

## **The Next Big Thing At Florida State**

By Corey Clark

Warchant

March 16, 2018

This isn't hyperbole. Though it's going to seem like it when you read this next sentence.

Ike Obiagu has a chance to be the best shot-blocker in the ACC in the last 20 years.

He has a chance to be the best shot-blocker in FSU history.

And he might already be the best Leonard Hamilton has ever coached.

After a recent game, I asked the Florida State coach if he had ever coached a freshman as good at blocking shots as his 7-foot center.

He paused for a moment.

"Maybe Sam Bowie," said Hamilton, who was an assistant at Kentucky when Bowie starred for the Wildcats and then famously was selected before Michael Jordan as the No. 2 overall pick in the 1984 NBA Draft.

That's it. That's the list.

That's the ceiling Obiagu has.

"There is no question that he will lead the nation in blocked shots at some point of time in his career," Hamilton said.

Over the last four games, Obiagu has blocked 22 shots. In just 65 minutes played.

He ranks fourth in the ACC with 67 blocked shot this season, despite averaging just 11 minutes per game.

He's not skilled offensively. Not yet. He's a work in progress on that end, obviously.

But on defense, he's proving to be a phenomenon. If you prorated his minutes out to playing a full game, he'd be averaging almost eight blocked shots per contest. For perspective, the national leader in 2018 averages four blocks per game.

"He just has it," FSU junior Terance Mann said. "There's some guys who have it, and he definitely does. I've never seen it before, like that."

Mann admits he's had a couple of shots pinned in practice.

So did fellow leading scorers Phil Cofer and Braian Angola, who tried to dunk on the freshman early in preseason practice.

"That didn't work out," Angola said with a smile.

Obiagu is blessed physically, obviously.

He's 7 feet tall and has real spring when he jumps. But there's more to it than that. There are a lot of tall guys in college basketball who can jump. There's nobody else averaging a blocked shot every five minutes.

"There's no question he has an uncanny knack for timing on the shots," Hamilton said. "He just has a good feel for that. ... He's much further along (at this stage of his career) than some of the other big guys that we've had in the past. Solomon Alabi, guys like that, he's surpassed them already with just his knowledge of the game, his ability to absorb things.

"But one thing that's apparent, he can rebound and block shots."

It came out of necessity, too.

When Obiagu arrived from Nigeria for his freshman year of high school, he had never played organized basketball. And despite his physical tools, he didn't make the varsity team as either a freshman or a sophomore.

So before his junior season, to get any sort of significant action, he knew he needed to develop and cultivate an elite skill.

"I got zero playing time," Obiagu said. "I figured out that I've got to do something to at least stay on the floor. So that's something I just picked up and carried along with me."

Soon, Obiagu started swatting everything he saw. He blocked 330 shots over his final two years of high school, including 201 as a senior at Greenforest Christian Academy in Georgia.

"I just kept getting better at it," Obiagu said. "I don't really think about fouls. If I see someone look like they're about to shoot a shot, I go get it."

At a rate that is bordering on absurd.

Obiagu's 67 blocks is the third most by a freshman in FSU history -- behind Corey Louis (74) and Solomon Alabi (73). Both Louis and Alabi played many more minutes as rookies than Obiagu, who is still a massive project on the offensive end.

But as Obiagu gets more comfortable on that side of the floor, he'll be able to stay on the floor more and more for Hamilton's team. And then you can expect those blocked-shot records to fall.