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WKU MEN'S BASKETBALL

Transfer Coleby taking advantage of opportunity at WKU

Forward averaging 12.3 points, 7.8 rebounds for 4-2 Hilltoppers

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Western Kentucky Hilltoppers forward Dwight Coleby (22) dunks during WKU's 100-86 win over Nicholls State on Sunday, Nov. 19, 2017, at E.A. Diddle Arena. (Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com)

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Austin Anthony

Dwight Coleby was an afterthought last season at Kansas. Rick Stansbury wanted him to take on a bigger role after transferring to Western Kentucky.

“I don’t know too much, but it didn’t take me long to watch him to know he was going to average more than 1.7,” WKU’s coach Stansbury said Monday on his weekly radio show. “That’s one basket per game. I knew we could figure out some way to get him one basket.”

Coleby has scored more points through six games at WKU (74) than he did all last season for Kansas (41), and is a key reason the Hilltoppers are 4-2.

Coleby is averaging 12.3 points and 7.8 rebounds per contest. He ranks second on the team in scoring behind guard Darius Thompson (13.8 ppg) and second in rebounds to forward Justin Johnson (9.0 rpg).

The 6-foot-9 forward from Nassau, Bahamas, leads the Toppers with 20 offensive rebounds, nine blocks and a 63.3 field goal percentage.

With that kind of shooting percentage, Stansbury wants the ball in Coleby's hands more often.

"He's shooting 63 percent, he needs more shots," Stansbury said. "Sixty-three percent, I'd be curious to know, probably half of those are offensive put-backs where we didn't throw it to him.

"As he gets more comfortable ... we're all going to get more confidence. He's going to get more confident and we're going to get more confidence in him, throwing it to him in there. I believe he can score in there."

Stansbury pointed out Monday that Coleby didn't quite know how to react early this season when he became a focal point of the offense.

Coleby's most productive year came in 2014-15 as a sophomore at Mississippi, when he averaged 5.4 ppg. He averaged 2.4 ppg as a freshman at Ole Miss in 2013-14, and 1.7 ppg last year at Kansas.

WKU's coach said Coleby had to adjust to teammates actually feeding him the ball and keeping him involved offensively.

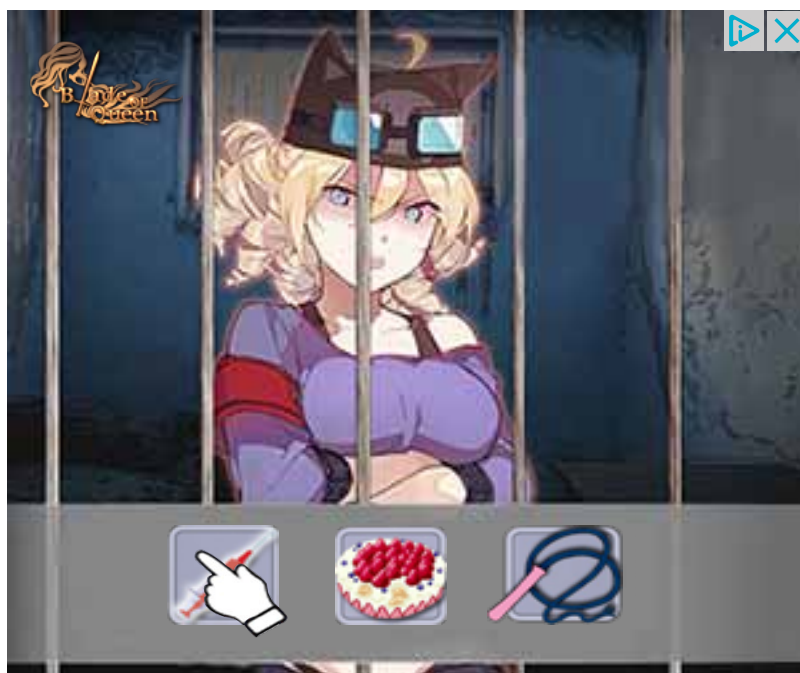
"The first couple of exhibition games, the first game, a lot of times when we threw it to him, he would walk because he was so anxious to score, because he's never had the ball thrown to him," Stansbury said. "But the more playing time he gets, he starts settling down and starts to understand that we have confidence in him."

Coleby showed last week in his native Bahamas that he can hold his own against some of college basketball's most talented teams.

Coleby started the Battle 4 Atlantis with a 12-point, 10-rebound effort Wednesday in a 66-58 loss to No. 5 Villanova.

He was limited by foul trouble Thursday against No. 18 Purdue and finished with six points and four rebounds. Two of Coleby's points came on a late dunk as the Hilltoppers fended off a Boilermaker rally in a 77-73 WKU upset.

Coleby then finished his time at Imperial Arena with 12 points and 12 rebounds Friday against Southern Methodist. Guard Jake Ohmer hit a game-winning 3-pointer that night to lift the Tops to a 63-61 victory.



“He was a load in that game down there against SMU now,” Stansbury said. “He was huge.”

Coleby's performance against the Mustangs capped off a special week for the Nassau native in his homeland.

The week started for WKU when the team and its traveling party went to a homecoming celebration Nov. 20 at the home of Coleby's relatives. The Hilltoppers were greeted by about 30 of the graduate senior's family members and were served a homemade, multi-course Bahamian feast.

Value of that trip went beyond just the food, Stansbury said, with his players getting to learn more about their new teammate Coleby and his culture and background.

Coleby's family members came to WKU's games that week at the Atlantis resort, many wearing custom T-shirts bearing his No. 22 and were among the Hilltoppers' most enthusiastic supporters.

TV cameras followed Coleby immediately after the final buzzer Friday. He walked into the stands after the SMU win with a grin and greeted his loved ones, picking up his young nephew.

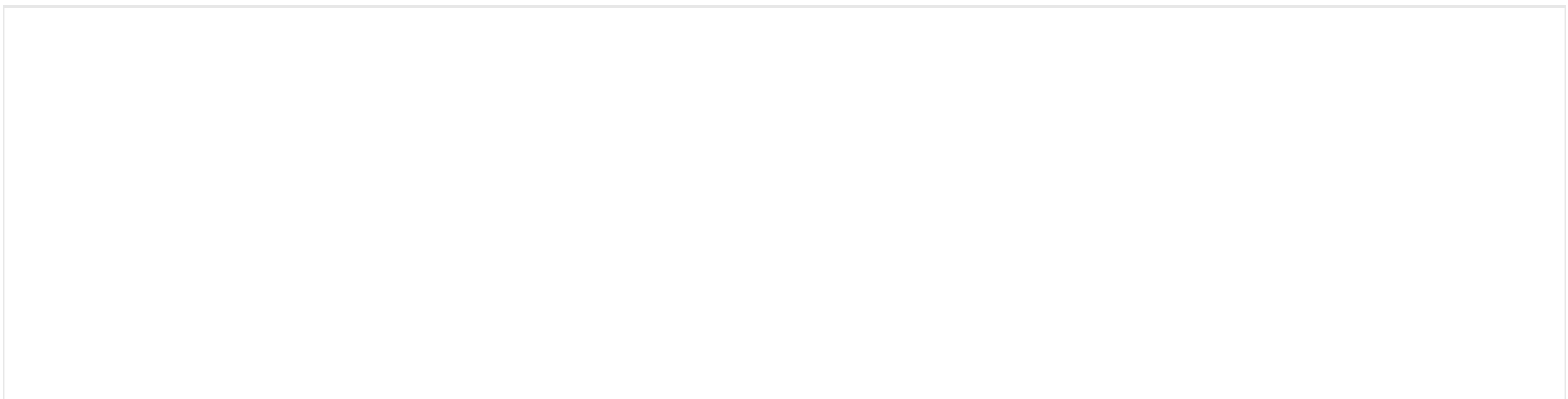
"There wasn't anything more special than walking off that floor that last night and seeing Dwight up there in those stands with his family, holding his little nephew," Stansbury said. "That's what it's all about right there, those experiences for those guys."

Up Next

Coleby and WKU host in-state rival Eastern Kentucky at 7 p.m. Wednesday at E.A. Diddle Arena. The Colonels beat the Hilltoppers 78-59 last season.

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Brad Stephens

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