

## **Turpin Relishes Return**

By Tim Linafelt  
Seminoles.com  
November 1, 2014

His younger teammates call him “graybeard.” They joke that he’s drawing Social Security and that there’s a good chance he’ll be at Florida State for their senior years, too.

But no matter how much teasing they throw his way, make no mistake: the Seminoles are glad to have Kiel Turpin back in the lineup.

A rare sixth-year senior, Turpin is set to return after spending a year recovering from a knee injury. He and the Seminoles will host Embry-Riddle in their first exhibition game on Monday at 7 p.m.

“It was a long time coming,” said junior guard Devon Bookert, Turpin’s friend and teammate.

He’s not kidding.

### **‘It was pretty painful’**

Turpin, a 7-foot center, arrived in Tallahassee in 2011, a junior college transfer from Normal, Ill.

But his FSU career got sidetracked before it even started when doctors discovered that he had a slight heart murmur. He was eventually cleared to play, but then came down with a lengthy illness that led to a redshirt year.

Turpin showed promise during the 2012-13 season. He started 25 games and averaged 5.4 points, 3.0 rebounds and 1.7 blocked shots per contest.

Any progress he made, though, was derailed by a preseason knee injury suffered last October.

The injury was diagnosed as a stress reaction to the patella tendon in his knee, a byproduct of the strain placed on Turpin’s knees by his 7-foot, 240-pound frame.

“(Big men) get a lot of great forces there compared to the average-type person,” FSU team trainer Sam Lunt said, “Just because of the laws of physics.

“He had a lot of inflammation there and it was pretty painful. Obviously if you can’t run and jump without pain, it’s hard to be successful playing basketball.”

Turpin spent the entire season feeling like he was almost ready to play. But he could never get over the “almost” hump. Big guys, Lunt said, just take longer to heal.

Finally, in December, coach Leonard Hamilton pulled Turpin aside and said he planned to seek a medical hardship waiver from the NCAA. Turpin would have to miss the entire season, but, if the NCAA approved, he could return next year.

“Coach Ham kind of told me that I needed to be a little selfish in this situation,” Turpin said. “And luckily it turned out right.” That’s not to say it was easy. Turpin could only watch as FSU’s depth-deprived frontcourt went through some growing pains. Then, after the season, waiting for the NCAA’s decision was nearly unbearable. He went months at a time without hearing anything about his case.

“I was kind of freaking out at the middle of summer,” Turpin said. “Because you’re never really sure if you’re going to get your sixth year back or not. Unfortunately, I think mine ... took longer than usual.”

Finally, on June 3 – nearly six months after his original application – Turpin received the word that his hardship waiver had been approved. He had another year to play basketball.

Turpin first called his mother, Lisa Nichols.

“She was kind of freaking out, too. She was a little concerned that I wouldn’t get it back,” Turpin said. “But to be able to give FSU another year and, hopefully, end it strong – the way I want to, is pretty great, really

### **‘Shaking the rust off’**

Turpin knows that if he's going to finish strong, he still has lots of work to do. Both mentally – he hasn't played a competitive game since March 19, 2013 – and physically.

To that end, Turpin continued to participate in practice last year and devoted himself to studying coach Hamilton's system. And he's already shed some of the weight he gained over the last year, down from 260 pounds to about 245.

"Turpin is shaking the rust off. He's not quite there yet," Hamilton said. "I think he's 100-percent recovered now, but he has a lot of work he needs to do in terms of getting his timing and athleticism back. (But) he's probably improved his skills."

And that's welcome news for an FSU team that has high hopes after ending last season in the NIT semifinals.

Not only will Turpin add another 7-footer to the lineup, but he'll also provide a big boost to FSU's junior big-man duo of Michael Ojo and Boris Bojanovsky.

"Having him out there is really accelerating their progress," Hamilton said.

"Sometimes (last year) we'd get into foul trouble, maybe tired," Bojanovsky said. "You didn't get a break sometimes. Maybe we weren't as aggressive because we were tired. So it's going to be good to have Kiel back."

**'End it on the highest note possible.'**

However long his road has been, Turpin knows that this is it. He recently celebrated his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday and, all kidding aside, won't be back for another year.

He of course is itching to play, but he wants to play well. And he wants his last season to end on college basketball's biggest stage.

As FSU's only senior, Turpin is also the only player on FSU's roster to have experienced an NCAA tournament. He was there in 2012, but didn't play.

He wants to change that this season.

"I feel like that's what drives this team this year," Turpin said. "We all want to get to the NCAA tournament and last long in the tournament and possibly get a national championship.

"That's how I want to end my career -- especially as a Seminole. End it on the highest note possible."