding talent and has to win collectively. Hemenway agreed, noting that the Tigers have so much depth that there's little drop off when subs enter the game.

"With the platoon system, you play four or five minutes and the subs come in and you don't lose anything," Hemenway said. "We have great combinations. We have an unselfish group."

Hemenway is one of four — count 'em four — Southern Indiana Athletic Conference products playing for top 25 teams. Jack Nunge, who was Hemenway's teammate on Castle's 2017 Class 4A semistate team, is a redshirt sophomore for No. 5 Iowa. Kiyron Powell, a freshman from Bosse, comes off the bench for No. 11 Houston. Dru Smith, a senior from Reitz, stars for No. 13 Missouri.

"It's a great feeling," Hemenway said.

It's an amazing tribute to the SIAC -- doubtful if there's been another time in recent memory in which four local players were on four different Top 25 teams at the same time.

Hemenway characterized Brownell as a players' coach.

"He's a teacher, not only of the game, but life's lessons on and off the court," Hemenway said.

While some coaches think about a player primarily in terms of what they can do for the team, Hemenway said Brownell makes a point to get to know each of his players as a person.

Hemenway said there's a comfort zone to have local connections with Brownell and assistant Marty Simmons. He attended Simmons' youth

camp growing up, but was too young to play with Blake Simmons, Marty's son, at Castle. Blake graduated from Castle in 2013, then played for his father at the University of Evansville.

"It definitely always helps to know someone from your home town, talking about high school basketball and missing certain food," Hemenway said. "You can never go wrong with Turoni's pizza."

He relishes the possibility of playing in the NCAA tournament, which will all held exclusively in central Indiana this year because of the pandemic.

"I saw that they're moving everything to Indiana," said Hemenway, Castle's career scoring leader with 1,765 points. "To have it all in your home state is amazing."

'Monroe Menace' was masked hero in Clemson's win against North Carolina

BY TODD SHANESY, GREENVILLE NEWS
FEB. 3, 2021

Like most everyone during this global pandemic, Clemson basketball player Hunter Tyson is getting more comfortable wearing a mask.

But for Tyson, a junior forward from Monroe, North Carolina, it has meant trading his cloth covering for a plastic shield during practice and games because of a fracture.

Tyson had a season-high 16 points Tuesday night, five short of a career high, and they all came in the last 10 minutes as he helped Clemson hold off North Carolina, 63-50, at Littlejohn Coliseum.

"He was The Monroe Menace, as we like to call him," Clemson all-ACC senior Aamir Simms said. "He did this thing and let everyone know that he can still hoop."

Tyson missed five games and Clemson had three others during that span postponed or canceled because of COVID-19. He finally got back on the court Jan. 16 and is still trying not to let the mask bother him too much. But it does.

"It affects him. No question," Clemson coach Brad Brownell said. "He doesn't see as well. He has trouble seeing things sometimes peripherally. Obviously, he doesn't like it. Defensively, sometimes he feels like he can't see things. And when he has the ball, sometimes he can't see as many guys. It's challenging for him."

Tyson averages 5.4 points and six of his 11 games this season yielded a total of 10 points. He's scored double figures twice in the past three outings, however, including a win against Louisville to break a three-game losing streak. In between, though, he saw only seven minutes of action in a loss to Duke and didn't score.

"I just tried to get in the gym, work harder and get ready for this game," Tyson said. "Obviously, it wasn't a good outing for us last time. So, we really needed to bounce back tonight."

"You might play 30 minutes today. You might play five the next," Simms said. "But whenever your number is called, you have to know and trust in yourself. That's what Hunter did. It's never about the minutes you play. It's about what you do with the minutes you get."

Tyson played a career-high 26 minutes against North Carolina. The last 10 might have been his best ever.

North Carolina (11-6, 6-4 ACC) had cut a 16-point deficit to four. Tyson made a 3-pointer,

took a charge at the other end of the court and then scored again as Clemson (11-5, 5-5) went ahead, 47-40. With 1:30 remaining and a nine-point lead, seemingly a spot to drain the clock, Tyson instead drained a quick 3.

"I just really thought it was a good shot for me, so I took it," he said. "Thankfully, it went in."

Tyson added two dunks, giving him nine points in the last 1:21.

"He really wants to compete," Brownell said. "He has pretty good confidence. He has to work at things, though. It's not that easy. Not a natural athlete and all that. He's got to really fight and buckle down. We're trying to teach him that he needs to embrace physicality and dirty work. He has to be more than a shooter. He's going to have to defend physical, tough guys. He's going to have to be able to rebound. He needs to improve his passing and get better at that."

"The one thing you know about Hunter Tyson is that he wants to win. He wants to compete. I think he did that tonight. They scored on him some, but he was fighting like crazy down there. He battled. We didn't double-team very much. We left him alone. 'Hey, you're going to have to battle.' And so I'm really proud of him and his fight. He's a tough-minded young man."

How Clyde Trapp became 'that guy' at Clemson

BY NOLAN SHAY, DAILY ORANGE
FEB. 4, 2021

When AAU coach Paris Coles received a phone call from his brother, who coached a Little League football team in Eastover, South Carolina, he only heard a few words: "Get down here and take a look at this kid." The player he was referring to was 13-year-old Clyde Trapp, now a regular starter on Clemson's basketball team.

Coles did just that. He went to a local gym and watched Trapp during a pickup game. Within a few seconds, Coles was certain the 13-year-old was a special talent. He recruited Trapp to his AAU team — the South Carolina Tigers — where Trapp later dominated tournaments as a sophomore, putting up as much as 40 points, 15 rebounds and 12 assists per game, Coles said.

"He was that guy," Coles said. "It didn't matter who was at the tournament, you were coming to watch Clyde play."

Now at Clemson, Trapp has started 15 games for the Tigers. Seven months after an ACL tear, he averaged over 25 minutes per game during the 2019-20 season. A year ago, Trapp scored the game-winning shot in the final two seconds as the Tigers beat Syracuse 71-70. He posted a career-high in every category that day — 17 points, nine rebounds and six assists. And on Feb. 6, Trapp and Clemson will host Syracuse in Littlejohn Coliseum.

Trapp has developed from the young, budding talent who Coles watched in Eastover, a small town in Richland County, into an Atlantic Coast Conference star. He went from "basically a nobody" to being "on the radar" in a matter of one summer, Coles said, and that was because of his drive.

"His work ethic went from good to the next level," Coles said. "He did his homework so fast, so he could get to the gym night and day."



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Coles started training with Trapp only two or three times a week after school. Little by little, they increased the frequency of training sessions, and by the end of Trapp's freshman year, sessions were before school, during lunch, after school and before and after practice. Because Coles was a manager at the recreation center and had the keys to the facility, the two trained as early as 4 a.m. and as late as 11 p.m.

Trapp played varsity basketball at Lower Richland High School starting his sophomore year, and he was "the stud of the team" by his senior year when he led Lower Richland to a state championship title. Eastover has always been a small basketball town, former teacher Liz Still said, and Trapp never failed to rise to the occasion. He regularly had clutch performances, former teammate Savion Townsend said.

Against Orangeburg-Wilkinson High School, Trapp — then a senior — was injured as his team tried to lock up the No. 1 seed in its region. By half, Lower Richland was "down big," head coach Caleb Gaither said, and the crowd began to chant as the team walked into the locker room at half-time.

"We want Clyde, we want Clyde," Townsend remembered the crowd yelling.

So, Trapp changed into his uniform for the second half, "put on his shoes with a bum ankle and balled out," Townsend said. Trapp did a 360-dunk near the end of the game, too, and the Diamond Hornets recovered from their deficit to win and to take his team to the state championship game.

"His composure, leadership and athletic ability on display that game set in stone what we already thought about him — a Division I player and probably the next level," Still said.

Going into his senior season, Trapp didn't have any Division I offers. But that's when he took off, Gaither said, and earned offers from a number of ACC programs following the state championship victory.

"On the court, there have been ups and downs, but playing in the ACC has been a dream come true," Trapp said.

Three years later, during his junior year at Clemson, Trapp tore his ACL and missed five months. Most ACL recoveries take 12-13 months post-surgery, but Trapp was back on the floor by December 2019 with the support of a knee brace. He had his career-night in the Carrier Dome just over a month later.

His high school point guard, Townsend, was in attendance that night for Trapp's shot.

"I have seen buzzers-beaters and game-winning shots on television, but to see it in person, and it be an old teammate, was surreal," Townsend said. "I haven't seen him that happy in awhile."

Off the basketball court, Trapp is a "country boy at heart." He still makes the two-hour drive from Clemson back to Eastover. He's one of few from the "small country town" who stayed and played basketball in the area.

"I get a lot of love when I go back home, in the grocery stores and places like that," Trapp said. "It is a blessing to look out for the kids and be an inspiration to somebody else."