

Written by

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After six seasons, 90 regular season wins, 11 playoff wins, and one WNBA Championship Corey Gaines is out as the Phoenix Mercury's head coach and general manager. All of those are franchise records for a head coach.

For the past seven years Gaines has been a fixture U.S. Airways as an assistant in 2006 with the Mercury under then head coach Paul Westhead and as an assistant with the Phoenix Suns working with the team in a player development role. He was on the staff as an assistant when the team won the 2007 Championship and has been pulling the strings since 2008, including the 2009 Championship as the head coach.

All of that came to an end today.

***Gaines status with the Phoenix Suns will be determined separately from this decision at a later date per the team***

President Amber Cox statement:

First and foremost, we thank Corey for his years of dedication to this franchise, its players and its fans. Corey helped bring two championships to our organization and for that we will be forever grateful. Unfortunately, our team's performance this season has not lived up to our expectations, and at this time, a change was necessary. Russ Pennell is a proven leader and winner, whose resume speaks to his ability to build a winning culture founded in discipline and fundamentals.

The team has been under-performing based on talent so far this season at 10-11 overall clinging on to the third seed in the Western Conference for most of the season.

## Phoenix Mercury relieve Corey Gaines as the teams head coach and general manager; Russ Pennell takes

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With Diana Taurasi, Brittney Griner, DeWanna Bonner, Candice Dupree, and Penny Taylor the team was supposed to be a force in the WNBA and a legitimate threat to win their third Championship in six years. Instead they have struggled to defend, score consistently, and win games against quality teams. In all likelihood they are a playoff team, but with the way they have played are not seen as a serious contender in the Western Conference.

In the door comes Russ Pennell.

Arizona basketball fans are aware of Pennell as the initial replacement to the legendary Lute Olson at the University of Arizona. He lasted 35 games and a run to the Sweet 16 before he was passed over for the permanent job in favor of Sean Miller. Since then he has been with the Grand Canyon University (Division II) where he went 72-44 reaching the NCAA Tournament twice.

Dan Majerle took over for Pennell this summer and now Pennell is back on a sideline; this time in the WNBA.

This is a drastic change going from Gaines who has Championship experience to Pennell who has never coached a woman's basketball game in his career. Pennell will also be the teams General Manager in his interim role as well.

This season the team has now dismissed their former first round pick in Samantha Prahalis after just one season and their long-term head coach while, again, dealing with a Mash Unit of injuries that have sidelined Taylor, Griner, and others for numerous games.

Will this change motivate the team for the remainder season? Only time will tell, but it was obvious that a change was needed for this team to have a chance to realize their potential...

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As for Gaines role with the Suns that has yet to be determined. He was an assistant under interim head coach Lindsey Hunter for the final 41 games of the season after serving as a player development coach for the past few years.

He has a good relationship with the Suns players and primarily works with the younger players, more specifically the guards.

Over the past year he has been working to develop Kendall Marshall and Diante Garrett as the teams primary back-up guards. With the staff seemingly full under head coach Jeff Hornacek as he hired Mark West, Jerry Sichting, Mike Longabardi, and Kenny Gattison this summer. Remaining on board as a member of player development is a decision that owner Robert Sarver will have to make and that Gaines will have to think about as well.

After being a head coach for six years and being an assistant in the NBA it is clear where Gaines wants his career to go. To an NBA bench. He will have opportunities to coach in the WNBA next season, but will he continue his trek into the NBA instead? Again, only time will tell...