



Junior Chucky Jeffery (23) is growing into her role as a point guard.
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Brooks: Jeffery's Shooting, Overall Game On Upswing

Release: 12/16/2011 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER - The biggest tests are ahead, but Chucky Jeffery has done pretty well in the prelims - and the same tag attaches nicely to her University of Colorado women's basketball team. Their shared goal: Remain consistent and prevent their November/December flash from disappearing in January/February/March.

Behind Jeffery, an athletic junior growing into her point guard role, the Buffs have opened 8-0 for only the third time in program history. Jeffery has been consistently productive through eight games, but her last three have moved the needle to the "WOW" level. In wins against San Francisco, Idaho and Denver, she averaged 25.1 points and 9.1 rebounds, shooting 71 percent (29-of-41) from the field, including 80 percent (8-of-10) from three-point range.

In consecutive games, she reached career-high point totals - 26 vs. USF, 30 vs. Idaho - and is averaging a team-best 18.5 points and 9.0 rebounds in the Buffs' perfect start.

In her first two CU seasons, mostly courtesy of her athleticism, the 5-10 Jeffery did much of her scoring on drives to the basket - which she still does very effectively because improved outside shooting has forced teams to

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defend her more honestly rather than "sagging" to prevent her drives.

After an off-season huddle with CU coach Linda Lappe and guards coach LaTonya Watson pinpointed one of her game's glaring needs, Jeffery built big blocks of gym time into her summer regimen. She concentrated on improving her outside shooting, which hovered at 47.1 percent and 45.5 percent in her first two seasons. It's currently at 57.4.

"I got to the gym in my first two summers here, but I didn't have the kind of routine I did last summer," Jeffery said. "I was in three or four nights a week, probably for an hour and a half to two hours at a time, and it's made a huge difference. My goal during the school year is to get up an extra 500 shots a week . . . I'm hitting my shots now so I can't let off.

"I have a lot of confidence in my game now and I feel like I'm just stepping into my role. When I'm tentative I tend to miss shots, but with my (outside) shot a little more consistent I'm not just attacking the rim all the time. I'm better (overall) when I'm aggressive."

But it's not just Jeffery's perimeter shooting that has improved. Lappe sees Jeffery now as a point guard who truly understands her role, rather than player who was mostly getting by on talent and occasionally resembling a point guard.

"As a point guard you see the game from a different point of view," Lappe said. "You have to see it from a different point of view that everybody else on the floor - literally and figuratively. It's just different moving from a wing to a point guard.

"She understands the flow of the game, where the ball needs to go, who has the hot hand, how to run in transition, our sets . . . and she's become more of a vocal leader. It's a lot easier to play with teammates that talk on the floor and tell you what they need, whether it's 'I'm screening for you,' or 'Wait for my screen' . . . whatever it is. She's understanding the big picture."

That includes the bigger one away from basketball. Whether due to immaturity as a freshman and sophomore or whatever, Jeffery wasn't as focused then as now. Once again, her athleticism frequently provided an adequate cover, yet it offered little help when she wasn't the most athletic player on the court - which happened during Big 12 competition and will again when Pac-12 play begins later this month.

But fortunately, she has recognized the benefits of being "all in." Commitment goes a long way.

"I've matured a lot since I came here, and in a lot of areas of my life," Jeffery said. "Just talking to coach and what she wants me to do for our team and my role and then taking that on myself to focus on those things. It's going good right now but I know I've got to continue to get better to help my team."

Lappe believes Jeffery's development has as much to do with her developing a "sense of urgency" and taking pride in where she is and what she wants to accomplish.

"I think it's now really important to her to be at (CU) and be a Buffalo, to take pride in that," Lappe said. "Chucky is a prideful person; it's just a matter of what she takes pride in. She takes pride in being with her family, in being a good teammate . . . now she takes pride in our basketball team, what it means to put on a Colorado jersey.

"That's a little bit of what we're seeing. And I think we're seeing that she realizes she's getting toward the end of her career. A lot of times that happens when you get to be a junior; you take a step back and say, 'Wow, I've only got two years left.' Sometimes as a freshman you think you have forever, but it goes very, very fast. Then when you're a junior or a senior you're wishing you'd focused a little more . . . I think that's part of it with (Jeffery) too. Her sense of urgency is a little better than it was a year ago."

In her first two seasons, Jeffery wasn't ready for a leadership role. As a junior, particularly at her position,

leadership is needed. Freshman Lexy Kresl, a guard from Paradise Valley, Ariz., initially recognized Jeffery for her hoops talents more than her taking charge.

"Initially, I didn't see a very outspoken person," Kresl said. "You don't really notice her too much until you're on the court, and there she's more of a leader by example. She works really hard in practice and she pushes us all. She's still more of a soft-spoken leader.

"But she speaks up when she needs to; she knows when the time is right. She also knows how to do it - how to encourage rather than tear you down with it."

Said Jeffery with a laugh: "Somebody has to do it. But I think what's good about this team is that we don't take a lot of things to heart. When I say stuff to younger kids, they just say, 'OK' and get it done.

"It's kinda good because they're listening and it's not just me talking. I have to be able to take it back also, and I think we're all better at that."

In her second CU season, Lappe sees a team that is beginning to understand how personal accountability can infiltrate the group and how that promote cohesiveness. "We have good team chemistry right now," she said. "They can get on each other in practice in a good way (and) challenge each other. But I think it stays on the court. Julie (Seabrook) and Rachel (Hargis) can battle each other in the post and be ready to fight on the floor.

"But as soon as the day's over, they laugh about it, let it go and are good friends. That's what you have to have on a team, and sometimes it's not always easy with females to get that. It shows maturity on our team's part that they can let it go."

The Buffs play host to Weber State Saturday at 4 p.m. (Tickets start at \$8 and can be purchased at CUBuffs.com/tickets or by calling 303-49-BUFFS.) But following Saturday, the road beckons.

CU travels to San Antonio for a pair of games against Texas-Pan American (Tuesday) and Creighton (Wednesday) in the UTSA Holiday Classic. Then, the Buffs don't play again until Dec. 31 when they travel to Utah to open Pac-12 Conference play. Their next two Pac-12 games also are on the road - at Washington on Thursday, Jan. 5 and at Washington State on Saturday, Jan. 7.

They finally come home to face California on Thursday, Jan. 12 - and by then, the Coors Events Center might never look so appealing.

Jeffery calls the five-game road swing "definitely a challenge . . . we picked up momentum in this (six-game) home stretch, but I think it'll be good for our team to get on the road and get some early wins. Pushing through adversity in other people's gyms and creating our own energy, playing together and staying together when things don't go our way - that's what we're looking at doing."

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