

Cofer Brings Extra Size, Skills To 'Noles

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Athleticism and tenacity packed into a 6-foot-8 yet somewhat wiry frame is what makes Phil Cofer such an interesting project.

Cofer's length and quickness could allow him to defend numerous positions in a way most can't. Those talents also can help him expose match-ups on offense.

Cofer knows this.

So does Florida State men's basketball coach Leonard Hamilton.

It's why the sophomore added around 20 pounds of muscle, worked hard on his defense and expanded his skills as a shooter in the offseason.

"Coming in, I didn't even know I was that skinny," Cofer said. "So I was like 195, maybe 200 just getting to 200. But now, I am 218, 219. So I've been working out with [strength and conditioning coach Michael Bradley] and he keeps telling me to eat protein, milk shakes and stuff like that.

"I'm just doing whatever the coaches want me to do, and it really has helped me progress."

How the changes affect Cofer in the long term remain to be seen. For now, it appears he's off to a good start. Cofer started Sunday in FSU's 109-62 laughter over Nicholls State at the Civic Center.

Cofer played 25 minutes and scored nine points along with grabbing five rebounds. His contributions helped the Seminoles surpass the 100-point barrier, something they didn't do once last season. FSU will attempt to deliver a similar performance tonight when it hosts Jacksonville at 9 p.m.

Rated by Rivals as a three-star prospect, Cofer came to FSU after he initially signed a letter of intent with Tennessee. He was released from his letter following a coaching change and then selected the Seminoles.

The son of former Detroit Lions linebacker Mike Cofer averaged 22.3 minutes, 6.9 points and 4.5 rebounds as a freshman. Like most freshmen, he struggled with consistency. He scored a career-high 21 points against Pittsburgh on Jan. 14. Fourteen days later, he scored 19 against Wake Forest.

Yet between those two games, he combined to score 13 points over three games.

"It's just a mindset type of thing," Cofer said. "You know everybody goes through like a freshman slump, so that's one of the key things. [FSU associate head coach Stan Jones] helps me go over film and stuff like that. That way I can learn from my mistakes and not let it get to me again."

Hamilton described Cofer as having a "junkyard dog mentality" that is present during every game and practice.

"He comes with that effort in all the drills," Hamilton said. "He's a verbal guy. He's a hype man, I guess you might say, and he plays that way all the time."

Hamilton added that Cofer is the kind of player the coaching staff likes to work with. They believe he can be an effective "stretch-four," a power forward who can play on the perimeter, which is why they had him train with the guards during the summer. During those sessions, Cofer worked on developing his three-point shot and his ball-handling. He said he's intently focused on being a more complete and consistent player.

Only one game into the 2015-16 season, he already feels a significant difference from a year ago.

"Last year, man, I was going down the court thinking about, 'What play am I doing?' Or, 'What am I doing this play?'" Cofer recalled. "And now, I don't even think about that."

Said senior guard Devon Bookert: "He's always had a lot of energy, but now he's getting a lot better basketball IQ. He understands the plays and he understands how to pick his spots and where things are much easier on the floor for him."