

CU's Jeffery grows into role

Former starter key off bench for Lappe's Buffs

By Joshua Lindenstein Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Chucky Jeffery admits that the idea of coming off the bench took some getting used to.

Like most Division-I college basketball players, Jeffery had started at just about every level along the way. And she didn't just start. She starred. Even at Colorado, Jeffery had grown accustomed to taking the floor for the opening tip, starting 28 of 29 games as a freshman and the first 15 of this season.

"At first I didn't really know how to handle it," Jeffery said after practice Saturday.

But as Jeffery has learned, she doesn't have to be first on the floor on game day to play one of the Buffaloes' leading roles. And she's cool with that, not to mention contributing as much or more than she did before.

When the Buffs (18-15) host Southern California (22-12) in the WNIT quarterfinals at 1 p.m. today at the Coors Events Center, Jeffery figures to come off the bench for the 10th game in a row not counting the Baylor loss, which she missed to attend a funeral.

The routine usually works like this: Jeffery first enters the game four to six minutes in and rarely leaves the floor again after that. And she's always on the court in crunch time.

"I really liked her coming off the bench and thought she provided a great spark," first-year CU coach Linda Lappe said. "Sometimes it's not always the best players start. It's whatever helps your team win. She's done a nice job of accepting her role. She provides us, I think, something that nobody coming off the bench does."

Of course, it took some hardship for the Buffs to even first tinker with the idea of Jeffery not starting.

After establishing herself as a staple in the lineup, Jeffery missed two games in a row with a concussion midway through the season. She struggled off the bench in her first game back, excelled in the next game in a loss to Kansas State, then struggled in a loss to Texas as a starter.

Then came a suspension at Kansas for academic reasons, after which she came off the bench for a game and then started one more in a loss to Texas Tech before the lineup dust finally settled.

Jeffery concedes that there were a couple of weeks there where she "was kind of all over the place and wasn't being consistent with what I was doing." But she said she's been locked in athletically and academically since and has embraced her new role.

"I just talked to a couple of the coaches and they were like, 'Don't let it get to you. You're still going to get your minutes,'" Jeffery said. "It's just a different look. I think it's good just to stay consistent with the lineup. I don't have a problem with it because I still play. I almost think I play better coming off the bench."

Recent numbers suggest she's right.

In CU's three WNIT victories, she's averaging 15.3 points, 8.3 rebounds and 5.0 assists -- all better than her season marks. But she increased her impact even before the postseason, just missing a triple double in an upset win over Oklahoma while playing 37 minutes off the bench.

Jeffery said she likes coming in off the bench five minutes into a game and taking advantage of her fresh legs against tiring foes. And when the game is tight late, meanwhile, there's still no question who is running the show for CU.

Senior guard Britney Blythe, who has started all but two games this season, said Jeffery's leadership has evolved, while her swagger has always rubbed off on her teammates.

"She just brings a sense of confidence to the game," Blythe said. "Even though she's not starting she still comes out on the court and brings that spark."

And best of all, the Buffs are winning.

CU is 6-3 -- again not including Baylor -- since Jeffery started coming off the bench full-time.

"Any time that you're winning, it helps players understand because winning is fun," Lappe said. "I think all of our players would sacrifice personal gains and personal attention for our team winning."

"I think she's done a great job of maturing and understanding, 'Hey, this is what's best for our team and I'm going to relish it and make the most of it.'"

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women's nit

Lappe is confident Bufs are up to task

By Irv Moss
The Denver Post

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It's alright with first-year CU coach Linda Lappe if her University of Colorado women's basketball team continues to surprise people.

As far as she's concerned, the Buffs could keep doing it right to the finals of the women's National Invitation Tournament.

Next up is a return match with USC at 1 p.m. today in the Coors Events Center. The winner advances to the tournament's semifinals next week to play the winner of today's Arkansas-Illinois State game.

For the Buffs (18-15), the matchup with USC (22-12) is a chance to avenge a 68-54 loss in the Women of Troy tournament early in the regular season.

"The game's at our house this time, and we're a totally different team than we were in December," Lappe said. "It takes awhile for a new coach and the players to get to know each other and where each player can thrive."

USC is coached by Michael Cooper, a former NBA player and interim Nuggets coach.

USC has four players who score in double figures, led by Briana Gilbreath at 14.6 points a game. She also leads the team in rebounding at 7.3 a game.



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