

James Allowed to Play; Hearing Set for Feb. 19

The Associated Press

CLEVELAND — LeBron James' next court date is Saturday. He won't be bringing his lawyers.

Now that he has been given permission by a judge to continue playing, James will return to the floor this weekend when top-ranked Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary plays in a tournament in Trenton, N.J.

At least for a few days. James had his eligibility restored Wednesday when a judge granted a temporary restraining order, allowing the senior superstar to play three of four games remaining in the regular season.

James faces another hearing on Feb. 19 when a judge will rule whether to grant a permanent order to block a state commission's ruling that the 18-year-old violated amateur rules by accepting two sports jerseys — valued at \$845 — from a clothing store.

Before then, James can concentrate on trying to win a state title, something his attorney, Fred Nance, argued that he was being denied.

On Saturday, the Fighting Irish (14-1) play nationally ranked Los Angeles Westchester, led by UCLA-bound Trevor Ariza in the Prime Time Shootout.

James practiced with his teammates on Wednesday shortly after learning he had been reinstated. Coach Dru Joyce said the nation's best player didn't miss a beat during his absence, which began last Friday when the Ohio High School Athletic Association declared him ineligible for breaking one of its rules on amateurism.

"Bron's in great shape, and he didn't miss anything during the layoff," Joyce said.

Nearly every move James makes these days is either being scrutinized, publicized or debated. The spotlight is brighter

than ever on James, who is expected to be the No. 1 pick in this year's NBA draft.

Joyce isn't worried about the extra attention distracting James.

"If anything, it's going to make him more focused," said Joyce, who has known James for about nine years, having coached him at the AAU level. "He wants to move on and just play basketball. That's what we all want to do."

Following the OHSAA's decision, James had to sit for the first time in his career and nervously watched from the bench as his teammates beat Canton McKinley 63-62. He'll miss a Feb. 23 home game against Toledo Scott as part of the judge's ruling.

Despite playing without James, the Fighting Irish, whose only loss is a forfeit which came as part of the OHSAA's decision against James, showed they're a pretty good squad. "These kids had a lot of confidence before they had to play without 'Bron,'" Joyce said. "They've accepted their roles on this team and that's why we're as good as we are."

Joyce is relieved to have James back. But he said there was no excessive celebrating when he and his players learned James would be rejoining them.

"I kind of stick to the John Wooden philosophy," Joyce said. "I don't like emotional highs because you always have valleys. The guys were happy, but it wasn't the kind of jumping around. It's about business here and it's about playing basketball."

FSU Rematch Has Different Feel for UNC

Staff Report

North Carolina was sitting pretty. Unbeaten in the ACC, with wins against Kansas and Stanford under their belts, the 7-2 Tar Heels seemed well on their way back to the NCAA tournament after a one-year hiatus.

That's how things stood after UNC's last encounter with Florida State, a 69-48 Tar Heel victory at FSU on Dec. 22.

On Saturday, North Carolina will tangle with the Seminoles again, but this time UNC is fighting to stay above .500, the minimum winning percentage required to reach the NIT.

"We have to keep it in our minds that the season is only halfway over," said UNC forward David Noel. "Anything can happen."

Indeed, much already has happened that the Tar Heels didn't expect.

Certainly no one was counting on an injury to center Sean May, the Tar Heels' lone physical presence inside. Since May went down, the Tar Heels have gone 4-8.

Freshmen Byron Sanders and Damion Grant have shown occasional flashes of defensive competence, but both players are huge liabilities on the offensive end.

Until one of them can learn to receive an entry pass without juggling the ball three or four times, the Tar Heels are better off

playing 4-on-5 on the offensive end.

The recent struggles of Rashad McCants also have come as somewhat of a surprise. The freshman remains UNC's leading scorer on the season, but over the last three games he has shot just 25.6 percent and averaged just 9 points per game.

Perhaps McCants' problems are a result of his removal from UNC's starting lineup by Coach Matt Doherty before the Wake Forest game. Or, perhaps the benching was in response to his poor play.

"(Being benched is) not something you just smile about, but it's also not something I can always do something about," McCants said. "I have to do what's best for the team."

Despite UNC's current five-game losing streak, the Tar Heels have some reason to be optimistic. May could be back in time for UNC's game against Maryland on Feb. 22. Point guard Raymond Felton, forward Jawad Williams and Noel have been playing very well of late.

And although the Tar Heels couldn't pull out wins against Wake or Duke, they did prove something to themselves: they can compete with the ACC's best, even without May or an effective McCants.

— Compiled by Aaron Pitt

THE LOWDOWN ON SATURDAY'S GAME

North Carolina
(11-10, 2-6 ACC)
VS.
Florida State
(11-8, 2-6)

PROBABLE STARTERS

FSU

- C: Trevor Harvey, 6-11
- F: Anthony Richardson, 6-7
- F: Michael Joiner, 6-7
- G: Tim Pickett, 6-4
- G: Nate Johnson, 6-3

UNC

- C: Byron Sanders, 6-9
- F: Jawad Williams, 6-8 1/2
- F: David Noel 6-6
- G: Jackie Manuel, 6-5
- G: Raymond Felton, 6-0 1/2

Game: Florida State at North Carolina
Time: Saturday, 1 p.m.
Location: Dean Smith Center
Radio: 100.7 FM, WCHL-1360 AM
Television: RJ

Keys for UNC: Stopping Florida State is as simple as stopping Pickett. The junior guard leads the Seminoles with 18.0 points and 6.0 rebounds per game. Manuel must play tight and keep him out of the lane and off the glass. Pickett accounts for more than 25 percent of FSU's points, so the Tar Heels will do everything they can to take him out of his game and make the Seminole frontcourt beat them.

Keys for FSU: The Seminoles' defense has held opponents to just 38.4 percent from the floor, sixth-best in the nation. Felton, Williams and Noel are playing with a lot of confidence on the offensive end, so the 'Noles will throw a variety of defensive looks at them and try to rattle them early. Offensively, FSU must improve on its 1-of-16 performance from behind the arc against UNC in December.

UNC Bench: UNC's leading scorer, Rashad McCants, has been in a dreadful funk. A strong performance from him Saturday would give the Tar Heels a huge boost.

FSU Bench: Florida State's bench is nearly as thin as UNC's. Freshman point guard Todd Galloway leads the team in 3-point percentage.

Prediction: UNC 74, FSU 60

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