

Florida State Basketball Center Balsa Koprivica Showing Signs Of Progress

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No. 19 Florida State has been one of the best college basketball programs in the country at developing big men over the last decade.

But the Seminoles (9-2, 1-1 ACC) have taken a bit of a step back this year, which is to be expected when two new centers are introduced to the program.

Ole Miss transfer Dominik Olejniczak and true freshman Balsa Koprivica are both still learning FSU's system in their first years with the program.

For a team that relies heavily on its big men, that has created some challenges.

"We've had a problem with our big guys," FSU coach Leonard Hamilton said.

"We have spots on the floor that we have to fulfill and transition. We don't have layups we got to get to what we call that checkpoints. And our guys are running to the wrong spot. Instead of running to the, what we call the halo at the front of the rim, they're running to the short corner. Or they run to the weak side, or they're stopping at the free throw line."

Both players have improved recently, but the progress that Koprivica has made has Hamilton excited for the rest of the season.

Koprivica, a native of Belgrade, Serbia, spent most of the first part of non-conference play on the bench because he was fouling at an extremely high rate. He even had as many fouls as minutes played at one point.

But Koprivica has shown flashes of his potential over the last six games, and FSU will need him to continue to do so against South Florida (6-4) in the Orange Bowl Classic Saturday at noon at the BB&T Center in Sunrise, Fla.

"I told our staff that I'm seeing something develop there," Hamilton said.

"He's responding to coaching. We've been challenging him. We've been holding them accountable been pushing. And he's eager to learn he's a sponge."

Koprivica, 7-foot-1, 260 pounds, has played the eighth most minutes per game on FSU's roster, but he's sixth in points scored. He's averaging 6.2 points and 2.6 rebounds in 12.8 minutes per game. He's shooting 81.8% from the floor this season (27-33).

He had a career-high 15 points against North Florida Tuesday with three rebounds and a block.

The other seven players in front of him in minutes played are all averaging more than 20 minutes per game. As his time on the court improves, so will his grasping of the system that FSU runs. When that happens, FSU's coaches and players are excited for what his future holds.

"It's amazing," Olejniczak said.

"I mean, where he was when he got here as far as where he is right now it's like having a really, really big strides and he's got so much more potential and his ceiling is unbelievably high. So, I'm just looking forward to seeing where this season takes him."