



Colorado Student-Athlete Spotlight: Levi Knutson

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He's not a flashy or showy athlete on the court, but his statistics this season would give him grounds to be just that. Senior guard Levi Knutson has entered his final season and has quickly shown everyone watching that this season will surely blow the past three out of the water.

Knutson is averaging 11.5 points per game while shooting an impressive 56.6 percent from the field and averaging 24.3 minutes per game. He has started two games this season, but overall has found his role as the Buffaloes' sixth man.



Courtesy: Big12Sports.com

"Levi's playing with unbelievable confidence," head coach Tad Boyle said following Knutson's team-high 20-point performance to lift the Buffs over then No. 21/20 Kansas State on Jan. 12. "He gives us such a lift off the bench. Obviously he's playing starter minutes, but he brings such enthusiasm, energy and makes all the right plays."

Knutson has hit a few bumps in the road leading up to this successful senior season. During his freshman campaign, Knutson learned he would need surgery on his left hip once the season ended, and unfortunately, that was not the end of his hospital visits as a Buffalo.

Just before he started his sophomore year he was told he had the same injury - a torn labrum - only this time on his right hip. He made the decision to wait until the season concluded to do the surgery so he wouldn't have to sit out.

"Instead of getting in the gym like I wanted to during those summers, I was doing rehab," Knutson said. "I think this past off season was really beneficial to not have any injuries."

Not only has Levi set individual records this season, he ranks first in the Big 12 Conference while being tied for 12th nationally in three-point shooting percentage at 50.0 percent (42-of-84).

As calculated by basketball statistical analyst Ken Pomeroy, through games of Sunday, Jan. 23, Knutson ranks first nationally in effective field goal percentage (69.6) among players who play at least 40 percent of his team's minutes. Effective field goal percentage measures the same as regular field goal percentage, except made three-pointers are appropriately given 50 percent more credit.

Additionally, Pomeroy shows that Knutson is ranked third nationally in true shooting percentage (71.8). True shooting percentage is similar to effective field goal percentage, but also factors in trips to the free throw line. The 71.8 percentage approximates what two-point percentage Knutson would need to shoot to score the points he produces on all his shooting attempts.

Knutson remains ranked first nationally in Offensive Rating (144.7) as calculated by Pomeroy. Offensive Rating is a complex formula developed by Dean Oliver and explained in his book *Basketball on Paper*. Essentially, the rating measures the points a player produces per 100 possessions in which that player ends the possession through a made field goal or free throw, missed field goal or free throw rebounded by the defense, or turnover.

Is he surprised to be having such a remarkable senior term?

"I've always been confident in my ability," Knutson said. "I had a great off season mostly training in the weight room with coach [James] Hardy, our weight coach, and getting in the gym twice a day, six days a week working on ball handling and shooting. I think having a good off season was the most important thing."

Aside from focusing the majority of his off season on basketball, Knutson also managed to squeeze in a "basketball based mission trip" to Poland with an organization called Athletes in Action-- a Christian sports organization. His team was made up of Division I athletes from around the U.S. and a few players from Poland.

"I was able to share my faith out there and play against some teams," Knutson said. "That was a good opportunity for me to use basketball as a way to share my faith, which was pretty cool."

With graduation approaching in a matter of months, Knutson hopes to "keep playing if I can and share my faith with people around the world." If his basketball career happens to end at Colorado, his academic successes will pull through for him.

Knutson, a finance major, currently has a 3.938 cumulative GPA, is a six-time Dean's List honoree and is a five-time Commissioner Honor Roll recipient. He also was named CU's Scholar-Athlete his junior year for having the highest GPA (3.929) of all junior class student-athletes at CU.

As a senior, Knutson knows he has to be a leader on and off the court. His last season has already managed to be a sensation, but in no way does he focus on himself.

"Individually I don't really have any goals," Knutson said. "Obviously, I want to play well and contribute whenever I can and make plays for the team whenever I'm on the floor."

Needless to say, Knutson, as an individual, serves as a prime example of how hard work really does pay off.

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