

Women's Basketball: CU Buffs' Lexy Kresl a real sharp-shooter

Freshman prolific from 3, developing other areas of game

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The first time Lexy Kresl stepped onto the court for a college basketball game, she tied a Colorado school record with five 3-pointers in the first half.

Now 32 games into her career, it shouldn't come as much of a surprise that Kresl owns another school record. Her 58 3-pointers are the most ever by a CU freshman.

"That's what we brought her in for. We brought her in to be a 3-point shooter," CU head coach Linda Lappe said.

A 5-foot-11 guard from Paradise Valley, Ariz., Kresl prides herself on her shot and the freshman record is a significant accomplishment.

"It means that I've done my role for the season," she said. "That's what it signifies for me, that it's important that I've done what I'm supposed to."

While the Buffs knew Kresl could -- and would -- shoot a bunch of 3-pointers, they're also seeing an all-around player develop. For Kresl, this season has been a good learning experience.

"Lexy has done a tremendous job," Lappe said, as the Buffs CU (19-13) prepare to visit South Dakota (23-7) in the second round of the WNIT on Monday. "She started off the season very well; she struggled during the middle of the season; and then she's coming on pretty strong here as of late. She would say, 'I want to be more consistent,' and we would probably echo that, but it's tough for freshmen to always be that consistent."

With a thin frame, Kresl found scoring in college isn't as easy as it was in high school. At Shadow Mountain High, she averaged 25 points and 14 rebounds as a senior and she led the state in scoring during her junior and senior seasons.

This season, she is second on the team with 9.1 points per game, but has had to learn a new way to play.

"It's so much different (than high school)," she said. "Everybody knows how to play defense, they know how to exploit your weaknesses. It's just a lot harder to get open. Strength didn't really matter in high school, but now it's proven that it's definitely a factor."

For starters, high school competition allows for more time to set up and take an open and balanced 3-point shot. Lappe also said that if Kresl didn't have that 3 option, she could go around her defender and get to the rim for a layup.

In college, the window of time to get a shot off is much smaller, and Kresl hasn't found it as easy to get to the rim against big-bodied college players.

"Everything is faster, everybody is taller, everybody is quicker, hands are bigger, arms are longer," Lappe said. "All that takes some getting used to."

Credit Kresl for adjusting. She has developed a mid-range jumper and has learned to finish in transition with key layups for the Buffs. After a mid-season lull, she has become a threat off the bench once again.

Perhaps the biggest change since that opener on Nov. 11 is that Kresl has started to defend. Lappe always preaches defense, yet Kresl came in with an offense-first (and often second and third) mentality. Now, she'll get after opponents.

"The transformation in her mind as far as concentrating on the defensive side of things has really been impressive and I've been happy about that," Lappe said. "You can see it in her defense. You know now she's thinking about it and she knows

it's important."

Flipping the switch came out of necessity during that shooting lull.

"My shot was not where I wanted it to be, so I knew if I was going to be on the floor, I had to do something productive, so I decided to go with defense," Kresl said. "I realize that is my biggest weakness, so if I can do that, everything else will come."

With her freshman year winding down, Kresl has learned a lot of valuable lessons and she hopes to come back even better next year.

"The main thing I see right now is that over the offseason I need to get stronger, so that I can get myself open more and get myself in better position for shots," she said. "It really just comes to what I do in the offseason now."

As Kresl looks to improve her mid-range jumper, her finishing touch on layups and her defense, there is sure to be one aspect of her game that CU fans will always recognize. She'll always be a go-to threat from beyond the 3-point arc, and might actually have a chance at CU's career record of 257 (set by Bianca Smith from 2006-10). Kresl already ranks 16th on the career list.

"I really have (enjoyed that role)," she said. "I also have enjoyed being the person we go to at end of game situations if we need a 3. I'm really confident in my shot."

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Sports

Coyote Women Faced With Yet Another 'First'

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VERMILLION — Sure, the University of South Dakota women's basketball team has hosted teams from well-established leagues such as the Big Sky, Ivy League and Missouri Valley.

Just never of the caliber coming to Vermillion next week for a WNIT showdown.

The Coyotes (23-7), coming off an 8-point over Drake on Thursday, now have the weekend to prepare for Monday night's second round 7 p.m. home game with Colorado.

Yes, that Colorado, of the Pac-12 Conference — a BCS league. And yes, the Buffaloes are headed to Vermillion.

"This is another first for us," USD coach Ryun Williams said Friday. "It's a neat opportunity for our university and our team to see a Pac-12 team we normally wouldn't see.

"And they're a good one, at that."

Winners of 13 of their last 14 games, the Coyotes continue a season that has already been the program's most successful at the Division I level. Not eligible for the NCAA Tournament until next season, USD zeroed in on the WNIT as its main goal for 2011-12.

Still, the Coyotes aren't content with just the one win.

"That's the goal, to keep it alive," junior guard Alexis Yackley said Friday. "This is the best we can do, and we're doing it right now.

"It's great for not just our team, but for our school," she added. "After the (D-I) transition, we're starting to make a name for USD."

USD, with an RPI of 87 entering the week, earned an at-large bid to the 64-team WNIT field. With the final first round games being played Saturday, the Coyotes are now one of 32 teams remaining — no small feat for a mid-major newcomer.

"The farther you advance in any tournament, the teams will get better, and we know that," Williams said.

Case in point: Colorado.

The Buffaloes (19-13), who finished 10th in the Pac-12 Conference, are a rather seasoned group. They advanced to the WNIT quarterfinals last year and used to finish to spring-board to a 12-0 start to this season.

Along the way to that unbeaten start, Colorado beat the likes of Wisconsin, Creighton and Utah. USD has found similar success, scoring wins this season over South Dakota State, Creighton and Idaho State — all teams that qualified for the NCAA Tournament.

"We're excited to see how we can do. The farther along we get, the bigger the names will get,"

Yackley said. "No matter who it is, Creighton or Drake or even SDSU, we've never backed down from a challenge."

Already on Friday, Williams and his staff were watching film on the Buffaloes, who beat Northern Colorado in Wednesday's first round of the WNIT.

"They've good length and size everywhere on the court," Williams said. "That probably poses the biggest concern for us, that disruption because of the length."

Arguably Colorado's biggest threat is junior guard Chucky Jeffery, who leads the team in scoring (15.2 ppg), rebounding (7.5) and assists (3.7) — not to mention blocks and steals.

"She looks like a tough kid to contain," Williams said. "She's in charge of what goes on. She's probably one of their most dynamic post players, too."

Aiding in USD's favor is how the team played against Drake, Williams said. The Coyotes shot 53 percent from the field and committed just nine turnovers — stats that led Williams to say, "We were as good offensively as we've been in a while."

Senior Amber Hegge led with 20 points against Drake, while senior Annie Roche added 15 points and junior Tempestt Wilson chipped in with 13 points.

With all five starters back from last season's run through the Women's Basketball Invitational (WBI), the Coyotes set their sights one tournament higher this season, Yackley said.

"We had a whole year together under our belt, building that chemistry," she said. "This year we wanted the WNIT. It's a great feeling, knowing that we can keep playing."

Now comes the challenge of keeping up that momentum against Colorado.

"This is what we signed up for. Getting these big names schools, that's what people wanted," Williams said. "That's exactly what they're going to get with Colorado."

The winner of USD and Colorado advances to play either Illinois State or Villanova, on March 21-23. The date and location of that game will be determined after Monday's outcome.

"We don't want to waste an opportunity to pick up another big win," Yackley said. "Whoever is next on the list, we'll go from there."