

Women's basketball: Lexy Kresl embracing role with CU Buffs

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The way she played in high school and the way she played her first 11 games in college, many probably figured Lexy Kresl would be a prolific scorer for the Colorado women's basketball team.

Now in the latter half of her sophomore season, Kresl has transformed her game and become a much more valuable player for the 21st-ranked Buffaloes because of what she can do on both ends of the court.

"Since I've arrived here, I think I've definitely become a smarter player and I think I've become a better defender," she said. "I think I've just started making better decisions and understanding the game a lot better. I also think I've learned how to lead more and those kinds of aspects, as well."

Statistically, Kresl has had a modest season. She's averaging 6.3 points, 2.9 rebounds and 1.3 steals per game. Her impact goes well beyond those numbers, however.

"Lexy is a competitor," said head coach Linda Lappe, who has had Kresl in the starting lineup for each of the past 15 games. "She practices hard. She's very consistent in how she practices and how she plays. As a coach, I feel like I know every game, game in and game out, what we're going to get from Lexy. I also think she's a smart player. She understands game plans. You want your starters to know the game plan and get us started off on the right foot. I trust and have confidence she can help do that."

Kresl's game has changed perhaps more than anybody else on the roster since the start of the 2011-12 season.

At Shadow Mountain High School in Paradise Valley, Ariz., Kresl averaged 25 points and 14 rebounds as a senior and 27 points and 12 rebounds as a junior.

Then, she made a smashing debut as a Buff, scoring 15 points in a win against Northern Arizona on Nov. 11, 2011. In that game, she tied a school record with five 3-pointers in the first half.

During non-conference play last season, Kresl scored in double figures in nine of the 11 games, and she had eight points in another game. At that point, Kresl was averaging 12.3 points per game.

In the 47 games she has played since, she is averaging 6.9 points, reaching double figures just nine times. Considering the numbers she put up in high school, it would be easy to think she would be frustrated by her lack of scoring, but she's not.

"Not at all," she said. "I took a lot of pressure and I took a lot of the team roles and requirements on my back in high school. I like the college atmosphere much better where it's everybody that contributes. It's a lot more fun.

"I would say last year it was a little bit harder, because I feel like every freshman comes in thinking they're going to be the super star. This year, I definitely know what I should be doing and what my role is."

Kresl can still score when needed. She had 12 points against Oregon on Sunday and 11 in a key win at

Southern Cal on Feb 3.

It's her defense and rebounding that has probably helped the Buffs more. She's had 10 steals in the past four games, and she's grabbed at least four rebounds six times in Pac-12 play.

"As this year has progressed, I feel like she's just now hitting her stride," Lappe said. "She's playing her best basketball of the year right now."

A big reason for Kresl hitting her stride now is that her body is much more ready for the rigors of a college season.

In preparation for her freshman year, Kresl did a lot of distance running. That put her in great shape, but by the middle of last season, her lean, 5-foot-11 frame was getting beat up.

"Last year by this time, she was completely run down, had no legs, her back hurt and she had no lift on her shot," Lappe said. "That really affected her."

Kresl spent the offseason working hard to change that. She lifted weights and strengthened her body and feels the difference on the court.

"I don't feel like anybody really picks on me anymore because of weakness or size," she said.

Kresl isn't the same player she was in high school, but she has become a great asset to the Buffs in a lot of ways.

"You know you're not going to get playing time if you can't play defense," she said. "They've also made it very fun. The way the team responds to it, it's just very competitive and I love competing."

She's embraced the defensive philosophy and she's excelling at it, but defense still isn't Kresl's first love. Her 92 career 3-pointers rank 12th in team history, she'll never shy away from an opportunity to add to that total.

"I don't know if I'll ever like (defense) as much as shooting," she said.

Lappe, however, loves the fact that Kresl has figured out to combine the two skills to help CU succeed.

"She's at the point now where she understands her role and understands where she fits and how valuable her role is to our team," Lappe said. "Once a player determines that and figures that out, they're not frustrated anymore and they feel comfortable and they understand they're valuable."

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