

Feeling Healthy Again, Phil Cofer A Big Contributor To Florida State's Early Season Success

By Joe Reedy

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Phil Cofer is finally making an impact for 19th-ranked Florida State.

The 6-foot-8 senior forward is healthy for the first time in a while and has been one of the main contributors behind the Seminoles' 9-0 start. He has been in the starting lineup for every game this season, averaging 12.3 points and 5.8 rebounds.

Cofer was limited the past two seasons due to ankle and back injuries, but he said this past summer was the first time he has felt completely healthy since his freshman season.

"Injuries are always going to take a mental toll, but the coaches have told me to play my game and not dwell on the past," Cofer said.

Cofer came to Florida State as a physical power forward who could also play some at center. As a freshman he started 24 games and was second on the team in rebounding (4.5 per game) while averaging 6.9 points.

But injuries would diminish his production the next two seasons. He started only five games while averaging 3.2 points and 2.0 rebounds.

Despite seeing limited minutes, Cofer continued to work on ball handling and improving his perimeter shooting. That work has paid off this season as he is making 55 percent of his shots from the field, including 6 of 15 3-pointers.

"Where some guys are always looking for reasons why they aren't being as successful and use excuses that is not the case with him," coach Leonard Hamilton said. "Even when he was hurt he was working on his game and studying our system. He has confidence in his shooting now that when he has the open look he can knock it down."

Going into Saturday's game against Oklahoma State, which is part of the Orange Bowl Classic in Sunrise, Cofer is averaging 13.8 points and 6.7 rebounds during the past six games along with hitting 56.9 percent from the field. His best game during that stretch came in the Dec. 4 win at then-No. 5 Florida when Cofer had his second career double-double with 10 points and 12 rebounds.

Cofer, who had scored in double figures only seven times in 76 games the first three years of his career, has six this season.

The Seminoles switch in offensive philosophy has also meant Cofer has had to change his game. Florida State has evolved from a motion offense that relies on strong inside play to a team that is more up-tempo with versatile perimeter players, Cofer has refined his game to where he can play both small and power forward.

"This summer I was on the treadmill a lot more because of the way we play," he said. "I've been getting the ball more but also have been getting a lot of open shots. With an unselfish team like we have and this offense, it has been great so far."

Cofer and the Seminoles have also bought into Hamilton's philosophy of having to win by committee. Florida State returned only one starter from a team that went 26-9 last season and reached the NCAA Tournament for the first time in five years, but it can tie its best start in school history with a win on Saturday.

The Seminoles will host Charleston Southern on Monday and Southern Mississippi on Thursday before opening Atlantic Coast Conference play at Duke on Dec. 30.

Even though Florida State has been the conference's surprise team so far, Hamilton is trying to keep expectations in check.

"Our attitude and effort is good but still have some technique errors," he said. "We still have a ways to go. We need to attack defenses better and move the ball better."