

Fressle helps Jeffery stay relaxed at point for CU Buff women

CU at Missouri today

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Moving sharpshooter Bianca Smith into the starting lineup wasn't the only change Colorado women's basketball coach Kathy McConnell-Miller made two games ago to try and boost her team's offensive productivity early in games.

Sensing that freshman point guard Chucky Jeffery was still dealing with some jitters and uncertainty after tip-off, McConnell-Miller decided to try a steadier hand at the point in the opening minutes.

The coach didn't have to do anything drastic to make the tweak. Sophomore Alyssa Fressle - who was already in the lineup at the 2 guard position - spent half of her own freshman season playing point guard for the Buffaloes, and the coaching staff knew what they could expect from her.

The plan: Have Fressle run the point, call plays and direct traffic until Jeffery has a chance to settle into the flow of the game. Then swap the players back to their usual positions.

"I think Alyssa has a little calmer feel, at least out of the gate," McConnell-Miller said Monday. "And then Chucky always performs better as the game goes on."

While the Buffs (12-13, 2-10 Big 12) have yet to snap their eight-game losing streak, the changes have helped the squad break out of its scoring funk.

Averaging just 61 points per game in Big 12 play, the Buffs broke through with 72- and 73-point efforts, respectively, the last two games against Kansas and Nebraska.

The Buffs started out hot in each outing, leading both games for most of the opening six or seven minutes before big runs by the opponent put them behind for good.

The two games were the first in which the Buffs scored more than 64 points since a 78-71 win over Yale on Jan. 4 - the team's last non-conference contest.

That offers at least some reason for optimism for a squad whose season is rapidly approaching must-win territory entering today's 5:30 p.m. road game at Missouri (11-14, 1-11).

"We're playing a little freer in the offense, just moving the ball a little bit better," McConnell-Miller said.

The coach said her team has been doing a better job of spreading the floor, reading defenses and improvising based on what the defense is giving up.

Fressle has thrived particularly well in such an environment and been a catalyst for the Buffs' offensive output the past two games.

After scoring 12 points and handing out three assists against Kansas, the 5-foot-10 Highlands Ranch product scored four points, handed out eight assists and grabbed six rebounds against No. 3 NU.

A highly-touted recruit coming out of high school, Fressle, McConnell-Miller admitted, had a lot shoveled in her direction last season - from playing lots of minutes to defending opponents' top players to scoring to leading the team.

"She was asked to do quite a bit," McConnell-Miller said. "But I think she's starting to come into her own right now and relaxing a little bit and performing at the level I think she knows she can. "I like her floor game right now. I like what she's doing, the way she's leading."

Fressle, who is averaging 6.8 points this season, scored in double figures three games in a row leading up to the Nebraska game.

She downplays her recent uptick in production but admits that she is feeling more comfortable on the floor than she has in the past.

"I just try and go out and play hard every time," said Fressle, who prefers an offensive style of constant motion. "Sometimes I don't score or sometimes I have a lot of assists. Sometimes I do score. I don't really worry too much about it. I just know I've got to play hard. When I play hard, good things happen for the team, whether I'm dishing out assists or scoring."

Fressle's impact was perhaps largest against Nebraska as she broke the Husker defense down time and again and found Buff shooters for wide-open looks.

She turned the ball over just once, and CU hit 15 3-pointers in the game - just one off the school record.

"I think it's great for us," said Smith, who is nearing Shelley Sheetz's career 3-pointers record at CU. "Me and (forward Brittany Spears) obviously love getting open shots, and I think Alyssa draws a lot of attention on her drives because she's starting to drive and finish now and get to the free-throw line."

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