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cu women's basketball

CU's Fressle getting baptism by fire

Freshman shines despite heavy responsibility

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Freshman Alyssa Fressle has had her ups and downs this season, but the guard has exceeded expectations and leads the Buffs in assists and steals. (Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post)

BOULDER — There may come a day, after she has led Colorado out of its Big 12 and NCAA Tournament doldrums, or when the players she helped attract to the Buffs have done so, that Alyssa Fressle might sit back and have a good laugh about the stretch of basketball she's going through.

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At that point, the 27 percent shooting over the past three games will be a distant memory, as will the 11 turnovers she has committed in the last two contests. But because that day isn't here just yet, Fressle is beating herself up like she's entering the 12th round against Muhammad Ali.

"I'm just disappointed in my own performance," Fressle, a freshman from Highlands Ranch, said recently. "Really, I'm getting the better of myself. It's just a big mental thing — there's too much thinking on my part."

In a perfect world, Fressle (pronounced FRESS-ley) wouldn't be called on to do so much for Colorado, that she could ease into the collegiate game just as she did in high school, when she went from a reserve to a mainstay on three state championship teams, culminating with being named the state's player of the year after her senior season.

But the Buffs, 10-10 and 2-6 in the Big 12 entering Saturday's game against Iowa State at the Coors Events Center, can't afford that luxury, meaning Fressle's freshman year has largely been a baptism by fire.

"I know she can handle it, but we're asking a lot of her," admits Buffs coach Kathy McConnell-Miller. "Alyssa's prepared her whole life for this level, however, she may not have expected that on the first day she would be handed the ball and have us say: 'OK, you're our starting two-guard and backup point guard. We expect you to score and, by the way, we'd also like you to guard the other team's best offensive player.' "

Given the weight of all that responsibility, some would say Fressle has exceeded expectations. A starter in all but one game this season, Fressle has averaged 8.7 points a game. She also leads the Buffs in steals and assists — categories in which she also outpaces every other Big 12 freshman.

That would be in keeping with one of her preseason goals, being at least a contender for conference freshman of the year. But there are times when the forest indeed gets lost amid all the trees, as was the case last weekend in a 75-73 victory over Nebraska, when a turnover in the final minute left Fressle despondent.

More than an hour after the contest, despite the encouragement of McConnell-Miller and other coaches, teammates and family, Fressle struggled to keep her churning emotions bottled.

"I just think I expect a lot out of myself," she said. "At every level, it's a tougher game. I'm a good player from high school, but every player here is a good player from high school and then you're going up against juniors and seniors who have more experience."

"I remember coming into high school as a freshman and thinking how much better all the other players were. Now, I'm experiencing that again — except I'm playing. It's been fun. I mean, my basketball IQ has risen to such a different level so quickly, but it's been difficult."

The truth is, whatever Fressle gives the Buffs on the court is gravy. Of greater importance might

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be her part in helping CU reconnect with the state's impressive pipeline of prep talent.

Minutes: 31.1 (second on team)

At this point, Fressle is the only native player on the team's roster. That will change next season when twins Brenna and Meagan Peck from Horizon and Janeesa "Chucky" Jeffery from Sierra join the team.

"I don't think I realized until my official visit the impact I could have," Fressle said. "When I got here, Coach Miller told me that I could make a difference, that we would get better recruits — I just had a good feeling that we were building something and I wanted to be a part of it. I thought that this was the place for me."

Chances are it will be — even if it doesn't quite look that way at the moment.

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Making a difference

Alyssa Fressle is the only player from the state on the Colorado rosters. A look at the freshman guard's contributions:

Points: 8.7 (fourth on team)

Assists: 69 (leads team, ranks seventh in Big 12)

Steals: 37 (leads team, eighth in Big 12)

Rebounds: 2.8 (fifth on team)

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