

## The Phoenix Mercury reach their full potential behind Brittney Griner's late game heroics

Written by

Tuesday, 24 September 2013 11:42 -

---



Welcome to Bizzaro World. The Phoenix Mercury won a thrilling game three against the Los Angeles Sparks on the road, in their house, in what will amount to an instant classic behind what amounted to a game winning shot and a huge defensive stop in the final seconds.

In the final 10 seconds Candace Parker made a quick move to the basket on a brilliant out of bounds call, which was countered by a Brittney Griner jumper and anchored by a DeWanna Bonner closeout on the defensive end.

Something about that feels backwards.

I wouldn't hesitate ever to throw her the ball in that situation. -Coach Russ Pennell on Brittney Griner

But as the Mercury celebrated in Los Angeles like kids in a pool on a hot summer day, they marched off the floor to an appropriate tune echoing; I Don't Care.

After losing in game two, Griner wore her emotion on her sleeves and took it out on a traffic cone, which was not necessary after she turned over her left shoulder and nailed a baseline jumper that was the penultimate moment before the confetti fell. This season has been about accomplishment and struggle for the rookie phenom. She took her lumps learning how to play in the pick-and-roll at the professional level.

## The Phoenix Mercury reach their full potential behind Brittney Griner's late game heroics

Written by

Tuesday, 24 September 2013 11:42 -

---

Griner is a physical specimen that has dominated based on that and that alone. She has come a long way to not only have the confidence from her coach to be the second option on a final offensive possession in the win-or-go-home play.

*You are really screening for Diana...* Interim Head Coach Russ Pennell barked in the final huddle of the game. Griner was being setup to give a screen for Taurasi to spring free and attack.

*have to post.*

the defense jumped Taurasi.

*you screen we can throw it right into you.*

*We have enough time to throw it there and you*

Additional directions for Griner in case

*Once*

There was some more direction for Briana Gilbreath to give some fake action and Dupree to set a pin down, but the gist of this was obvious; the game was coming down to Taurasi or Griner.

That was the final huddle where Coach Russ Pennell drew up the final play that was designed for Taurasi, but setup the opportunity up for Griner to make a play if the defense keys in on the superstar like they had the play before. Coach Pennell had the confidence in the moment to put the ball in his rookie's hands if the play broke down for her to make a play.

Throughout the season Griner has had her ups-and-her-downs on the offensive end surely making this one of the more satisfying moments in her young career.

"It's been up and down," Griner stated after the game of her season. "Especially tonight. It wasn't one of my best games until the end but that's really all that matters. I'm glad I could do that for my team."

Conversely, Bonner has been an offensive Swiss Army Knife for the past few seasons for the Mercury either off the bench, in a starting role, or starting as a compliment like this season. She has created the reputation as a tough one-on-one cover inside 10-12 feet and a deep bomber from three. There are very few things that Bonner cannot do on the offensive end, but this season has been a struggle on the defensive end.

Those struggles were evident in rotations and team scheme situations this year as opponents would target her side of the defense for easy baskets and momentum changing three-point

## The Phoenix Mercury reach their full potential behind Brittney Griner's late game heroics

Written by

Tuesday, 24 September 2013 11:42 -

---

shots.

Bonner has great length and size to disrupt an offensive player when she gets after them. That is what Candace Parker realized as she tried to turn the corner, but was met with the 6-4, long, and determined Bonner not allowing her to turn the corner like she had just three seconds prior (in game time) for an easy lay-up. The rotations have been criticized often, but in this game, in that final play, they were the difference in Parker turning to the rim for a drive or passing to Kristi Tolliver for a makeable three-point shot.

With Bonner and Taurasi trapping Parker she turned to Tolliver as the secondary option only to see Gilbreath there instead in the passing lane.

The trap was set and Parker, forced with no other options, threw-up a shot with no chance of going in as the Mercury move on to the Western Conference Finals for the fourth time in five years.

On the surface this seemed like an improbable feat; beating the second seeded Los Angeles Sparks on their home floor in not one, but two games and advancing to the Conference Finals as the three seed. Then again that was the plan from the beginning now wasn't it? Before the season a [poll of five ESPN Basketball Analysts](#) including Rebecca Lobo and Kate Fagan thought that the Mercury would be a playoff team and 60% of them saw them as the uncrowned WNBA Champions.

Over on [Swish Appeal Albert Lee](#) saw the Mercury as the second best team out west only behind the Minnesota Lynx.

This is where the team was expected to be, but the journey was so bumpy and filled with unexpected twists that this almost feels like a surprise by the Mercury, getting to this point. Taurasi was a pre-season MVP candidate and Griner was a Rookie of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year favorite to boot.

This was expected.

## **The Phoenix Mercury reach their full potential behind Brittney Griner's late game heroics**

Written by

Tuesday, 24 September 2013 11:42 -

---

But in a bizarre way, winning only 19 games, losing three in a row, and at one point, six out of seven games in a particularly low stretch. The team struggled with injuries, coaching changes, and a general sense of underperforming. There were positives and negatives, some extreme lows and, with their recent play, an extreme high heading to the Western Conference Finals.

The Mercury are right where they are supposed to be, but found a way to do it with a former Division I Men's Basketball Coach, a defensive enforcer hitting game winners, and an offensive dynamo closing games out with a fortified defense.

In Bizzaro World this is how the 2013 Phoenix Mercury advance and win. In this Bizzaro World they have become the team everyone expected them to be.