

# Ferrell, VanVleet are familiar foes

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OMAHA — Almost everything that happened to Yogi Ferrell, Fred VanVleet eventually got in on, too.

Ferrell was first in achieving prominence on the summer-league circuit, gaining recruiting attention and becoming a leader of one of the nation's top college basketball teams.

VanVleet caught Ferrell eventually as a less-hyped youth and high school player. They're virtually equals now, junior point guards looking to guide their teams deep into the NCAA Tournament.

One can — possibly permanently — claim the upper hand when Ferrell leads Indiana against VanVleet and Wichita State on Friday in the CenturyLink Center.

"I think he's gotten a lot better and obviously he's been working his butt off, as I have," VanVleet said of Ferrell. "We both came a long ways since then. He was kind of a phenom in high school, I would say, throughout our area."

While VanVleet was trying to get on the radar of college coaches as a high school player in Rockford, Ill., Ferrell was a state away in Indiana and had already become familiar with the spotlight.

Ferrell, from Indianapolis, was ranked No. 1 in the class of 2012 while in fourth grade. A two year-departure from AAU basketball later affected his rankings, but he was highly sought-after while at Park Tudor High. As a senior, he was ranked in the top 25 by many recruiting services.

"It was a lot of fun, really," Ferrell said of being a ranked elementary school player. "That was obviously a long time ago. It was real great being in the newspaper and stuff like that."

As a freshman, Ferrell started every game for the Hoosiers, ranked No. 1 in the preseason with current NBA players Victor Oladipo and Cody Zeller. Coach Tom Crean wanted Ferrell for many of the same reasons Marshall coveted VanVleet.

"He's a winner," Crean said. "He won in high school. I'm not really sure what he did in junior high and things like that — I would imagine he won. Since I've known him, he's won."

VanVleet wasn't ranked by recruiting services until late in his senior year. The turning point was his performance in AAU games against Ferrell, current Kentucky

guard Andrew Harrison and other top players.

His year didn't end joining Ferrell as a McDonald's All-American, but his profile increased. He was ranked in the top 100 by ESPN, beyond the scope of the anonymous low-major schools that had expressed interest to that point and earning requests from more prominent schools.

"I definitely see that now, him being a great guard, leading," Ferrell said. "He can definitely knock down the big shot. One thing I remember (is) he's a great facilitator. That's one thing he does very well, gets his guys involved and makes his teammates better."

While VanVleet played an important role for WSU during their run to the 2013 Final Four, his freshman season was a story of fits and starts. He averaged 16 minutes behind starter Malcolm Armstead and didn't blossom until his sophomore season, when he was named Missouri Valley Conference Player of the Year.

"I'm not sure what I would prefer," VanVleet said. "In hindsight it worked out for me. There's not much desire to be anything other than what I am. (Ferrell) earned it, he had the respect. I think he was in a bigger market than me, and those type of things go into effect."

VanVleet and Ferrell are equally crucial to their teams — virtually indispensable.

The 6-foot, 180-pound Ferrell is one of two current players who was with the Hoosiers when they advanced to the Elite Eight, a freshman then but now a badly needed veteran presence for a team that will likely start two sophomores and two freshmen.

Ferrell averages 16.1 points and 4.9 assists while shooting nearly 41 percent from three-point range.

VanVleet's numbers are similar — a little less scoring, a few more assists — and his traits are identical. The 6-foot, 195-pounder brings a calmness to the Shockers that, even with a veteran starting lineup, they may find more difficult to reach without him.

It took about a decade, but VanVleet and Ferrell became equals, just in time for that to become meaningless.

"We're both here now and it doesn't really matter the paths that got us here," VanVleet said. "It's just about us and our teams and who is going to play the best as a team on Friday, rather than me versus Yogi."