

Colorado men's basketball: Buffs' Jaron Hopkins has promising future

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Few players on the Colorado men's basketball team get scolded during practice more than Jaron Hopkins.

This is not a bad thing. In fact, the true freshman point guard has been excelling during his first few weeks of college practices.

What draws the attention of coaches, however, is not so much what Hopkins is now, but rather what he can become.

"I don't want Jaron to have a good freshman year," CU head coach Tad Boyle said. "I want him to have a great freshman year.

"To have a great freshmen year, you've got to get out of your comfort zone and you've got to change some of the things that maybe have been holding you back."

Each week, it appears fewer things are holding Hopkins back.

With Colorado's season opener just two and a half weeks away, Hopkins is routinely showing why the Buffs -- and several other schools -- wanted the former Dobson High School (Mesa, Ariz.) star.

"I'm really pleased with where he is and he's showing in practice that he obviously belongs at this level," Boyle said.

Hopkins, who backs up junior standout Spencer Dinwiddie at the point, has often shown his play-making ability in practice. During the one opportunity fans had to see him play, during an intrasquad scrimmage on Saturday, he unofficially scored eight points -- half of those at the free throw line -- while dishing out several assists and playing solid defense.

So far, Hopkins has handled everything thrown his way.

"Things are going pretty good so far and hopefully I can keep getting better," the 6-foot-5 Hopkins said. "I'm learning a lot. It's a lot thrown at me, at the same time, with all the defenses and offenses. There's a lot of pressure on me, but I'm ready for it."

Squaring off against Dinwiddie, who is regarded as a potential first-round pick in the 2014 NBA Draft, is certainly helping Hopkins get better. But, so is the constant pressure from the coaching staff.

Hopkins knew this was coming. Boyle told Hopkins up front that he would demand a lot from the freshman.

"Coach is on me the most, but he tells me all the time it's because he wants me to maximize my potential," Hopkins said. "It helps that I know that he's on me for a particular reason and that he wants me to get better."

As is the case with all freshmen, Boyle didn't know exactly what he was getting with Hopkins. But, he did know that the biggest criticism of Hopkins was that he didn't always play hard.

Right away, he told Hopkins, "'You can't do that at this level, because if you do you're going to get beat and you're going to pay for your mistakes.'

"He's getting better at that."

During the first week of practice, earlier this month, Hopkins was a bit tentative, but that, too, has changed.

"What I like is the fact that he's playing aggressively," Boyle said. "The first week, he was trying not to make mistakes and thinking too much. Jaron is physically as talented a player as we have. When he's aggressive, he puts a lot of pressure on the defense."

Now that he's added some aggressiveness, the Buffs would like to hear his voice a little more. As a point guard, he needs to be more vocal as a leader with his teammates and that's been a point of emphasis.

"(Boyle) wants me to be vocal a lot to control the team and do what I have to do on offense and defense," Hopkins said. "It's really going to help me out because I'm a real quiet person. Being more vocal will help me in the long run."

The Buffs are doing all they can to help Hopkins because they see great things in his future.

"He's going to be a terrific player," Boyle said.

Contact staff writer Brian Howell at howellb@dailycamera.com or twitter.com/BrianHowell33.