

Sister act headlines ASU women's basketball season

Peace Amukamara is joining her sister Promise as ASU women's basketball teammates



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(Photo: Michael Chow/azcentral sports)

The sister era is dawning for Arizona State women's basketball.

Peace Amukamara is in this season, reuniting with her sister, Promise, a senior. Next season when Arnecia Hawkins is a senior, she'll be joined by her sister, Armani, who signed with ASU on Wednesday.

"It's worked for Stanford," ASU coach Charli Turner Thorne said. "I'm not too proud to say that's a good formula."

Not to put pressure on the Amukamaras to deliver in one season what the Ogwumike sisters did in two NCAA Final Four seasons together at Stanford. But Peace, coming off a national junior-college title at Mesa

Community College, isn't setting any limits.

"I never thought I'd get the opportunity again," Peace said. "Hopefully, we can do what we did in high school and win a national championship or do some remarkable things here at ASU."

Promise was a senior and Peace, 11 months younger, a junior when they led Glendale Apollo High School to Class 4A-I state championship. Turner Thorne thoroughly scouted Promise, the Arizona Gatorade Player of the Year, and in the process saw plenty of Peace.

"They had a lot of highlights together," Turner Thorne said. "They have that bond and chemistry. We're going to see some fun transition from Amukamara to Amukamara."

The 5-foot-8 Promise started 31 games last season for 23-win ASU, averaging 6.9 points and making the Pac-12 All-Defensive team. She had a team-high 52 steals and can be a blur transforming a turnover into points.

"I know I get points on steals and breakaways, but I want to be able to score the ball in the half court," Promise said. "Just be more of an offensive threat."

Turner Thorne is looking for the same. Her leading scorer last season, departed guard Deja Mann, averaged just 11.1 points. Scoring balance is one way to win, as ASU proved by advancing to the NCAA Tournament second round, but the promise of Promise being more of a go-to scorer could be realized this season.

Peace, a 5-7 point guard, averaged 14.1 points, 5.6 rebounds, 4.9 assists and 2.2 steals as a sophomore at MCC when she was national junior college Division II Player of the Year. She had a triple-double in the national semifinals and followed with a career high 28 points and 11 rebounds in the title game.

"My first year I kind of let my team down because I was lazy and just walking through the motions," said Peace, although Mesa reached the national-championship game. "I knew if we wanted to win I would have to put in more effort and get my teammates more involved, so that's what I did."

Peace will start out as the backup to junior Elisha Davis when ASU opens its season Friday but figures heavily into Turner Thorne's plans.

"We're on her, challenging her every day to be ready to help out," the 18th-year coach said. "She loves basketball, and we need her."

To reset the Amukamara story for those who might not know, father Romanus is the son of a Nigerian king and mother Christy ran track for Nigeria at the 1984 Olympics. There is a story behind the names of all six children: Prince (a cornerback with the New York Giants), Princess, Precious, Promise, Peace and Passionate.

"My dad said it's a point of life where he was feeling a certain way, and he wanted us all to have P names," Peace said. "It made it very unique. Sometimes people say, 'Hey, Precious' or call me a different name. I get used to it."

Promise is used to Peace claiming she's the best in the family in basketball.

"Since she was little, she always thought she was better than me," Promise said. "I'm not going to argue with her. I'm just going to show it on the court."

"I feel like I'm a better offensive player, but her defense is pretty good," Peace said. "I'm a better all-around player."

If the sisterly competition drives both, ASU will be all the better for it. They live together — "She gets mad when I don't do anything in the house or clean or take out the trash," Peace said — and Promise has done her best to help in Peace's transition from junior college.

"I actually like it (ASU) better," Peace said. "I like the campus and the people and I'm actually doing better in school. Promise makes sure I'm always on top of what I'm doing. She tells me, 'Don't feel defeated if in practice you're doing something wrong. Everyone makes mistakes.'"

That's when you most need a sister to pick you up.

ASU OVERVIEW

Strengths

Three starters — G Promise Amukamara, F Kelsey Moos, F/C Sophie Brunner — are back from a 23-10 that tied for fourth in the Pac-12 and reached the second round of the NCAA Tournament. They will be joined in the starting lineup by guards Elisha Davis and Katie Hempen, both of whom averaged more than 19 minutes last season.

Concerns

ASU's starters are small, topped by Brunner at 6feet1, although the bench includes 6-4 Quinn Dornstauder and 6-4 freshman Ayanna Edwards. All Pac-12 guard Deja Mann is gone, now playing professionally in the Czech Republic, leaving a gap in floor leadership that must be filled.

Key games

ASU could face two-time defending NCAA champion Connecticut on Nov.30 in the Gulf Coast Showcase championship game. Overall, the Sun Devils play their first seven games (21 total) against teams that made the NCAA tourney or WNIT in 2013-14, including the season opener Friday at home vs. Middle Tennessee.

Players to watch

Brunner and Moos had solid and almost identical freshmen seasons, averaging 7.6 points/6.4 rebounds (Brunner) and 7.3/6.6 (Moos) and each shooting 49.7 percent, good enough for All Pac-12 freshman honorable mention. They need to take another step and become consistent double-figure scorers.

Best-case scenario

Davis and Peace Amukamara will play smart enough to replace Mann, defense in the paint improves and the offense takes another step forward particularly in the half court. That allows the Sun Devils to again exceed expectations (seventh Pac-12 coaches poll, sixth media) and return to the NCAA tourney.

Worst-case scenario

After improving by 10 wins last season, the Sun Devils regress because of the improving Pac-12 and difficulty matching their record in close games (15 wins by 10 points or fewer or in overtime). That takes the win total below 20 and sends ASU to the WNIT instead of the NCAA tourney.

ASU schedule

Nov. 14 Middle Tennessee 5 p.m.

Nov. 19 CSU Bakersfield 6:30 p.m.

Nov. 25 at Miami (Florida) 5 p.m.

Nov. 28 Gulf Coast Showcase: ASU vs. Villanova in Estero, Fla. 12:30 p.m.

Nov. 29 Gulf Coast Showcase in Estero, Fla. TBA

Nov. 30 Gulf Coast Showcase in Estero, Fla. TBA

Dec. 6 SMU 3 p.m.

Dec. 13 UC Davis 2:30 p.m.

Dec. 16 at Illinois State 6:05 p.m.

Dec. 20 ASU Classic: ASU vs. Lehigh 1 p.m.

Dec. 21 ASU Classic: Lehigh vs. TBD noon

Dec. 21 ASU Classic: ASU vs. TBD TBA

Dec. 28 Yale 2:30 p.m.

Jan. 3 Washington 2 p.m.

Jan. 5 Washington State 8 p.m.

Jan. 8 at Arizona 6 p.m.

Jan. 10 Arizona 6 p.m.

Jan. 16 at California 7 p.m.

Jan. 19 at Stanford 4 p.m.

Jan. 23 Oregon 11 a.m.

Jan. 25 Oregon State 2 p.m.

Jan. 30 at Colorado 7 p.m.

Feb. 1 at Utah TBA

Feb. 6 Stanford 8 p.m.

Feb. 8 California 2 p.m.

Feb. 13 at Oregon State 7 p.m.

Feb. 15 at Oregon 5:30 p.m.

Feb. 20 at UCLA 8 p.m.

Feb. 22 at USC 4 p.m.

Feb. 27 Utah 6:30 p.m.

March 1 Colorado 2 p.m.

ASU roster

No. Name Pos. Ht. Yr.

0 Katie Hempen G 5-9 Jr.

1 Arnechia Hawkins G 5-10 Jr.

2 Nicole Iademarco G/F 6-1 Fr.

5 Tia Kanoa G 5-8 Fr.

10 Promise Amukamara G 5-8 Sr.

11 Peace Amukamara G 5-7 Jr.

15 Nisha Barrett F 6-1 Gr.

20 Isidora Purkovic G 5-11 Jr.

21 Sophie Brunner F 6-1 So.

22 Quinn Dornstauder C 6-4 So.

23 Elisha Davis G 5-3 Jr.

24 Kelsey Moos F 6-0 So.

34 Ayanna Edwards C 6-4 Fr.

43 Eliza Normen G 6-0 Jr.

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