



AP Photo/Rick

Scuteri Promise Amukamara and No. 11 Arizona State recently won 14 consecutive games.

It's too easy to say that Charli Turner Thorne quickly saw the promise in a speedy, local guard who showed up at camp as a high school track star with a not-quite-clear path into collegiate basketball.

"I knew that she was going to have huge upside," Turner Thorne said, recalling her first impressions of Promise Amukamara.

Upside has certainly arrived for Amukamara, a 5-foot-8 senior whose improvement, particularly offensively, has driven the Sun Devils to the best start in school history and one of the biggest surprises of the season.

Arizona State, coming off Sunday's home loss against Oregon State to fall into second place in the Pac-12, has won 14 of its past 15 games and sits at 18-2 with a 7-1 record in league play. Before falling to the Beavers, the Sun Devils had reeled off 14 straight wins, including the program's first victory over Stanford at Maples Pavilion since 1984.

Amukamara, from nearby Glendale, Arizona, leads the Sun Devils in minutes played, free throw percentage and steals. She ranks third in scoring on a balanced offensive team at 11.7 points a game. She has scored in double figures in 13 games this season, more than in all of last season (eight).

She is a catalyst on both ends of the floor, already an established defensive stopper.

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AP Photo/Rick Osentoski
senior guard, Amukamara averages 11.7 PPG and nearly 2.0 SPG while shooting 49.7 percent from the field.

But watching people sag off her last season, knowing she wasn't much of a scoring threat (she averaged 6.9 points in 2013-14), was a good reason to refocus on offense. Amukamara is explosive off the dribble, one of the fastest players "shooting the gap" that Turner Thorne has ever coached.

"She got a taste of not being guarded last year," Turner Thorne said. "I told our team that we can't progress as a program if there's someone out there who isn't a threat."

Amukamara spent the summer working on her shot, changing her mindset and building her confidence.

"I knew I needed to be a threat," Amukamara said. "Just having people play me helps us. It's my senior year, and I knew I had to be more aggressive. Our leading scorer left last year and I knew we needed more scorers on this team. And I think coach and myself knew that I would be the best one to fit that role."

There is more than a hint of competitiveness in Amukamara's voice, one that comes from years of practice. There are six children in the Amukamara house, five girls and one boy, who made pretty good for himself.

Promise's older brother, Prince, plays corner from the New York Giants and won a Super Bowl in his rookie season in 2011, perpetuating the family's athletic legacy. Her mother ran track for the Nigerian Olympic team. Her father was a soccer player in Nigeria.

The Amukamara kids have always compared everything: their grades and their athletic feats, even before they got to high school.

"There's a lot of competition in our house," said Promise's younger sister and ASU teammate, Peace, a junior college transfer from Mesa Community College. "We all think we are better than each other in everything. We are always talking about our accomplishments, trying to top each other. One time, my

brother came back from New York and the three of us played pick-up and I beat them both and they were complaining about the rim and talking about who was the best defender."

Peace is learning a lot from her older sister in their only collegiate season together both on court and off. The two live together, as well.

"I just try to pick up as much as I can from her," Peace said. "She talks to me -- how she stays in front of her player, how she doesn't get beat on the ball. In practice, she's always guarding the top player. I try to mimic what she does, and I try to remember what she teaches me."

“

I really feel like the sky is the limit for her.

”- *ASU coach Charli Turner Thorne on Promise Amukamara*

Prince Amukamara has said he thinks Promise is the best athlete in the family.

Promise played basketball before switching her focus to track in middle school, doing it mostly, she has admitted, because her siblings were doing it.

She returned to basketball because she did not love running outside in the heat. She wanted to come indoors, and so she went back to basketball, leading Apollo High to the state title in her senior season and winning Arizona state player of the year honors. But, she admits, she did not see herself playing college basketball.

Promise was not playing basketball year-round when Turner Thorne first saw her at camp as a high school prospect.

"She was playing regional club basketball and hadn't played nearly as much as some of the kids I was recruiting," Turner Thorne said. "And I was fine with that."

Promise said she is still learning how to be a leader.

"I just keep talking and talking to my teammates on and off the court," Promise said. "It's becoming a more comfortable position for me."

It is comfort borne of hard work.

"She has put in the time," Turner Thorne said. "It's come quickly to her because she's such a good athlete. She's doing what I've asked of her and she's doing more. I really feel like the sky is the limit for her."

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