

Colorado volleyball: Move to right, right for Buffs' Kerra Schroeder

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Coming back from a knee injury that wiped out nearly her entire 2012 season, Colorado's Kerra Schroeder told her coaches she was willing to do whatever was necessary to help the team.

"I told (head coach Liz Kritza) I'm not stopping half way," Schroeder said.

Schroeder realized that, with CU's talent pool deeper than it's been in years, her usual role as the dominant left-side hitter might not be there. But, she didn't want to be a part-time player.

Nine matches into her final season as a Buffalo, Schroeder is a different player, but no less valuable than she was before her injury. The fifth-year senior is having a great season thus far for the Buffs (8-1), who begin Pac-12 play on Tuesday at Utah.

"Her savvy and volleyball experiences and her leadership with this team is definitely steering us in a great direction," said CU assistant coach J.T. Wenger.

The 6-foot Schroeder, who is from San Diego, led the Buffs with 3.95 kills per set in 2011. Her 3.83 kills per set in 2010 ranked sixth in the Big 12 Conference.

She and the Buffs were looking for the same type of results a year ago before Schroeder tore the ACL in her left knee during the second match of the season. She missed the rest of the year and has spent countless hours working her way back into shape.

Kritza and her staff have loaded the roster with talent in recent years, especially knowing Schroeder was supposed to be gone after last year. Now that she's back, though, the Buffs are loaded at outside hitter.

Schroeder is now playing mostly on the right side, but continues to put up big numbers. Her 2.12 kills per set are third on the team, and her 2.78 digs per set rank second. She is one of just two players (along with Kelsey English) to be on the court for all 32 sets so far.

"I'm in there to pass and play defense and also to hit," said Schroeder, who is a captain for the fourth year in a row. "It's different than what I'm used to, but at the same time the responsibility is almost even more.

"If it was anything else, I would feel like I'm not helping the team as much as I could. Being able to be given this opportunity to play right side, something completely different, and having such an impact is just awesome. I'm used to (having an impact) and I'm OK with it."

In addition to having to adjust her thinking as a hitter -- it's easier to hit from the left side than the right, she said -- Schroeder said her whole view of the court is different than usual.

At first, she was hesitant and kept asking questions about what to do. Her coaches kept telling her, "Just play." That simple advice was all she needed, and she's grown more comfortable as time has passed.

"It doesn't matter where I am on the court; I just have to play," she said. "It's different, but it's volleyball.

"I kind of just had to embrace it."

The Buffs are benefiting from Schroeder's acceptance of her new role. Because she's so skilled as an all-around player, she's able to help them in every rotation.

"Even though the position has changed sporadically throughout the season, her role has remained the same," Wenger said. "She's a steady, ball-control player who can put the ball away when she has the right opportunities. Fortunately, she's been able to do both of those things for us so far this year."

With eyes on playing overseas after she's done at CU, Schroeder said she's thankful for this new role because it's made her a better player. More than anything, though, she's excited about the fact that she's able to make an impact on what should be CU's best season in years.

"It feels so good going into the Pac-12 season having these wins," Schroeder said. "We can do it this year. It wasn't my time last year and it wasn't our time last year. I'm so glad to be here right now and I'm so glad that we're able to win. This team is a great group of girls and it is just so good to be here and help them."

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