

Miami

2010: 20-13 (4-12 ACC), Lost to Duke 77-74, ACC semifinals

In-conference offense: 1.00 point per possession (5th)

In-conference defense: 1.08 points allowed per possession (12th)

What Miami did well: *Make observers think they were not very good.*

The Hurricanes held the distinction of having the worst conference record in the ACC, but they may have a strong case for being the best last-place team ever. For starters, they were shorted a win based on their point differential. But in addition, they won games over 9-7 Wake Forest and 10-6 Virginia Tech before losing by three to Duke in the ACC tournament.

They also went unbeaten in non-conference play. Granted, it was a woefully easy schedule, but it did include a comfortable neutral-site win over South Carolina and a home win over Minnesota. Being the best last-place team ever is the ultimate in damning with faint praise, but it's also a good starting point to surprise some people in the coming season.

What we learned in 2010: *Certain schools will list your actual weight in the program, even if it is more than 300 pounds.*

The stories of Dexter Pittman's weight loss during his four years at Texas are legendary. When the Longhorns briefly reigned at the top of the opinion polls last season, much credit was given to Pittman and his improved physique. However, a quick check of the Texas media shows him as weighing 300 pounds entering his freshman and 290 entering his senior year. Not exactly the kind of thing that would make him a contender on the Biggest Loser. (Especially considering Pittman weighed in at 303 at the NBA Draft combine.)

But Miami apparently has no such reservations about listing its players' true weights, because last season they listed incoming freshman Reggie Johnson at 316 pounds which is clearly not the kind of number one would make up. It made Johnson the second heaviest

D-I player to see meaningful time last season and it also made him fit to reprise Chris Farley's role as a Chippendale dancer. The good news is that Johnson checks in lighter at 303 pounds headed into this season. We'll see if Pittman-like accolades follow.

What's in store for 2011: There are a few reasons to think that expectations for the Hurricanes should be elevated. After all, they were probably not the twelfth-best team in the conference last season. And their only personnel losses of note, Dwayne Collins and James Dews, are replaceable. Collins' departure opens up minutes for Johnson, who posted staggering numbers in a reserve role last season. There's a fair amount of uncertainty as to whether Miami can make the jump to at-large contender, but there's little doubt that among last-place finishers, the Hurricanes have the most reason for optimism. I don't think fans of Penn State, DePaul, Nebraska, Washington State, or LSU would disagree.

Prospectus says: The big questions are on defense where Miami has underperformed under Frank Haith's leadership. I suppose one could claim that Johnson will improve the team in this area as well, but the four games without Collins were an inconclusive indicator. Nonetheless, by the end of last season Miami and Virginia Tech were nearly indistinguishable in terms of skill. Virginia Tech will be ranked in the preseason polls and is projected as a single-digit seed in the NCAA tournament. Knowing that, Miami's goals should be an at-large bid. Keep in mind that there is but one senior in Miami's projected rotation. Whatever noise Miami makes this season should be amplified in 2012.

Meet the Hurricanes

Malcolm Grant (6-1, 180, Jr.). The Villanova transfer did not disappoint in his first season in Coral Gables. Grant was a threat from behind the three-point line and when distributing the basketball. He doesn't get to the rim very often (he actually posted a two-point accuracy that was five percentage points lower than his conversion rate from beyond the arc), but his backcourt mate fills that role well.

Durand Scott (6-3, 200, So.). Nominally Scott is a shooting guard, although he is much less likely to launch a perimeter shot than Grant and is almost equally likely to assist a teammate's made basket. Scott's particular talent is being the rare short-ish player that is a high-volume two-point shooter who is also able to make 50 percent of those shots.

Reggie Johnson (6-10, 303, So.). I am going to devote a few words to Mr. Johnson. Given equal playing time, he would appear to be an upgrade over Dwayne Collins. The main concern is that Johnson had the luxury of playing limited minutes, and could play a bit more aggressively as a result. However, when given increasing minutes in the absence of Collins over the last four games of the year, he wasn't able to reduce his foul rate significantly. On the plus side he was able to maintain the impressive production he showed in spot duty up to that point. (For the season, he posted an offensive rebound rate that would have ranked fifth in the nation had he played enough minutes.)

Something else worth noting: Johnson draws fouls. He was ninth on the team in minutes played, yet second in free throws attempted. He was awfully impressive at the stripe, making 79 percent of his attempts,

which ranked him ninth among players 6-9 or taller taking at least 100 attempts. Johnson's playing time is worth watching early in the season. If he manages to average 25 minutes a game, the Hurricanes offense could be among the best in the conference, and therefore the country.

DeQuan Jones (6-7, 220, Jr.). For the second consecutive season, Jones' outstanding athleticism has not translated into outstanding play on the court. He's ineffective beyond five feet, although he did post a decent combination of steals and blocks. He should find himself starting to open the season, and given the difficulties that Miami has traditionally had on the defensive end Jones will find minutes if he has an impact defensively.

Julian Gamble (6-9, 260, Jr.). Gamble found himself a spot in the starting lineup late in the season, mainly on the strength of his defense.

Adrian Thomas (6-7, 225, Sr.). Thomas finds himself suiting up for a sixth season after the NCAA ruled that having two of his previous five seasons cut short by injury after just four games merited a bonus year of eligibility. Thomas has made 40 percent of his somewhat selective three-point attempts in his career. Simply put, he's a low-volume but accurate shooter.

Rion Brown (6-5, 190, Fr.). The most likely freshman to contribute this season, Brown is an athletic wing from eastern Georgia.

Garrius Adams (6-6, 195, So.). Adams is an Adrian Thomas-in-waiting. As a freshman his rare shots were usually three-point attempts, of which he connected on 29 percent.