

Florida State Center Balsa Koprivica Is Showing A Lot Of Improvement In Sophomore Season

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As a freshman reserve last season, Florida State center Balsa Koprivica played in 27 games. But he struggled with back and knee injuries throughout the year.

A limited Koprivica averaged 4.7 points (eighth on the team) and 2.4 rebounds (seventh) while shooting a team-leading 69.9% from the field.

Koprivica during the offseason was able to take time off and regain his health. Through seven games (5-2) this season heading into Saturday's home showdown against Duke (3-2), Koprivica has raised his game to another level.

Koprivica, a 7-foot-1, 240-pounder, is averaging 9.9 points, 5.9 rebounds, and 1.0 blocks per game. He is also shooting 59.1% from the field. In Tuesday's 77-67 defeat at Clemson, Koprivica had eight points and tied a career-high with nine rebounds.

The native of Belgrade, Serbia, credits his improvement to hard work on and off of the court.

"I've been watching a lot of film and just trying to figure out ways to be as productive as I can at this level because every level you play at is different, Koprivica told the *Democrat*. "College basketball is different than high school and the NBA and overseas in Europe. Every level of basketball is different, so you gotta adapt your game to be as efficient as possible.

"I think in college basketball, there's a lot of film to watch, teams to always prepare for, opposing players who know your tendency. Just being able to figure out what's the best for me and the best way I can be productive, and that's the man thing I focused on and working my game throughout the whole summer up into this season."

Improved Long Range Shooting

In today's game, not only are big men like Koprivica expected to contribute inside the paint, but also away from the basket. With that in mind, Koprivica has been working on his long-range shooting.

With the help of FSU associate head coach Stan Jones, Koprivica has been tweaking his jump shot with the hopes of becoming more of a spot-up shooter. FSU recruited Koprivica from Montverde Academy in Orlando with the belief he would become more of an all-around player.

Koprivica hasn't taken many jump shots this season, but his coaches trust him and are giving him the freedom to take those shots whenever he chooses. In his first career start in the Seminoles' season-opening win over North Florida, Koprivica turned in a solid all-around performance with 13 points, five rebounds, two blocked shots, one steal and one assist.

"We started with a plan with him being an effective interior player, and now we have moved into Phase 2 at the start of his second year in adding his ability to go out and play on the floor and face up and get those opportunities to show he has a complete game as a player and not just a complete game as a big man," Jones told the *Democrat*.

"He's been very receptive, very coachable, very enthusiastic about his work. I think people are starting to see the step by step improvements that he is making. Big men are that way, they don't typically go from point A to point Z.

They have to go through all the letters in the alphabet.

"Big guys always continue to make that progress on a consistent basis. If you watch the game closely from game to game with Balsa, you will see the light getting brighter in every area of his understanding and things he needs to work on.

One area of Koprivica's game that's still a work in progress is his defense. Last season, Koprivica was counted on defensively to give the Seminoles a spark off the bench.

Now that he's a starter and playing more minutes, Koprivica feels like he hasn't generated the same defensive intensity as he did a season ago.

"I just took pride in that and just tried to switch on anyone on the floor and guide anyone," Koprivica said. "And that also brought me energy, going to the glass and being aggressive on offense. And I think obviously this year with playing more minutes, I think I need to do a better job of doing the defensive techniques and closing out a little bit better.

"So I think when it comes to close-outs, I just need to have better footwork, so I don't get blown by. Because sometimes, it is hard when you're in a rotation, and then you have to close out, and someone does rip drives next to you. In general, my defense needs to get a little bit more active this year on defense just like I did last year, just bring more energy to it."

Looking To Bounce Back

FSU is coming off its first ACC loss of the season at Clemson on Tuesday.

The Tigers outrebounded the Seminoles 49-35. Additionally, Clemson converted 24 of 33 free throws, while FSU went 6 of 9. The Seminoles were called for 24 personal fouls, compared to 14 for the Tigers.

Turnovers were also a contributing factor in the Seminoles' loss. They had 17.

Koprivica says he is confident FSU will continue to get better and learn and grow from the loss as the team gets deeper into ACC play. Duke provides an important test as the Seminoles have dropped two of their last three games.

"They shot a pretty poor percentage from the field, and so did we," Koprivica said of the Clemson defeat. "They didn't shoot the ball well, so that means that we were doing a decent job. They had way more offensive rebounds, I think they had 19 offensive rebounds, and we had turnovers in the beginning as we had six turnovers in the first few possessions.

"And they attacked the basket more and got to the free-throw line. So those three things are what we need to focus on, attacking the glass, don't let the opposing team get offensive rebounds, and shoot more free throws than the other team. If we do those three things, everything else will fall into place. We will hit shots, and we will get open looks."

2020 has been a difficult year for everyone in all walks of life. But there have been some positives when it comes to FSU basketball. Last season, the Seminoles finished 26–5 and won the ACC regular-season championship. However, the 2020 ACC Tournament and the 2020 NCAA Tournament was canceled because of the COVID pandemic.

Even before this season started, FSU players dealt with the new normal in the world of COVID. Players were limited in the number of times they could practice as many worked out individually to prepare for this season.

Koprivica is determined to embrace the learning experiences.

"I think 2020 had a lot of ups and downs," Koprivica said. "I think a lot of people had a lot of ups and downs. But just in general, I just try to learn from everything that happened throughout this whole year."