

2009-10 Grand Canyon University Men's Basketball Prospectus

New floor. New bleachers. New lighting. New video system. New baskets and rims. New entrance.

Antelope Gymnasium has been completely refurbished for the 2009-10 season, and of all of the improvements one stands out above the rest – a whole new Grand Canyon University men's basketball team.

It's a completely new roster. Not one player from last year's team has returned. In their place are seven transfers from Division I schools, three freshmen who turned down Division I scholarship offers to attend GCU and three other talented freshmen.

Among the D-1 transfers is Gaby Ngoundjo, a 6-foot-8 junior with an amazing 7-foot-5-inch wingspan who played the past two seasons at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. He was the No. 1-rated prep out of Little Rock as a senior, and in his first season at UNC-Charlotte he set a freshman and arena record with six blocked shots against Farleigh Dickinson.

Joining him is Rony Tchatchoua, a 6-6 junior who spent the past two years at the University of New Hampshire. He played in 29 games and started seven at UNH, averaging 4 points and 3.2 rebounds in 15.5 minutes per game.

Ngoundjo and Tchatchoua, both natives of Cameroon, played for Dewey Pennell, the father of GCU's new head coach, Russ Pennell, at Little Rock Christian High School and won the Arkansas state championship in 2006.

Other transfers include:

- T.J. Benson, a 6-1 senior point guard from Corona del Sol High School in Tempe who played at Mesa Community College and Weber State University.
- Brad Carroll, who at 6-7 played point guard through high school at Corona del Sol and averaged 14 points and four assists per game as a senior. He came to GCU from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and has four year of eligibility remaining.
- Marco Ramos, a 6-6 senior who averaged 18 points and 10 rebounds, shot 67 percent from the field and was a two-time all-conference selection at Monterey Peninsula Junior College. He also played at Weber State.
- Justin Wesolowski, a 6-7 sophomore who came to GCU from the University of Northern Colorado. He was part of back-to-back state championship teams at Mountain View High School in Mesa.
- Nick Witherill, an all-state performer at Highland High School in Gilbert who scored more than 1,500 points in three seasons at Saguaro High School in Scottsdale before transferring to Highland. The 6-2 sophomore played last season at Washington State University in the Pac-10.

The freshmen who turned down Division I offers are:

- Brandon Duliakas, who at 6-11 is the tallest player in the recruiting class. He played at Ironwood Ridge High School in Tucson, where he won the state title in 2008 and was runner-up in 2009. He averaged 15.4 points, 10.4 rebounds and 3.8 blocked shots per game.
- Alyx Foster, a 6-3 all-state point guard who averaged 12.2 points, 5.8 assists, 5.4 rebounds and 1.7 steals per game at Thunderbird High School in Phoenix.
- Steven Morin, 6-4, one of the state's leading scorers last season at Saguaro, where he averaged 18.8 points, 5.5 rebounds, 2.8 assists, 1.6 steals and 1.3 blocks per game. He had 14 three-pointers and scored 56 points in one game.

Other freshmen include:

- Travis Currier, a 6-5 guard who won the state championship in his junior year of high school, and was all-state and region player of the year his senior year.
- Cramer Doughty, a 6-2 guard from Thomas Jefferson High School in Lacey, Wash. Who was named honorable mention All-South Puget Sound League North Division by *The Seattle Times* as a senior.
- Cooper Nelson, a 5-8 guard who played for Mesquite High School in Gilbert and for Arizona Premier club teams.

None of the new players have received as many rave reviews than has the GCU administration for its hiring of Pennell to be the university's 12th men's basketball coach on April 9. Pennell is a familiar face in the Valley of the Sun, having been an assistant coach at Arizona State University and running the Arizona Premier Basketball Academy in Mesa, where he coached many of the players who have joined him at GCU. He guided the University of Arizona to a 21-14 record and Sweet 16 appearance in the NCAA Tournament last season, while serving as the interim head coach. He assumed the role of interim head coach at Arizona on Oct. 24, 2008, a day after Lute Olson announced his retirement. Pennell was hired as an assistant at Arizona on May 5, 2008, after assistant coaching stints at ASU, Ole Miss and Oklahoma State.

Pennell hired a new coaching staff that includes Mark Nelson, Anthony Boone and Phil Cullen, as well as graduate assistant Matt Brase, Olson's grandson.

GCU's CEO, Brian Mueller, chairman of the board, Brent Richardson, and the rest of the executive team are trying to build something big in Phoenix, and they expect their goals to be realized. So does Pennell, whose team opens its season on Oct. 30 at the Disney Tip-Off Classic in Anaheim, Calif.