

San Antonio Spurs hire Becky Hammon as assistant coach

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By Jill Martin

(CNN) -- In what many sports fans view as a historic move, the reigning NBA champion San Antonio Spurs announced the hiring of Becky Hammon as assistant coach. Terms of Hammon's contract were not disclosed.

"I very much look forward to the addition of Becky Hammon to our staff," Spurs head coach Gregg Popovich said. "Having observed her working with our team this past season, I'm confident her basketball IQ, work ethic and interpersonal skills will be a great benefit to the Spurs."

At her introductory press conference Tuesday afternoon, Hammon called the opportunity humbling.

"I'm just incredibly grateful, obviously, to the Spurs organization and Coach Pop and (Spurs General Manager R.C. Buford)," Hammon said. "The whole staff really just from day one has been so great to me. I'm a little overwhelmed right now, to be perfectly honest."

Hammon, a six-time WNBA All-Star, announced July 23 she will retire as a player at the end of this season. She has played the last eight seasons with the San Antonio Stars.

Hammon is not the first woman in NBA history on an NBA coaching staff. Lisa Boyer, while working for the WNBA's Cleveland Rockers as an assistant coach, also was on the Cleveland Cavaliers coaching staff under John Lucas in 2001-2002. Boyer is now the associate head coach for the South Carolina women's basketball team.

Hammon alluded to the historical impact of her hiring, but she also tied in career fields other than basketball.

"There's women that have trail-blazed much bigger paths and really trail-blazed the path for things like this to happen," Hammon said. "There's a lot more important things going on, in the bigger things, CEOs of companies. Women are really in every area. They're in the surgery rooms. They're doctors. They're lawyers. They're COOs."

"So even me sitting here today to be able to have the playing experience that I had as a professional basketball player, women went before me to pave that trail. So I'm really just reaping benefits of all their hard work and labor."

Popovich found out through San Antonio Stars head coach Dan Hughes that Hammon was interested in coaching. That led to Hammon spending time with Popovich and the rest of the Spurs team at practices, and a feature on "NBA Inside Stuff."

"She's right in the middle and she knows how to do it and her players really respond to her," Popovich said in the "Inside Stuff" feature. "She's just a natural."

Spurs guard/forward Danny Green was complimentary as well.

"Everybody here respects her," Green said. "She's a really good player and also a good person to have around. She understands the game."

In the feature, Popovich also said Hammon "knows when to talk" and "when to shut up," saying that a lot of people don't figure that out.

"She talks the game, she understands the game," Popovich said. "So for all those reasons you really know she's got that same sort of Avery Johnson, Steve Kerr, (Mike) Budenholzer type thing."

Hammon acknowledged she will be in high-pressure situations.

"I'm ready to be treated as just any other assistant coach," she said.

Despite going undrafted in 1999, Hammon was named one of the WNBA's Top 15 Players of All Time in July 2011. She's seventh in league history in points with 5,809, fourth in assists (1,687) and sixth in games (445). Hammon has averaged 13.1 points per game in her career.

Hammon, who grew up in Rapid City, South Dakota, spent her first eight WNBA seasons with the New York Liberty after signing as an undrafted free agent. On a draft-night deal in 2007, she was traded to San Antonio. Hammon also was a three-time All-American at Colorado State.

Hammon, one of many women's players to also play professionally overseas during WNBA offseasons, became a naturalized Russian citizen in 2008. That same year, when she was the runner-up in the WNBA MVP voting, Hammon created a stir when she decided to suit up for the Russian National Team in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. She said she was feeling overlooked by USA Basketball for a spot on the U.S. national team but still wanted to fulfill her dream of playing in the Olympics. Hammon also played for the Russian team in the 2012 London Games.

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