

Wilson provides needed spark for CU women

Freshman fills in admirably for injured Jeffery

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The moment provided a dose of swagger that the Colorado women's basketball team has desperately missed in big games the last two and half seasons. And it came from a freshman.

As Iowa State point guard Lauren Mansfield walked the ball up the Coors Events Center floor for one final shot before halftime Saturday evening, CU guard Brittany Wilson stood at center court. First she turned to her left and urged the crowd to its feet, and next to the other side of the arena to do the same. Then she backed the bravado up.

Playing point guard in place of injured Chucky Jeffery, Wilson had just drained a much-needed 8-foot jumper to halt a three-minute scoreless drought by the Buffs. And when Mansfield neared, Wilson proceeded to get low, blanket her driving foe all the way to the lane and force an errant pass to give the Buffs a momentum-building stop going into the intermission. The underdog Buffs rode the wave to a 13-point second-half lead before ISU eventually forced overtime in CU's upset victory.

"We need our fans," Wilson said after practice Monday of appealing to the crowd. "We haven't been playing too good. To get that win we just need our fans behind us. ... I'm an emotional player. So whenever I can come in and get a spark and get the crowd going or get the team going that's what I'm looking to do."

Whether Wilson is thrust into the floor general role again tonight on the road against defensive-minded Oklahoma State (12-4, 0-3 Big 12 Conference) remains to be seen. Jeffery's status as she recovers from a concussion is still day-to-day. But the Buffs (10-6, 1-2) at least know now that Wilson is fully capable of leading the team if need be.

The 5-foot-8 freshman's 19 points and eight rebounds versus ISU were career highs, and she also added three steals and two assists. And despite committing seven turnovers, her drives to the basket and pesky defense helped set the energy bar high for the short-handed Buffs.

"I thought she did a great job against Iowa State," first-year CU coach Linda Lappe said. "She set the tempo. She did a great job of controlling the tempo and controlling the game."

Wilson, who is averaging 8.1 points and 3.5 rebounds, admits to being more comfortable at the shooting guard position. But she also relishes the leadership role that comes with playing at the point, and she's got a winning pedigree. Her prep team, Long Beach Poly High School went 131-9 during her four years there as she helped the squad to three California state titles and one runner-up finish.

"She just brings a lot of positive energy and a lot of confidence," CU senior forward and leading scorer Brittany Spears said. "She's got the mindset of, 'Just go out there and play hard and win.' She's already got the mindset of a winning player."

Wilson's fearlessness might be her best trait. Usually undersized against her opponents, the freshman has been aggressive no matter who she is going up against, even if it's meant getting stuffed or humbled occasionally as she did once late Saturday against 6-7 ISU center Anna Prins.

While Lappe would certainly like to see fewer turnovers, she applauded the way Wilson picked which opportunities to seize and didn't try to force too many things.

And the coach had enough confidence in her freshman to put the ball in her hands at the end of regulation against ISU with the score tied, though Wilson was called for a charge as she drove to the basket.

"She does bring some explosive speed that we don't have," Lappe said. "When she wants to she has a great first step and she's strong. She can get to the rim."

All of this isn't to say the Buffs are looking to replace Jeffery. The sophomore is still the catalyst for the team when she's on the floor, leading CU in rebounds, steals and assists. But Lappe also believes the Buffs' second-leading scorer could be just as good from the wing someday if Wilson keeps developing.

"It might be something where the more experience Brittany gets being the point that we might be comfortable with her bringing it up for different sets or different looks or certain things like that," Lappe said.

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