

Health, Hard Work, Right Mentality Help Cofer Make 'Unreal' Jump

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TALLAHASSEE -- Phil Cofer became accustomed to watching everyone around him find success. The Florida State forward was a vocal cheerleader from the bench who quietly waited for his chance – when he would be healthy again and ready to show what he could offer.

Cofer went into his senior year focused on improving his weaknesses, refined his ball-handling and jump shot.

“All the hard work in the offseason,” Cofer said. “I went straight into the gym. I pretty much have been grinding and grinding.”

Cofer began an intense offseason in the days after FSU was eliminated from the NCAA Tournament in March. He was in the gym working on jumpers and post moves, 3-pointers and dribbling.

The texts to assistant coaches Charlton Young and Stan Jones were frequent, with Cofer wanting to know when either would be available for a late-night session in the gym.

“Everything he’s got going right now, he earned it,” Young said. “He has a pro’s type of mentality to the game. The jump he has made is unreal.”

The months of hard work have paid off. After battling through injuries as a sophomore and then averaging just 2.9 points a game as a junior, Cofer has become a go-to player for FSU (11-1), scoring in double figures in eight of FSU’s 12 games.

The senior forward is averaging 13.4 points per game and 5.5 rebounds per game through the non-conference schedule and has made contributions on the offensive and defensive end of the court for the Seminoles, who begin the ACC schedule on Saturday at No. 3 Duke (12-1) at 2 p.m.

“His commitment to becoming a better perimeter player has been huge for us,” Young said. “Now he’s another guy, a big at 6-8, that can dribble, pass and shoot and make a decision. Now he’s turned himself into a stretch 4.”

While Cofer was a starter as a freshman in 2014-15, his career detoured due to foot injuries the following year.

And Cofer was often viewed as a reserve that could provide defense and energy in quality minutes off the bench during his junior season.

But Cofer has been one of the most pleasant surprises of the 2017-18 season for FSU. He has made 13 three-pointers – already one more than he had in his first three seasons combined. He has also scored in double-figures in eight games this season after doing that just seven times in his prior 76 games.

“We have all known all along that he had the potential to be a high contributor,” FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said. “He’s been slowed by some injuries. He has tremendous character. He has good genes. You’re just seeing the maturity level of a guy growing, improving. Not only has he performed at a high level, he has given tremendous leadership.”

Cofer has led with his intensity on both ends of the floor. While he’s had nights where he didn’t score as many points, Cofer has made his mark as a rebounder, defender and leader.

And Cofer's accuracy from the floor (55 percent) and the free-throw line (75 percent) is also 10 points higher than his averages coming into the year. Coaches who have seen Cofer play a few times now are taken by surprise at the improvement in his game.

"He's a terrific long defender on film and in person," Charleston Southern coach Barclay Radebaugh said. "He's expanded his game so that he's efficient from the perimeter, both ways. I've seen his game grow in person. Because we've played Florida State play so many times, I've seen his game grow."

Cofer says his success this season hasn't surprised him. He's credited his teammates with supporting him along the way, encouraging him during the down times.

It's clear that Cofer doesn't like to discuss the injuries much. After one game in November, he said he "came a long way" and on Thursday he said that his focus is to "keep moving forward."

While he is playing to prove doubters wrong, his positive mind-set has helped him achieve a stunning start in what has been a career season. And the Seminoles have taken notice of the results from his hard work.

"Phil worked very hard over the summer and in the preseason, getting himself healthy, working on his game," guard Trent Forrest said. "Now it's just manifested for him."