

Women's basketball: Haley Smith brings versatility to CU Buffs

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Growing up just outside of Seattle, Haley Smith became accustomed to cloudy days and rain drops.

"At home, when it's sunny it's a big deal," said Smith, one of four freshmen on the Colorado women's basketball team. "Here (in Boulder), that's just normal."

Smith is hoping to see her game brighten up in Boulder, too.

While starring for Skyline High School in Sammamish, Wash., the 6-foot guard/forward turned heads with her tremendous athletic ability. Her coaches -- and CU head coach Linda Lappe -- wanted to see Smith become a little more selfish with that ability, however.

That was the challenge put to her before her senior year, and she took that challenge head on. Smith averaged 12.0 points, 8.8 rebounds and 2.3 steals per game in leading the Spartans to a 20-7 record last season.

"Definitely once I knew where I was going (to college) and that stress was out of the way, I was able to focus a lot more on improving and really getting ready to be here at the college level," she said. "I worked with a trainer and worked on the things I needed to work on, like ball handling, getting a wider range on my shot and improving my shot."

Prior to last year, Smith had a tendency to defer to older players on the team. She said learning to be more selfish required her to also learn to be more confident that she could be the leader of the team.

"Just feeling more prepared and more confident is a big thing for me," Smith said. "Being confident in myself and my abilities is really what's helped me become a different player over the past year."

Adding more confidence and selfishness to her athletic ability could make her a key player for the Buffs for years to come.

"I think Haley is going to be able to play a lot of different positions," Lappe said. "She's another really good rebounder."

Lappe compares Smith to junior-to-be Jasmine Sborov, but said Smith is a little "longer and taller" than Sborov, who has started several games the past two years.

Lappe has not been able to see a lot of Smith in person over the past year, but said she does like everything she hears about Smith's renewed aggressiveness on the court.

"She spent a lot of time on it, I do know that," Lappe said. "From everything I've heard, even since her season has been over, she's looking pretty good."

Smith arrived in Boulder just a couple of weeks ago, but said she has already started to settle in a bit during the short time she's been around her teammates.

"It's actually felt really comfortable and the girls are really welcoming and trying to make everyone feel that they're a part of the team," Smith said. "It is a big jump (from high school to college). It is different, but I've felt really a part of the team."

Just how much she plays will be determined in the coming months, but Lappe said Smith is certainly capable of battling for a starting role.

"I hope every single freshman comes in and wants to compete for a starting position," Lappe said.

A little more selfish than she was a year ago, Smith is ready to do just that.

"That's my goal," she said. "I still think there are some awesome players ahead of me who have proven themselves. But, I definitely think if I continue to work hard and work on my own self, I feel like I can definitely be a contributor."

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