

## Cofer Returns With New Back Of Tricks

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After starting 24 games as a freshman and ranking fourth on the team in scoring, Phil Cofer had big goals for the 2015-16 season.

Instead, he was struck by a bigger pain on the very first day of preseason practice.

Unbeknownst to Cofer, a cyst had been growing on a bone in his ankle, and it was causing a piercing pain every time he tried to run. Or jump. Or do much of anything.

"He had been struggling for a while, and he's a tough kid," Florida State associate head coach Stan Jones said. "He tried to play through it, thinking it was just minor."

When doctors discovered the root of the problem, playing through the pain was no longer an option. Surgery would be required, forcing him to miss the bulk of his sophomore campaign.

But when Cofer and the Florida State men's basketball team open the 2016-17 season Saturday afternoon, those concerns will be a distant memory. Not only is Cofer completely healthy once again, but he also has added some new skills that seem to be meshing well with the Seminoles' new free-flowing offensive attack.

"He's a much better ball-handler and passer, he's become a better perimeter shooter and his dribbling has really, really improved," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said. "He's still got some areas of his game he needs to work on, but he's becoming a more versatile player."

When Cofer came out of Atlanta's Whitewater High School, he was known primarily as an explosive low-post player. His combination of size (6-foot-8, 218 pounds) and athleticism helped him average 6.9 points a game as a freshman at FSU. He also finished second on the team in rebounding (4.5 per game) and first in offensive rebounding.

Now, teammates and coaches say, Cofer brings even more to the table.

While recovering from his ankle surgery last spring and summer, Cofer started working on other aspects of his game. Even before he could run again, the Seminoles' coaches had him working on his dribbling while stationary. Then they focused on his shooting from the perimeter.

At the time, Cofer said, he was having trouble keeping his jump shots on target; the ball would often drift slightly to the left. When Jones showed him the problem -- that Cofer was putting too much pressure on the ball with the thumb on his off-hand -- he worked hard on making the adjustment.

"Now, it's dropping," the redshirt sophomore said of his jumper.

"Phil's a smart guy, and he's one of the most coachable guys I've ever had the opportunity to coach," Jones said.

"You can say things to him, and he applies it and then he replicates it."

Cofer also used his time off to see the game from a different perspective. During each game last season, he would sit next to Jones and ask questions about what he should or shouldn't do in certain situations. He then would visualize the plays he would make when he was healthy enough to return.

"I think it gave him a chance to slow down and see the game a little better and to work on some little detail things that sometimes you can't do in the middle of a season," Jones said.

As frustrating as last season was at times, Jones said he has no doubt the time off made Cofer a much better player. He already was a solid defender, rebounder and post player; now he can take opponents off the dribble to create his own shot, and he also can knock down jumpers with much greater frequency.

In FSU's two preseason exhibitions, Cofer displayed what the additional skills can do for his game. In the first exhibition, he scored 20 points and grabbed nine rebounds. In the second, he finished with 12 points and five boards.

Sophomore center Christ Koumadje, who often squares off against Cofer in the low post during scrimmages, said those added skills are making him a major match-up problem.

"That's going to be a tough challenge for anybody that guards him," Koumadje said. "If you're big, he might take you outside and shoot it. If you're small, he'll post you up. So it's going to be a challenge."