

## **Mfiondu Kabengele Went From Under-Recruited To A Star For Florida State**

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An hour and fifteen minutes away from Syracuse, down Interstate 81, stands the only school that offered Mfiondu Kabengele a basketball scholarship out of high school: Binghamton.

He was eager to play basketball and accept his first collegiate offer, knowing no Power five schools would contact him. But with guidance from his coach at Corpus Christi High School in Canada, Kabengele bypassed Binghamton's offer. Instead, he elected to attend the Bosco Institute in Indiana in hopes of playing for a better school.

Three years after taking a chance on himself, Kabengele's decision has paid dividends for No. 22 Florida State (16-5, 4-4 Atlantic Coast). After helping lead FSU to an Elite Eight appearance in 2018, the 6-foot-10 redshirt sophomore has become the Seminoles leading scorer (13 points per game) despite averaging under 20 minutes per contest.

With a 26-point outing against Boston College and a 24-point performance against then-No. 1 Duke, Kabengele has gained attention from professional scouts as he continues his third season with the program.

"He has worked on his body, his shooting and rebounding abilities, his ability to block shots, his knowledge of reading defenses to help on our team on offense," FSU head coach Leonard Hamilton said. "I think he has just scratched the surface of his potential."

Kabengele is the nephew of former NBA player and Hall of Famer Dikembe Mutombo, who is 7-foot-2. While some of his skills came naturally from his physique, it took a three-inch growth spurt to get recognized.

Slowly, the now 6-foot-10 forward gained attention from mid-major schools like St. Bonaventure. Soon, Florida State became the first Power five school to give him an offer. ESPN ranked him as a three-star prospect, and other schools soon followed suit.

But Florida State was the first Power five school to give him a chance. So he chose to play for the Seminoles. When he arrived, the freshman didn't expect to be a redshirt. But after some convincing, he "took it with open arms."

"I knew, when they recruited me, they were the first school to trust me," Kabengele said, "so I must go with their word because they have trust in me, and I have trust in them."

Last year, he was given a chance to play and thrived as a reliable sixth man.

In the postseason, he averaged 8.3 points in the middle, and lead the team with 5.8 rebounds and two blocks per game. He recorded his second career double-double in a 67-54 first round win over eighth-seeded Missouri and posted nine points and six rebounds over No. 1 seed Xavier to get to the Sweet Sixteen.

"He was a big part of (the Tournament run) because he came in and made sure there was no different energy, made sure that we were all on our Ps and Qs," FSU teammate PJ Savoy said. "He's kind of like the floor general cause he sees everything because he's in the back."

Kabengele came into his redshirt sophomore year playing even better. In the offseason, he focused on conditioning, citing how taxing setting ball screens, guarding the post and constantly crashing the rim is on his body. He also worked to improve his outside shot. With more playing time, his field goal percentage has increased nearly two percentage points this season. He's also shooting 33.3 percent from three and is close to eclipsing his 3-point season total from last year (10).

In a game against then-No. 1 Duke on Jan. 12, Kabengele posted 24 points and 10 rebounds, catching the eyes of NBA scouts catching the eyes of NBA scouts in attendance.

He tries not to focus on his NBA stock, instead honing in on his current role: to grab rebounds. When Kabengele attacks the glass, he feels the rest of his game will follow. He doesn't worry about proving he belongs, saying that kind of "baggage" would only detract from the game.'

"He's worked so hard for everything he has," Savoy said. "You can't let that go unnoticed."