

Kendall Marshall in a fight for spot with Phoenix Suns

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Kendall Marshall has a few things going for him. He is on a very cheap (in NBA terms), guaranteed contract and he is only 21 years old. In college, he was the best passer in the game (possibly in the past decade). His basketball IQ is very high and his court vision is second only to a few.

But his lack of development of any other NBA-level skills have so far made it tough for Marshall to succeed. He cannot shoot well, doesn't run fast and doesn't use his large frame (for a PG) to his advantage. Worst of all, he has always seemed sure that he can succeed without significantly improving in any of those areas.

It started in Summer League, then carried over to a lackluster training camp and right into the season, down to the D-League and back to a rebuilding project.

"I wasn't as consistent as I wanted to be last year," Marshall said after his first practice with new coach Jeff Hornacek in preparation for the Summer League that begins on Saturday. "So if I can become more consistent on the defensive end and make my presence felt offensively getting guys in position to score as well as taking advantage of my own possessions, I think I can have a pretty good season."

Marshall is a thinking man, but it still seems like he thinks he just needs to "get by" without those vital skills. He thinks about setting up other teammates, and he thinks about how to facilitate that by doing everything else just well enough to be respectable. Even now, he doesn't sound like he's totally ready to be aggressive in getting his own shots.

"Personally, I just want to get my body where I want it to be," he said of his personal goals this season. "And take advantage of my size. Maybe drop a few pounds and be a threat offensively. That would open up a lot more passing."

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To become a threat offensively, he has to be able to shoot better. And with enough repetitions, Marshall could get his percentages up. But that's not the biggest problem, according to his coach.

"When you look at it you think it's a terrible shot in terms of his form, but it really isn't," Hornacek said of Marshall's shot. "It's just low and to get that off against a defense is going to be difficult. And that's the thing he has to work on is get it above his head. He's going to have to put the time in. It's an adjustment for him."

Hornacek was being kind. Marshall also doesn't get any air under his feet on the shot which compounds the problem even further. A slow-motion, set shot with a forehead-level release means Danny DeVito could block that shot right now.

"That's going to be a gradual thing that he has to work on day in and day out," Hornacek said of the process. "And just try to lift it a little higher. They may let him shoot it now because they don't think he's a great shooter. But I told him as soon as you start making those shots, they're going to guard you and then you're not going to get them off. So you might as well start practicing getting it up higher now. Hopefully he gets there."

To make matters worse for Marshall, it's not just about shooting or about the competition.

These [Suns](#) are going to run hard, which suits newcomers [Eric Bledsoe](#) , [Archie Goodwin](#) and incumbent [Goran Dragic](#)

to a "T". With Bledsoe and/or Goodwin running alongside him, Dragic may no longer be the only guy down the court on a breakaway.

"He wants us to run," Marshall said right off the bat.

"We'll know if they are in shape or not," the coach said with a chuckle. "We want to push the ball. We're putting a little pressure on them to take it to another level in terms of their intensity and what we're asking them to do offensively and defensively."

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But that's not necessarily Marshall's game.

"Some of them are used to just walking the ball up the court and not getting in the post quickly," Hornacek said of the summer squad after practice. He was talking of all the returning players, including the Morrii, Marshall and Garrett.

The new coach is not at a loss for ideas with Marshall though. There's worse things than having a good passer on your team.

"He's not the type of guy that is gonna fly down the court and penetrate and put pressure on a defense," Hornacek said of Marshall. "But he's a great passer when it gets into drag action, pick and rolls. He can hit those rollers and make the extra passes and those guys can put the pressure on the defense."

But there's still that matter of being able to shoot. Hornacek has a plan for that too.

"I did it when I was 22 or 23 years old," he said. "So he should be able to do it too if he puts the time in it. That's going to be a gradual thing that he has to work on and do it day in and day out and just try to lift it a little higher."

For those Suns fans who don't remember Hornacek, he came to the Suns in 1987 as a rookie combo guard who couldn't shoot straight. His GM, Jerry Colangelo, told him he needed to remake his broken shot. Within a year, Hornacek's shot was pure and he became one of the best shooters in the entire league for the next dozen seasons.

For his part, Marshall knows he's not on solid ground, and never has been since he was drafted.

"Personally, I didn't prove that I could be on the court early in the season," Marshall said. "I did get my chance in the second half of the year, but I didn't do as well as I wanted to."

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Regarding the acquisition of Bledsoe, drafting of Goodwin and looming return of Dragic, Marshall said, "I was excited but at the same time, as a competitor, you put your hard hat on and realize it's a tough road ahead. They are great assets to our team, they're going to make us better, so I'm excited about that."

Marshall is ready to get back on that court this weekend in Summer League.

"I'm a lot more confident," he said. "I know what I'm walking into. I know what it takes. It's a total different mindset than what I came in with last year."

Let's hope part of that mindset is to stretch out his shot to get some more height on his release, use his body to muscle into the paint and keep on passing like he knows he can.

"First of all: win. That's my first goal," he said of Summer League. "The second goal is to prove that I can be a contributor on this team."

To do that, he's going to have to be a lot better this summer, and from here on out, than he was a year ago. Fortunately for the Suns, Marshall is only 21 years old still. *(making him only the third youngest on the team, by the way, thanks to this year's draft)*