

Colorado men's basketball: Buffs' Askia Booker has confidence in his shot

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Askia Booker spent his summer watching film of last year's games and he didn't like what he saw.

A junior guard on the Colorado men's basketball team, Booker watched film of the slump that plagued him during the second half of the Buffaloes' season. It wasn't the missed shots that bothered him so much. It was how he responded to them.

"You could tell my gestures in the game, I would get down on myself, or I'd get down on my teammates if I wasn't playing good," Booker said.

This season, Booker is hoping to not only avoid the shooting slumps, but to handle them properly if they do come.

"This summer I put in so much work on my jump shot," he said. "Before I left to go back home (for the summer), coach told me I have to become more consistent. I worked on form shooting, getting my range a little deeper and becoming more consistent off the dribble."

Last season, Booker made just 36.4 percent of his shots. That was last among the 10 Buffs who played in at least 10 games last year. He made just 31.2 percent of his 3-pointers.

He got off to a good start, but really slumped during Pac-12 play, shooting just 32.7 percent from the floor, including 25.3 percent from 3-point range.

A 3-for-11 game would be followed by a 2-for-9 and then a 2-for-11.

"I think it was all mental," Booker said. "The hard part about it was I was in the gym. If I had a bad game, I was in the game. Even if I didn't have a bad game, I was in the gym.

When I look back on it, it was all mental."

CU head coach Tad Boyle said that's common for shooters, and he could tell Booker pressed at times. Overall, though, he felt Booker handled it well.

"I just know that there's a lot of other things you can do on the court to help your team win other than shoot the ball," Boyle said. "Hopefully he doesn't go through another slump like that, but if he does he'll be hopefully more mature and handle it a little better this time, but for the most part I thought he handled it pretty well last year."

For now, Booker is shooting with confidence. Earlier this week, Boyle said Booker is shooting the ball as well as he has at any point since arriving in Boulder two years ago.

Booker agrees, and added that his overall confidence is sky high.

"This is the best I've ever felt, condition-wise, physically, mentally," he said. "My game feels great, jump shot feels great."

As a junior, Booker said it's more important than ever before for him to guard against prolonged slumps like the one he got into last year.

He can't force shots like he did last year, he said, and he can't let his actions have a negative impact on himself or the team.

"This year I'm just trying to stay positive," he said. "When my shot doesn't go in, just keep playing. This year, I'm maturing and I'm trying to take on a leadership role. If I don't play well, I have to keep picking up my teammates."

The Buffs can deal with a shooting slump. What they don't need, Booker said, is for him to let it go beyond that.

"It's more about my energy, because the team feeds off my energy," he said.

So far, Booker has had good energy. The Buffs are hoping he can keep that up.

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