

## **FSU defense returns to form as young centers begin to blossom 7-footers Boris Bojanovsky and Michael Ojo have overwhelmed opponents with their length**

By Brendan Sonnone, Orlando Sentinel  
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TALLAHASSEE – Before the season started, Florida State coach Leonard Hamilton wrote down a list of key defensive statistics from the previous year on a whiteboard.

The numbers were meant to serve as a not-so-gentle reminder to FSU players about the disappointment of the 2013 campaign and the drastic disintegration of a once great defense.

Hamilton-coaches teams traditionally do well in opponent field-goal percentage, blocked shots, points per game, but the Seminoles suffered a major setback last year.

Quietly, FSU's defense has returned to prominence.

Two sophomore centers are leading the Seminoles' defensive resurgence: Boris Bojanovsky and Michael Ojo.

"Last year, we were bad on defense," Bojanovsky said. "I think all the time we've spent together, down the stretch it helps. ... We're more used to playing together, so that's why we're more confident on defense."

The Seminoles look to avenge their only conference loss Saturday at noon when they play at Virginia.

FSU's is third in opponent field-goal percentage (36.3), 10th in blocked shots per game (6.7) and 25th in points allowed per game (62.4) in the ACC. In four conference games, FSU has held opponents to 33 percent shooting from the field.

While FSU is collectively playing better team defense, Bojanovsky (7-3, 24) and Ojo (7-1, 290) have stepped up in recent weeks and are wreaking havoc on opposing offenses with their length.

"You shoot floaters, you don't try to dunk on them," FSU guard Montay Brandon said. "You hope to shoot floaters and get over them, because they try to block everything."

In turn, the presence inside allows FSU's wing players to be more aggressive on the perimeter.

Bojanovsky is averaging 2.2 blocks per game, 56th in the country. Ojo, coming off the bench, is averaging 1.3 blocks, a full block more than what he averaged last season.

"Last year they did what we told them to do, but they didn't really understand why we were running the type of system that we are," Hamilton said.

As a result, FSU's defense sputtered. The Seminoles gave up 68.6 points per game and allowed opponents to shoot an average of 43.7 percent on field goals, ranked 221st nationally. It was a steep decline from FSU teams that led the country in defensive field goal percentage in both 2010 and 2011.

"We've been here for over a year now, so we've come a long way in learning the defensive system, where we should be on the ball, how we should defend ball screens, defensive rotations," Ojo said.

Last season, Bojanovsky and Ojo were two players trying to find themselves.

Bojanovsky, from Slovakia, was used to playing with more finesse.

"He'll find himself not maybe sprinting back on defense because maybe we fast-break a little more than maybe they do in Europe," Hamilton said. "Sometimes he'll find himself relaxing when the ball goes up."

"Most of his adjustments have been more mental than they have been physical."

Ojo, on the other hand, came from Africa and had very little experience playing basketball.

"He wanted it so bad, he was trying so hard, he was so emotionally involved the game that he was overanxious," Hamilton said.

The centers are far from finished products, but their new-found comfort level in FSU's defensive scheme has changed the Seminoles' outlook.

"Defensively, we may have dug ourselves out of a hole," Hamilton said. "But we still have a long ways to go."