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Florida State Rides Wave of Momentum into 2007-08 Season with All-ACC Candidates Douglas, Rich and Swann Leading the Way for Talent-Laden Squad

Florida State, which averages more than 20 wins and has advanced to the postseason in the last two years, returns four starters and nine letterwinners for the 2007-08 season as it looks to continue a five-year upswing of success under head coach Leonard Hamilton during the 2007-08 season. The Seminoles will be led by a pair of veteran seniors — Jason Rich and Isaiah Swann — and a tested junior — Toney Douglas — as they continue to establish the Florida State basketball team as one of the top programs in the nation.

All-ACC candidates Douglas, Rich and Swann will anchor one of the ACC's deepest backcourt units and compete for honors throughout the season. The Seminoles' Dynamic Trio all averaged double figures in scoring and has started a combined 196 games during their careers.

Florida State returns four of its five starters from last season's lineup to form what will be one of the ACC's most experienced teams. The four returning starters — Rich, Swann, Douglas and junior Uche Echefu — have played in a combined 316 career games and started a combined 231 career games. Rich, who averaged 10.3 points per game in 2007, has started 63 of the last 64 games in the last two seasons while fellow senior Swann has been in the starting lineup in 63 of the last 65 games over the last two seasons. Douglas, who missed five games because of a broken hand during his sophomore season, has started 59 of 61 career games while Echefu started each of Florida State's 35 games during the 2006-07 season.

Led by Douglas' 12.7 points per game scoring average and Echefu's 4.3 rebounds per game average, the Seminoles return 66 percent of their scoring total and more than 70

percent of their rebounding totals from last year's 22-13 finish. Swann is the Seminoles' returning leader in three different categories — assists (3.1 apg), 3-point field goals made (68), 3-point field goals attempted (143) while fellow All-ACC candidates Toney Douglas (scoring and field goals made) and Jason Rich (free throws made and minutes played) are returning leaders in two categories each.

A look at the Seminoles' roster shows 15 players who will compete for playing time during the upcoming season with nearly half of those players having already earned extensive playing time during their careers. Hamilton adds a recruiting class that he feels will have an immediate impact on the team's positive fortunes to his already experienced group of players, thus forming the most talented and versatile team he has had during his tenure at Florida State. With his system firmly in place, Hamilton and his coaching staff will hit the ground running and begin the season with the pieces in place to make a run at a spot in the NCAA Tournament.

"We have players on our team that want to be coached, who want to learn from that coaching and become better players," said Hamilton. "That is always our goal and that is something we are very excited about as we begin this season. Players like Toney, Jason and Isaiah have consistently proven that they can be successful at a very high level. We feel they are ready to be successful on a night in and night-out basis. They understand the urgency of every game — not because they are seniors but because they are our group of leaders. They have learned that they can not take a game, a half or a

"Our freshmen are probably in position to have more of an opportunity to make more of an impact than the freshmen we have had in the past," said Hamilton. "They probably are a little more capable of making contributions at a faster rate. When I look at Solomon Alabi, Chris Blake, Jordan DeMercy and Julian Vaughn, I see four players who have been in situations where they have been challenged, exposed to winning at a high level and are further along than most incoming freshmen because of their backgrounds. We are very excited about their potential and look forward to them contributing to our success this season."

The Seminoles' senior class — Ralph Mims, Jason Rich and Isaiah Swann — came to Florida State with a goal of turning around the fortunes of the Florida State program. As the trio begins its final season in Tallahassee, they have largely achieved that goal. The team has played in back-to-back postseason tournaments for the first time since the 1992 and 1993 seasons, it has won at least 20 games in the last two seasons and it has defeated five nationally ranked teams during their tenure. The program is as solid as it has been in recent memory.

One thing is still missing from their resume, though — a trip to the NCAA Tournament. With their combined experience, talent levels and incredible desire, all signs point to that line being added to their resumes and their legacies as Seminole basketball players before the three graduate in the spring of 2008.

Rich returns as a four-year starter who has played in 95 games during the first three years of his career. He averaged 10.3 points per game as a junior to mark the second consecutive season he has averaged in double-figure scoring. Rich scored his career high of 24 points in

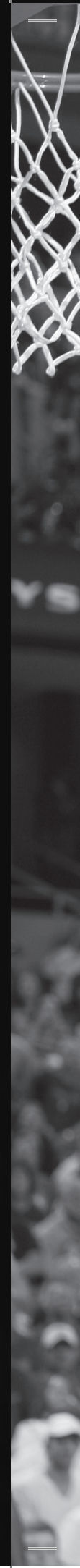
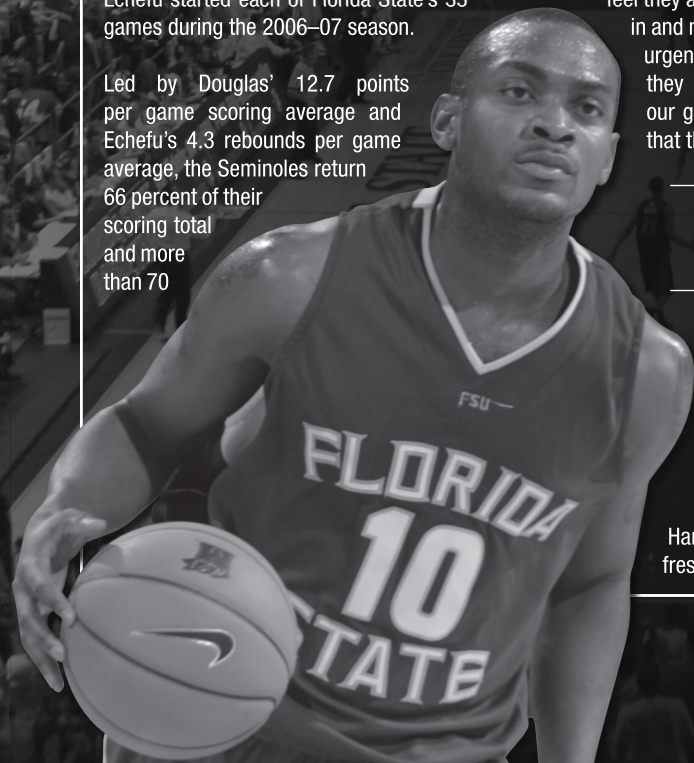
Florida State's victory over Maryland in 2007 and scored in double figures a career-high 21 times — including nine straight times during the months of December and January — as a junior.

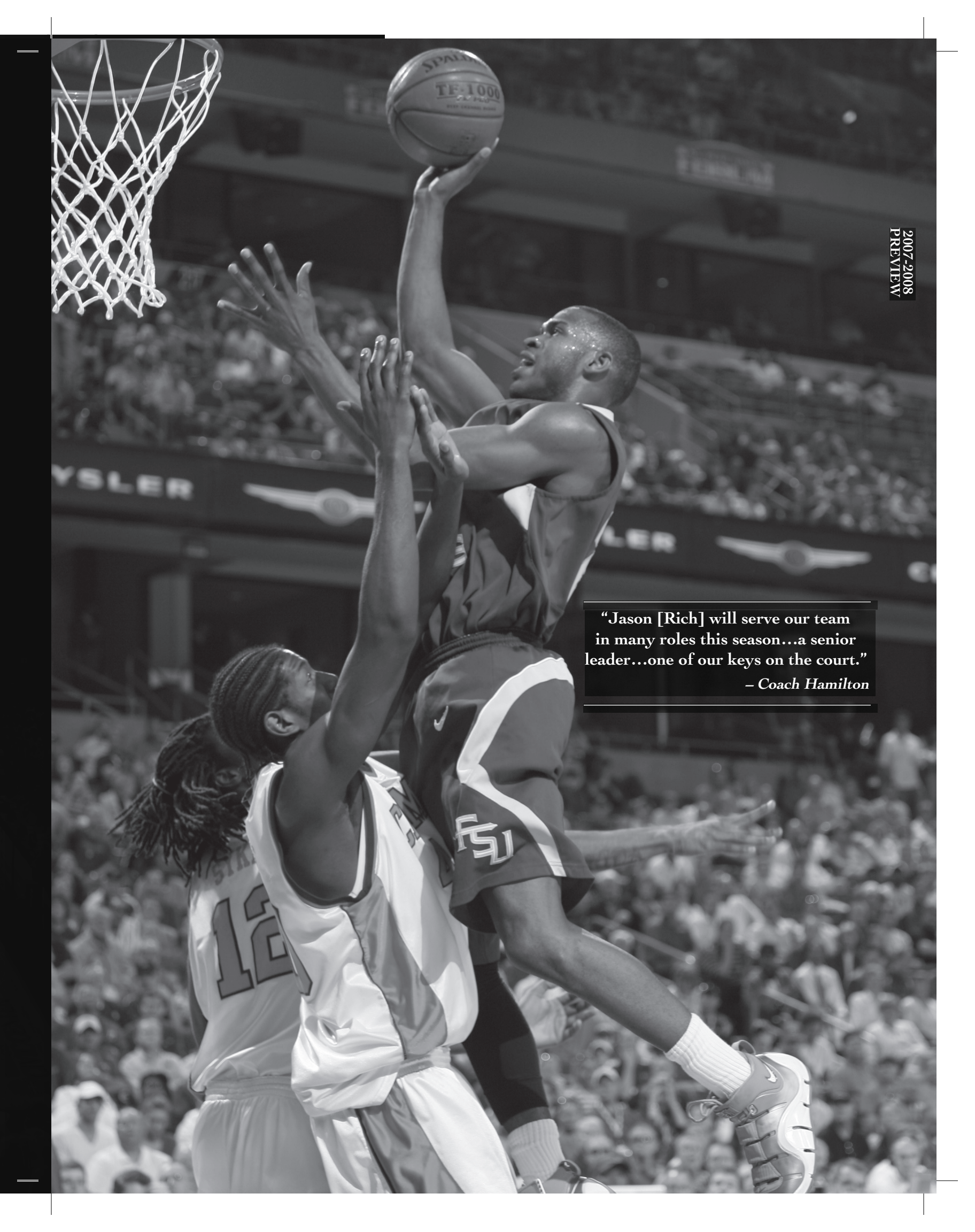
Rich, who led the Seminoles with a career-high .805 free throw shooting percentage during the 2006-07 season, is ranked 21st in school history with a career free throw shooting percentage of

Ralph Mims is one of Florida State's most valuable players.

single play off if we want to reach our goals at the end of the year. The fact that they have learned the importance and the value of every play and every shot is very satisfying to us as coaches."

Hamilton is also very excited about his freshman class.





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in many roles this season...a senior
leader...one of our keys on the court.”
– Coach Hamilton

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.762. He has improved his free throw shooting percentage in each of his first three years as a Seminole — in terms of free throws made, free throws attempted and free throw percentage. Rich averaged more than one full free throw attempt as a junior than he did as a freshman and improved his free throw shooting percentage by nearly one full percentage point during that time period. A defensive standout, he averages nearly three rebounds and one steal per game for his entire career.

“Jason will serve our team in many roles this season,” said Hamilton. “First and foremost, he will be a senior leader who will have to help lead us throughout the season for us to be successful. He has to become more consistent on the offensive and defensive ends of the court, and we feel that will come with his increased maturity. He will be one of our keys on the court in terms of getting us into our offensive sets and being a leader on defense in helping our younger guys when they are on the court. His experience will be put to the test and he needs to respond as he has done throughout his career.”

Swann is also one of the league’s most experienced players, having played in a team-leading 96 games entering the season. He is also one of the nation’s top returning shooters and one of the most athletic players in college basketball. Both of those traits will come in handy as Swann and the Seminoles continue their improvement and work toward their ultimate goal of playing deep into the NCAA Tournament.

Swann is ranked in the top 20 of five different career categories at Florida State entering his senior season. He begins the season ranked in the school’s top 15 in 3-point field goals made and attempted and has a strong chance of moving into the Seminoles’ all-time top 10 in both assists and steals. He made a career-high nine 3-point field goals against Mississippi State on March 20, 2007, and is among the most accurate 3-point shooters in the ACC for the upcoming season. He has made more than 37 percent of his career 3-point field goals and shot a career-high .410 from the bonusphere as a junior.

“Isaiah has the ability to be an outstanding player in the ACC and has the chance to be recognized for his play nationally this year,” said Hamilton. “The key for Isaiah is playing with the eye of the tiger in every game and instilling that sense of urgency in his teammates each time they step onto the court. We have learned too many times that taking one possession off or giving up one easy basket will hurt us. For us to continue to grow and meet our goals, we have to play as hard and as well as we can on every play.”

Mims’ play as the Seminoles’ starting point guard in seven games last season proved that he is one of Florida State’s most valuable players. He took Douglas’s place at the point guard position and led the Seminoles to three wins including one over Clemson in the ACC Tournament. He will fill a variety of roles this season at both guard positions and brings a tremendous amount of confidence to the court after earning increased and important playing time last season.

Mims averaged a career-high 2.1 assists per game as a junior and enters his fourth season looking to continue his annual upward progression of assists per game. He earned 74 assists during the 2006–07 season — his total as a junior was two more assists than he earned during his freshman and sophomore seasons combined (72). Mims earned his career high of seven assists in Florida State’s victories over Stetson and Providence as a junior. He also helped Florida State finish fifth in the ACC in steals as he averaged a career-high 1.0 steals per game (35 steals in 35 games) during the 2006–07 season and is one of four returning Seminoles who averaged at least one steal per game last season.

“Ralph played well for us last season and is comfortable in his role for our team this season,” said Hamilton. “He grew tremendously last season as we utilized his talents as our starting point guard when Toney was injured, and we expect him to use the experience he gained to be an even better player for us this season. The experience he gained last season will be invaluable for both Ralph and our team this season.”

Douglas, one of the most explosive point guards in the ACC, returns to lead the Seminoles from the point guard position for the second consecutive season. He averaged 12.7 points per game during the 2006–07 season and is the 10th-leading returning scorer in the ACC entering the 2007–08 season. The Seminoles’ point guard ranked 22nd

Douglas had an incredible impact on the Seminoles’ fortunes on both the offensive and defensive ends of the court last season. Case in point: in the five games Douglas missed (Feb. 11 through Feb. 24) the Seminoles averaged 65.4 points per game on the offensive end. In the final six games of the season upon his return, the Seminoles were 4-2 and averaged 77.4 points per game. Florida State was especially efficient in its first two games during the NIT as it averaged 82 points per game in victories over Toledo and Michigan.

“I expected to go through a period of adjustment,” said Hamilton. “The one thing that is going to allow him to play at the highest level is time. I thought we went through that period last season and I really liked what was happening. Toney was a major part of that with his play at the point guard position. We are looking forward to him surpassing that level of play this season. We will then be able to see how good of a player Toney really is.”

Three Seminoles — Douglas, Rich and Swann — enter the 2007–08 season poised to become the next three players in school history to reach the coveted 1,000 career point plateau. Douglas is the closest player to the coveted point scoring mark with 905 points and a 14.8 career points per game scoring average. He averages just over 452 points scored in his first two seasons and ranked second on the team with 380 points (12.7 ppg) despite missing five complete games with a broken hand last season. Rich enters his senior season with 823 career points and needs only 177 to become the 39th player in school history to reach the 1,000 points scored mark while Swann needs only 229 points to hit the 1,000-point mark.

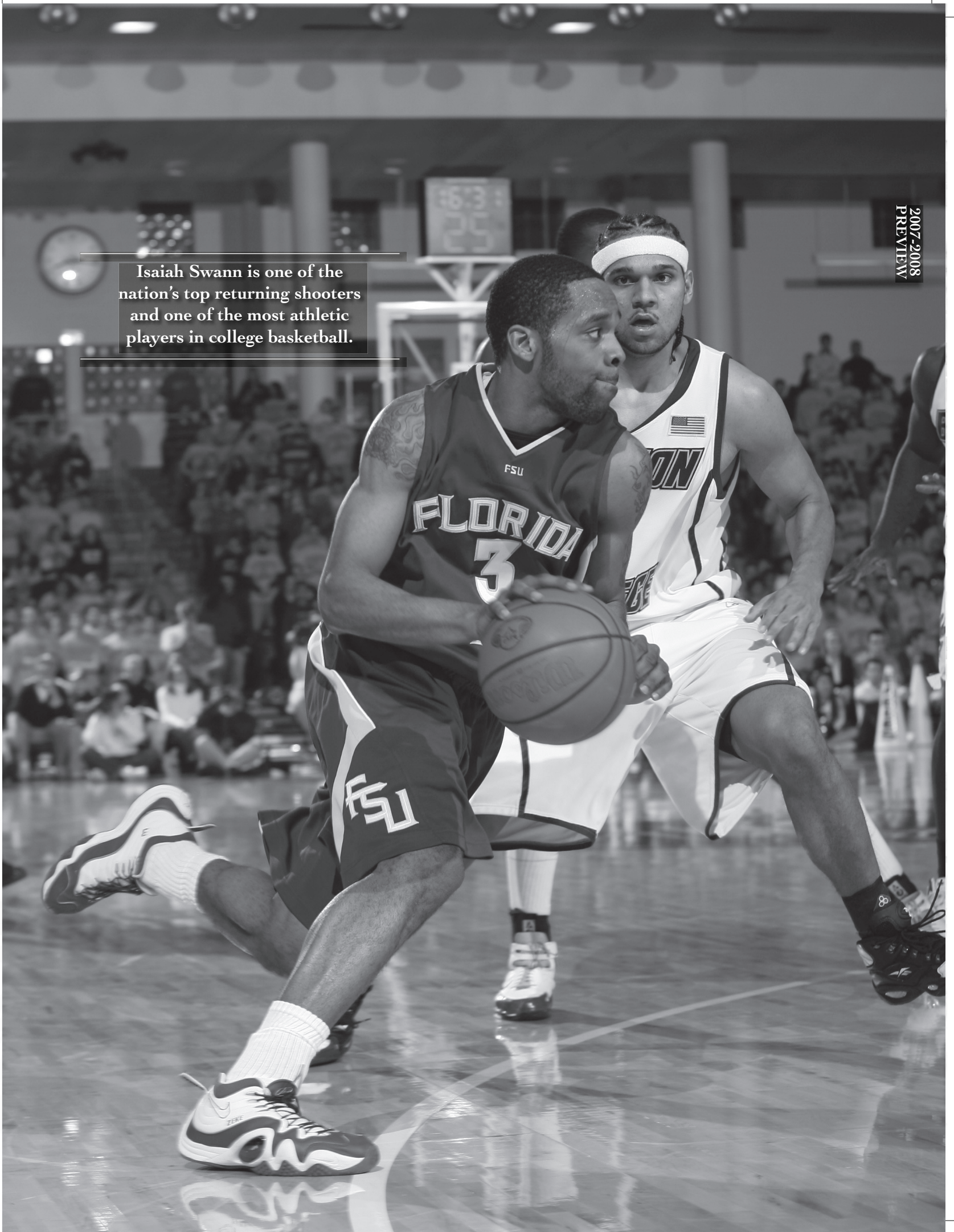
Echefu, a junior, also needs to continue his maturation process for the Seminoles to achieve their goals this season. He has played in 64 games during

Uche Echefu was one of the Seminoles’ main reasons why the team ranked ninth in the nation in free throw shooting percentage during the 2006–07 season.

in the ACC in scoring as a sophomore. It marked the second time in his career he ranked in the top 25 in one of the nation’s top leagues in scoring (he ranked fifth in the SEC in scoring as a freshman at Auburn during the 2004–05 season). Douglas missed five games with a hand injury and is fully healthy as the 2007–08 season begins.

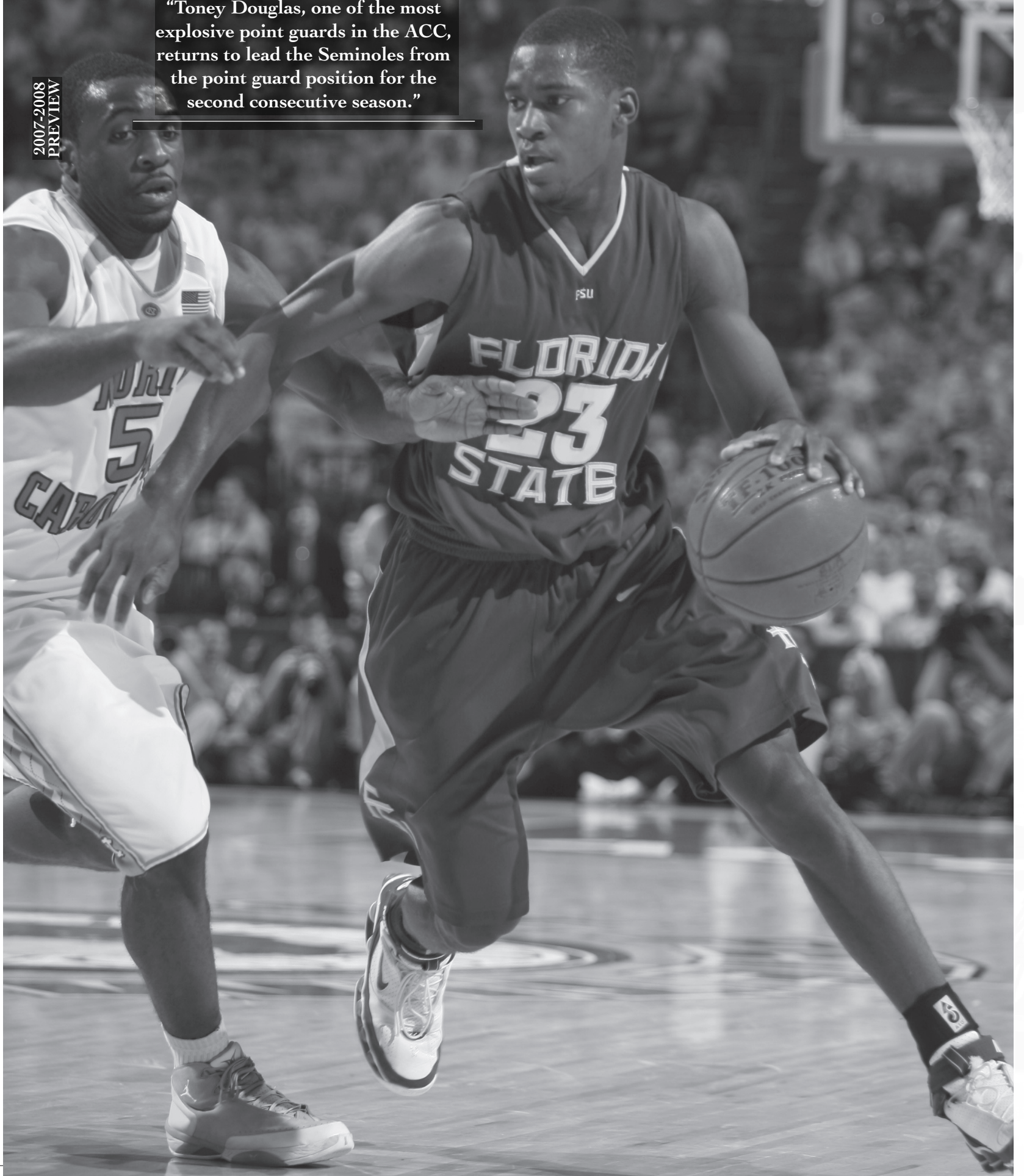


Isaiah Swann is one of the nation's top returning shooters and one of the most athletic players in college basketball.



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the first two years of his career and looks to be on the verge of his best season as a Seminole. Echefu started all 35 of the Seminoles' games as a sophomore and recorded career highs in virtually every statistical category.

Echefu was one of the Seminoles' main reasons why the team ranked ninth in the nation in free throw shooting percentage during the 2006-07 season. He was one of seven Seminoles who finished the 2006-07 season with a free throw shooting percentage above 75 percent. Echefu made a career-high 58 free throws and shot a career-high .773 from the free throw line in finishing as the Seminoles' fifth-leading scorer as a sophomore. Echefu improved his free throw shooting percentage by 22.8 percent as a sophomore (.773) compared to his freshman season (.545). His, as well as each member of the team's continued improvement from the free throw line will be a key to the Seminoles' success this season.

"The key to Uche's growth as a basketball player is continued improvement," said Hamilton. "We felt that he improved in so many different ways last season to reach the level where he began to become a good player. He has to improve this season as much as he did last season in order to earn increased playing time. That will not be a problem for Uche because he is a very committed and focused player."

Playing time is also the key to Casaan Breeden's continued improvement. Blessed with as much athletic ability and basketball knowledge as any player on the Seminoles' roster, the only thing that has stood in Breeden's way during the first two years in the program was playing time — that should increase dramatically now that All-American Al Thornton has taken his extraordinary talents to the NBA. (Thornton was a lottery selection by the Los Angeles Clippers in the 2007 NBA Draft.)

Breeden, who scored in double figures a career-high three times as a sophomore, enters his third season looking to have his most productive season as a Seminole. He has realized a steady increase in his statistics since his arrival as a freshman and will have to take his performance to its highest level to help Florida State reach its goals this season. He missed only one game as a sophomore and closed his season with a 10-point performance in the Seminoles' victory over Michigan in the second round of the NIT.

"Casaan has as much potential as any player on our team," said Hamilton. "His most important ally is playing time and he has worked extremely hard to ensure that he earns increased playing

time this season. We are really looking forward to seeing what Casaan can do as he begins to earn increased playing time and extended minutes in longer stretches on the court for our team this season."

Sophomore Ryan Reid was one of the most surprising players on the Seminoles' roster last year, and because of his production as a freshman, much is expected from him as a sophomore.

Reid played in all 35 games and averaged 16.1 minutes played per game for the Seminoles during the 2006-07 season. He was one of seven players on the roster who played in every game for Florida State. Reid, who finished third on the team in blocked shots with 16 and fourth on the team in rebounds with 113, was one of eight players who averaged in double figures for minutes played during his first season. He played in double-figure minutes in 32 of the Seminoles' 35 games and played his career high of 22 minutes against ACC opponents Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech and Clemson.

"The level of play that Ryan Reid achieved last season was a tremendous surprise for our team," said Hamilton. "Not only did he prove that he could play well at this level, he also proved that he was a much stronger player than we thought at the beginning of his freshman season. He played hard and played well throughout the season and didn't seem to hit the wall that most freshmen do midway through the year. That was very encouraging to our staff and showed us that as he continues to grow stronger, he will be able to play harder and for longer periods of time."

Florida State's freshman class could prove to be one of the top crop of newcomers in the conference.

"Casaan [Breeden] has as much potential as any player on our team. His most important ally is playing time."

— Coach Hamilton

Alabi, whose contributions as a defensive stopper in the Seminoles' lineup will be evident from the first day of practice, is a strong shot blocker who has an outstanding sense of timing on the defensive end of the court. In addition to his defensive abilities, Alabi is quickly refining his offensive abilities, which will make him more of a complete player during his career at Florida State. Alabi led Montverde Academy in Orlando, Fla., to an undefeated 30-0 record and a No. 4 national ranking in the final *USA Today* high school boys' basketball poll as a senior. Alabi and Montverde

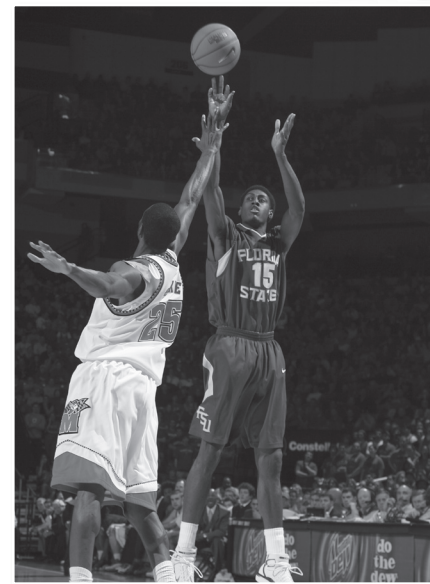
were named the National Champions in the *HoopsUSA.com* rankings. He was ranked as the No. 24-ranked overall player in the nation as a senior by *Rivals.com* and played for the Nigerian national team in the 2007 FIBA Under 19 World Championships. He averaged 9.2 points, 7.2 rebounds and a tournament-leading 2.8 blocks per game at the World Championships during the summer of 2007.

"Solomon's defensive abilities will allow us to play the way we have wanted to play as long as we have been at Florida State," said Hamilton. "He is a player who will command respect in the post and give our team a presence at that position. Our players will enjoy playing with Solomon at both ends of the court, and our coaching staff will enjoy watching him develop as both a player and a person."

Blake is an extremely athletic player who will complement the Seminoles' already strong and deep backcourt. He can handle the basketball, shoots well from the outside and is comfortable at both the point and shooting guard positions.

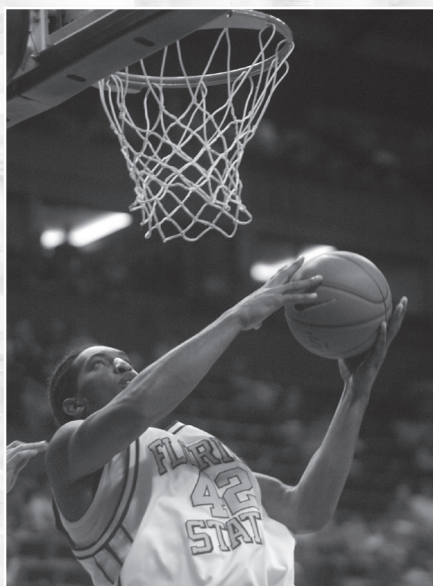
Blake led his high school team to the Class 6A state championship and earned All-State First-Team honors during his senior season. Nationally, he led his team to a No. 14 final ranking by *USA Today* as he averaged 21 points and six assists. He was also a finalist and the runner-up for Mr. Basketball honors in Class 6A in the state of Alabama as a senior.

"Chris Blake is a nice addition to our program," said Hamilton. "He will be a nice complement to Toney, Ralph, Jason and Isaiah once he earns playing time and breaks into our rotation. We like what he has showed us on the court and are looking for him to adapt to our system to put himself in position to earn increased playing time."



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DeMercy is a player who caught Florida State's eye late in the recruiting process and comes to Tallahassee with a chance to be an outstanding player in the ACC during his career. He is fundamentally very sound and a very smart basketball player. DeMercy averaged 9.4 points, 4.2 assists, 2.8 steals and 1.1 blocked shots in leading Norcross to the Class 5A state championship in Georgia and held the No. 12 national ranking by *USA Today*.

"Jordan is a hard worker and fits into our team concept very well," said Hamilton. "He has a strong knowledge of the game and plays bigger and better than people might think he is. Jordan has the ability to fill numerous roles for us, and we see him as a major contributor to our team this season."

Vaughn averaged 8.2 points and 10.2 rebounds to go along with 3.3 blocked shots per game in leading the Warriors to the No. 1 overall national ranking and the mythical national championship in the *USA Today's* Super 25 boys' high school basketball rankings for the 2007. He was also named Mr. Basketball in the state of Virginia following his senior season by the *Roanoke Times & World News*.

"Julian has outstanding abilities on both ends of the court, and we are going to take advantage of those skills throughout his career," said Hamilton. "He plays bigger than he is on the block and smaller than he is with the basketball in his hands. His is an outstanding rebounder and a skillful dribbler and shooter; he will become a very good player during his career here at Florida State."

Florida State's roster is rounded out with four players — Brian Hoff, Matt Zitani, Jordan Bolton and Ben O'Donnell — who will all contribute to the Seminoles' success this season.

Hoff, in his third season as a member of the Seminole men's basketball team, has worked to increase his playing time during the first two years

Ryan Reid was one of the most surprising players on the Seminoles' roster last year, and much is expected of him as a sophomore.

of his career. He established career-high statistics in virtually every category as a sophomore, playing in 11 games during the 2006–07 season — nearly triple the number of games he played in (four) as a freshman. Hoff earned playing time in an ACC game for the first time in his career (against Miami and NC State) and earned playing time in the postseason with two appearances in the 2007 MasterCard NIT (against Toledo and Michigan).

Zitani is playing his final season at Florida State as a graduate student after earning his bachelor's degree in business management during spring 2007 commencement exercises. He is in his third season as a member of the basketball team after spending one season playing at Indian River Community College in 2005. Zitani transferred to Florida State during the summer of 2006 and earned a spot on the team following campus-wide tryouts in October of 2005. He played in a career-high 12 games during the 2006–07 season to bring his two-year career total of games played to 16.

"We are happy to have both Brian and Matt on our team again this season," said Hamilton. "They are both hard-working players who are good teammates. Their hard work in practice makes us better as a team."

Bolton and O'Donnell, both guards, were added to the team as invited walk-ons prior to the beginning of the season. Bolton graduated from Winter Park High School in 2007 where he earned All-State First-Team honors in Class 6A by the Florida Sports Writers Association, averaging a near double-double of 19.9 points, 9.9 rebounds, 3.4 assists and 2.3 steals as a senior. O'Donnell graduated from Largo High School in 2007 and earned All-State Honorable Mention honors following his senior season. He averaged 12.8 points and 5.1 assists and shot .487 from the field, .350 from the 3-point line and .740 from the free throw line as a senior.

The Seminoles will play 10 teams that were nationally ranked a year ago and will face nine teams that played in the 2007 NCAA Tournament and three teams that competed in last year's NIT as they continue to play one of the nation's most challenging schedules.

The Seminoles will face the NCAA National Champions (Florida), one team that advanced to the Elite Eight (North Carolina), one team that advanced to the Sweet 16 (Butler) and four teams that won at least one game in the NCAA Tournament (Boston College, Maryland, Virginia and Virginia Tech). The Seminoles are scheduled to face one team that won a national championship (Florida, NCAA) and another that played for a national championship (Clemson, NIT).

In addition to facing eight ACC teams that were nationally ranked last season, the Seminoles will play Florida, Butler (who ranked as high as 10th nationally in 2006–07) and a Tubby Smith-coached Minnesota team in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge. Smith is in his first season with the Gophers after nine years as the head coach at Kentucky. He led the Wildcats to the 1997 National Championship and to a national ranking as high as 18th during the 2006–07 season.

The Seminoles will also face Providence from the Big East and UAB from Conference USA — two teams picked to finish among the top teams in their respective leagues. Providence returns four starters while UAB is picked to challenge Memphis for the CUSA Championship. Florida State will play a second team from the Big East — USF — and its new head coach Stan Heath — in the third round of the Glenn Wilkes Classic.

"Our non-conference schedule will definitely prepare us for our ACC schedule which begins in December," said Hamilton. "The teams that we will play in November and December — Butler, Providence, UAB, USF and Minnesota — will provide us the types of opponents who will help us become a better team as well as help us stay in the national forefront once conference play across the nation heats up. The quality of the teams we will play once the ACC schedule begins is undeniable with each of our conference opponents battling for a spot in the NCAA Tournament."