

Nairimar Vargas-Reyes: The Next Challenge

By **Kenneth Fermin** - April 15, 2020



Nairimar Vargas-Reyes in action during the FIBA U-17 Centrobasket. Vargas-Reyes earned a starting role after leading her high school to a national championship. Photo Credit: FIBA.COM

Nairimar Vargas-Reyes led her high school team to the **Puerto Rico** national championship as its MVP winner– in back-to-back seasons. She spent her summers representing the **National Puerto Rico Basketball Federation** internationally against the world’s best players. Vargas-Reyes earned an **NJCAA** All-Star selection– as a freshman.

Now, the forward will face new challenges after **announcing her intention to commit** to **Stony Brook** on Saturday, March 21st. At the top of that list, is creating more of that success which has defined her career.

Vargas-Reyes will join Stony Brook after two seasons playing for the **Florida Southwestern State Buccaneers**. She received offers from several other D-I programs including **Seton Hall**, **Fresno State**, and **America East-rival UMBC**.

Although listed as a forward, her speed, strength, scoring ability, on-court IQ and six-foot height allows Nairimar to fill any position on the court.

“Nairimar is a special athlete,” **Raburn Wright**, an assistant head coach at Florida Southwestern said. “I always tell her she is one of the greatest players I have coached or ever even seen. She is very self-motivated which is the dream for a coach– having a kid that wants to get better. She wants to win, she hates to lose. She is just a fun kid to coach.”

Vargas-Reyes and the nationally-ranked Buccaneers enjoyed plenty of success during her tenure. The team went 56-10, ranked among the Top 20 in the NJCAA and won consecutive **SunCoast Conference** Championships. The forward earned all-conference honors in both seasons, in large part due to her playmaking ability under the basket and along the corners. Nairimar utilized her attacking ability and finished 32nd in **Region VIII** with 316 points last season.

The all-around threat led the Buccaneers by averaging over four defensive rebounds per game and was third with over 10 points per contest last season. She drained nearly 42 percent of her shots from the floor and over 69 percent of her free throws in 63 career games.

“She was extremely versatile,” Wright said. “She was probably one of the hardest to guard in the conference because she has so many ways to score. She is an incredible shooter, lights out shooter from behind the line. She has a great touch around the basket, can finesse-finish around the rim and is gritty and works hard.”

The rising junior arguably played better defensively despite guarding opposing teams best players. Vargas-Reyes finished 17th in the conference with 203 rebounds, 16th with 25 blocks and 13th with 827 minutes played in 2019-20. That accountability and on-court leadership led to Nairimar’s Buccaneer teammates choosing her as their team captain.

Nairimar found the game of basketball at a young age, and was hooked. She used that passion for motivation to become the best on the courts of **Camuy**, her hometown. It wasn’t long until the rest of Puerto Rico took notice.

‘**Los Eagles de Adianez**’ (The Adianez Eagles) were among the island’s fastest-rising basketball programs in 2016, after a rebuilding phase. The Eagles needed one more piece to complete the puzzle of winning a national championship. That piece was Nairimar.

Vargas-Reyes commanded the Eagles to unprecedented heights by leading them to the national title in her first season. The Eagles went 35-0 and remained undefeated en route to another championship in 2018. The team won **a combined 72 contests and three national championships** across three seasons. Vargas-Reyes was **named the Buzzer Beater Finals MVP** following the 2017 and 2018 championship wins.

Nairimar's success earned her a starting spot on the **U-17 Puerto Rico Basketball** roster in the **FIBA Centrobasket Games**. Vargas-Reyes earned ten points and grabbed over five boards per game en route to a silver medal finish in **Aguada**, playing 45 minutes away from her hometown. She stepped up against the increased competition by dropping nine points and hauling eight rebounds per contest in the **FIBA U-18 Americas Championship**, the following year.

Vargas-Reyes always **wanted to play NCAA collegiate basketball**. Although Nairimar did not receive a NCAA Division-I offer after high school, she accepted the offer **to play for the NJCAA Division-I Buccaneers in 2018**. The forward learned she still needed to improve her skills in order to match the JUCO-ball competitiveness level, despite her rising potential and past success.

"When I arrived at FSW, I visualized how hard it was to guard explosive players and all the work I had to put into it in order to guard correctly," Vargas-Reyes said. "I decided to accept the challenge and demonstrate how capable I was of doing anything. I decided to work more on my ball handling and on my shot in order to be more consistent."

Vargas-Reyes credited playing with the national team for teaching her how to quickly adapt in the NJCAA.

"By gaining international experience, I was forced to improve my defense and my motor. Playing against top level competition, I was able to improve my dribble, my three point shot and mid range shot, which I needed while playing in the best state in the country at the NJCAA level."

Nairimar will join a Stony Brook roster that recently graduated five players—including three starters. While **Kent State transfer junior Asiah Dingle** is a strong candidate to replace **Kaela Hilaire** in the starting guard role, Hailey Zeise and **Cheyenne Clark's** starting forward spots are up for grabs. The Seawolves already had four upperclasswomen forwards available prior to

Vargas-Reyes' commitment, but Wright believes her former player should be the top candidate for a starting lineup role.

"Nairimar can start tomorrow on any team. She is very versatile, she obviously can play in the post but she is incredible on the wing, I think that is where she plays best. Whatever situation they put her in, she is going to attack it and do it well. So absolutely, she can start tomorrow if they wanted."

Vargas-Reyes' mission remains focused on building from her past accomplishments and creating new ones. Adding the rising-junior to the lineup could boost Stony Brook's chance of replicating its program-record 28-3, **America East Championship**-winning dominance from this season. Nairimar knows she will have to be up to the task next season.

"My goal has always been to be able to step in and contribute right away. I am going to be prepared to perform to the best of my ability as soon as I am on campus."

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Kenneth is a junior Journalism major at Stony Brook University in Long Island, NY. Kenneth is currently a broadcast commentator for Stony Brook Athletics and WUSB 90.1 FM, covering the Football, Basketball, Baseball, Volleyball, Soccer, Swimming and Diving, Track and Field and nationally-ranked Lacrosse programs. Kenneth also has experience working behind the camera, as an audio engineer, and over three years of newspaper reporting. Kenneth loves covering breaking news and writing captivating articles with his compelling storytelling.

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