

## **Whitewater Alum Helps FSU Reach top 25**

By Monroe Roark  
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Some basketball fans in Fayette County are watching the Florida State Seminoles with some interest this season.

One of the team's leaders on the court is senior Phil Cofer, who a few years ago was a star center-forward for a Whitewater Wildcats squad that reached the state tournament in his final year. After using his 6-foot-8 frame to dominate in the paint in high school, he has adapted to the college game by moving away from the basket and becoming a legitimate three-point threat.

"Never," he said simply when asked about his long-range shooting at Whitewater during a recent phone interview with the Citizen. "No jumpers in his school."

Contrast that with the Dec. 16 game against Oklahoma State in the Orange Bowl Classic in which he sank a career-high five three-pointers, the second time in five games he made four or more from behind the arc. His 22 points in that game was also a career high, his second 20-point game of the season.

His outside shooting is a big change not only from his high school days but also from his first three years at Florida State. Cofer is 13-of-27 (48 percent) on three-pointers in 12 games after converting 12 from long range in his previous 76 games since arriving in Tallahassee.

"I worked a lot on it in the off-season, fixing little stuff in my shot," he said. "In high school I had a hitch in my shot."

Cofer is the most experienced Seminole going into this season. He started 24 of 33 games as a freshman but was sidelined much of his sophomore year with an ankle injury. He came back last year and played in nearly every game but averaged only 2.9 points.

This year he is up to just over 13 points per game with more double-figure scoring than in his first three years combined. The team is also seeing a level of success not reached in recent years.

As of Dec. 22 the Seminoles were in the 23rd slot in the AP top 25, having improved to 11-1 overall with home wins over Charleston Southern and Southern Mississippi. The team opened the season 9-0 before falling 71-70 to Oklahoma State.

But the team came out of Christmas break with a brutal stretch that should give an accurate indication of whether Florida State is for real. The opening game in Atlantic Coast Conference play was a Dec. 30 loss in a close game at Duke, followed by an upset over defending national champion North Carolina at home Jan. 3.

Next is a Jan. 7 road tilt at Miami. The Blue Devils, Tar Heels and Hurricanes were all ranked in the AP poll's top 15 as of Jan. 4, with the Seminoles at 24th.

Having played a considerable amount, the past three seasons, Cofer knows well how teams like Duke enjoy a home-court advantage because of their raucous crowds. "When you first get there, it gets kind of crazy when all the fans show up," he said.

The home crowd in Tallahassee is making some noise of its own this year and trying to get to that level. The results have not gone unnoticed by the Seminole players.

"That's what has been helping us through this season a lot, having that atmosphere and fan support," Cofer acknowledged.

The sociology major is the son of Michael and Reba Cofer, who still live in Fayette County. They will no doubt be following, along with other interested fans, a busy two months of basketball leading up to the ACC tournament in Brooklyn's Barclay Center and hopefully an appearance in the NCAA tournament.