

Koumadje, Noles Hope Breakout Performance Carries Into Jamaica Classic

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MONTEGO BAY, Jamaica – To Terance Mann, it was like letting the world in on a secret.

Christ Koumadje, Florida State's 7-foot-4 center, was a force during the Seminoles' 87-67 win over George Washington on Nov. 14. The junior blocked five shots, grabbed seven rebounds and, most impressively, added 14 points on 7-of-11 shooting from the field.

Koumadje's performance was a most pleasant surprise for the Seminoles, who are off to Jamaica for a pair of games against Fordham and Colorado State in the Jamaica Classic.

But maybe it wasn't.

"No," Mann said. "No surprise.

"I know Christ has that. Y'all will see down the stretch – that's how Christ is. He's aggressive on both ends of the floor. Blocking shots, post hooks, dunks. That's what he does."

If Koumadje does that on a consistent basis, it could redefine the Seminoles' season.

Not only did the FSU enter the year looking to replace top scorers Dwayne Bacon, Jonathan Isaac and Xavier Rathan-Mayes, but it also needed to find consistent frontcourt production after the departures of senior forwards Michael Ojo and Jarquez Smith.

Koumadje, who at 7-4 is the tallest player in school history, seemed an obvious choice.

The N'Djamena, Chad, native averaged 3.4 points and 1.9 rebounds per game a year ago, but also showed plenty of room for growth.

In particular, coaches and teammates wanted to see Koumadje play in a way that took advantage of his overwhelming size, which didn't always come easily.

Despite his height, Koumadje only started playing competitive basketball as a junior at Montverde Academy in Orlando and, as a result, his inexperience showed at times during FSU's 2016-17 campaign.

There were moments when Koumadje looked uncomfortable or unsure of what to do, and, with such a large frame, that often manifested itself in foul trouble – he averaged 1.7 fouls in only 10.1 minutes per game.

But what a difference a year apparently makes.

While there's no mistaking Koumadje on the floor, he looked like a different player during the Seminoles' win on Tuesday.

His name appears 10 times in the first six minutes of the game's box score, beside blocks, dunks and rebounds and, most notably, made jump shots.

While players his size aren't exactly expected to be shooters, Koumadje has developed a useful hook shot that proved effective against the Colonials.

"He's probably 80 percent from there," guard Braian Angola said. "We tell him all the time – 'Just hook it, baby.'"

Just as impressive, though, are the things that didn't end up in the stat sheet: The way that Koumadje altered shots from the overmatched Colonials, how he went up and over players in better position to grab a rebound, or how he was quick and decisive with the ball once it ended up in his hands.

"I think you see that Christ Koumadje has made tremendous improvement," Hamilton said.

Koumadje said working with Ojo helped him evolve, as did another year spent in the gym learning the ins and outs of Hamilton's system.

With experience, he said, comes confidence. And, at least on Tuesday, the results of that confidence spoke from themselves.

"He's made unbelievable progress," Angola said. "His confidence is getting out of the roof.

"He's running the floor very well, he's playing defense, he's following what the coaches want him to do from rim to rim."