

Phil Cofer Remains Vital Piece Towards Seminoles' Success

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Florida State is 5-0 for the first time since the Seminoles won the ACC Championship in 2012. It has certainly been an impressive start for a team that boasts eight scholarship underclassmen. The `Noles have only two seniors: Phil Cofer and Braian Angola. Cofer is the longest tenured player on this roster, while Angola transferred to Tallahassee after starting his career at North Idaho College.

Cofer has traveled a tumultuous road to arrive to where he is in his career. He signed with FSU in 2014 alongside Robbie Berwick, Dayshawn Watkins, and Norbetas Giga. The Fayetteville native is the only member of his recruiting class who did not wind up elsewhere.

The senior forward was a key piece of the rotation as a freshman and was expected to make an even bigger leap as a sophomore. Instead, he suffered an ankle injury and only played in 11 games before having season-ending surgery that hampered him through his junior season. Cofer, almost two years removed from the surgery, is ecstatic to finally be feeling healthy.

"It feels great to be back out there," Cofer said on returning to the court. "I came a long way from the injuries on both feet. But it is what it is and you've got to live in the present."

Head coach Leonard Hamilton's squad has flourished with Cofer on the floor. The Seminoles are averaging 91.0 points per game while shooting 52.9 percent from the field. On the other end, FSU has limited its opponents to just 68.0 points per game and 36.8 percent on field goals.

"This year I'm trying to be more of a leader," Cofer said. "One of the key things for me is definitely bringing that junkyard defense back."

"He's always talking, always giving us instruction, and that's probably the area where he's contributed the most," added Hamilton. "He's constantly communicating with our young, inexperienced players and giving them instructions. Sometimes you keep talking through it, they make less mistakes."

Cofer has made vast improvements in his offensive game since the beginning of his college career. Now, that hard work is finally paying off. Averaging a career-high 13.2 points and 4.8 rebounds in 22.8 minutes per game, Cofer is one of three Seminoles shooting over 60 percent from the field.

"I was working on ball handling, shooting, film work, all the little stuff," Cofer said. "Everything on offense. There's not really one thing I worked on specifically."

The senior showed off those improvements last week in the `Noles 98-79 victory over Kennesaw State. Cofer finished the game by tying a career-high with 21 points, nine rebounds and a block. He was also extremely efficient, making nine of his 11 shots from the field and knocking down the only three-pointer he attempted. Cofer followed up that performance by putting up 15 points and 3 rebounds in 22 minutes during the blowout victory against the Citadel on Friday.

"There's really no limit to what Phil can do," sophomore guard Trent Forrest said. "He can score, he can rebound, it's great what he can do. It gives us a lot because he's energetic, he causes mismatches on offense and defense. He can guard one through five, it's just great having that versatility."

“We are trying to challenge him to be who he is,” Hamilton added on Cofer’s development. “He is an athlete who needs to get more rebounds. He was a back to the basket guy in high school and our system requires him to be away from the bucket a lot and out on the perimeter.”

After being an energy guy for much of his first three seasons in garnet and gold, Hamilton credited Cofer’s improving jump-shot as part of the reason for the leap in his offensive game.

“I think he kind of got his confidence up and made a couple of shots,” Hamilton said on Cofer’s growing offensive game. “He’s really improved his perimeter shot. He played within his abilities and I was very proud of him.”