

Phoenix Mercury Head Coach Recognized as Style Icon

Written by Christina Tetreault

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Without skipping a beat you see her go swiftly from morning and afternoon practices to behind-the-scenes computer work and then quickly darting off into the parking garage to pick up her two children. After an incredible first year with the organization, Phoenix Mercury Head Coach Sandy Brondello was named WNBA Coach of the Year for the lead team to be the 2014 WNBA Champions, and she did so all in style.

Brondello is arguably the best-dressed coach in not only the WNBA, but in the professional sports industry. Her professional and trendy style on the court has been nationally spotted and raved about.

The dynamic Australian native has made such a statement as a true fashionista that the Phoenix Mercury is incorporating her fashion-sense into a bobble head this season by asking fans to vote on the outfit that will be featured on the figurine.

We were able to catch up with this leading woman for a few moments pre-season before their season opener taking place Friday, June 5th to chat about being a style icon in such fast paced and high-profile sports industry.

AFM: Tell me a little about yourself in general, and tell me how you describe yourself.

SB: I actually grew up on a sugarcane farm in North Queens Land Australia, so I'm a real country girl. So like obviously as most country kids (I was) very outgoing. Rode motorbikes, horses, swam in the creeks. There were 50 kids that went to my school. Everyone knew everyone and all that good stuff, so that was kind of nice.

I started playing basketball at the age of nine. I played a lot of sports, but really fell in love with basketball and you know, and lucky for me I was good enough to keep representing my city and then the state and then started playing for Australia at the age of 16.

Then I had moved along to the big city to practice at the sports institute in Australia that targets and brings in players with potential, in every sport, not just Australia. That was a bit of an eye opener, moving away from home at 17. It was a great situation; it was the beginning of my national career. I played for Australia for a long time and went to the World Champs and retired in my 30's and then went straight into coaching.

Talking fashion, fashion's always been something I liked, but I cant really take credit because actually I have a former player that that's what she does, she's a stylist.

AFM: Tell us about how you pick out your looks and about your stylist from the Indiana Fever.

SB: I started working with her a few years ago and I just continued to ask her to style me more and more. Then, last year being the head coach, I enjoyed dressing up and I like the outfits that she did, so I've asked her to do more. I'll just call her and say, "OK, I've got this game's coming up, let's go!" Knowing her knowing me personally kind of helped, her knowing what I want or like to wear. I've always liked fashion, but I hate shopping. I hate doing it because I don't have any time being a coach and having two young children. Really it was a great investment for me. I get excited.

AFM: You say that you've always liked fashion and had a passion for it, was your stylist a leading force to encouraging you as a coach to dress up?

SB: I think I've gotten into fashion more as I've gotten older. But when I was younger, I was a big tomboy because I was from the country, so shorts and a T-shirt was good for me. Obviously once you get in your 20s, you always get a little more interested in how you dress up and having a stylist ... people think it's expensive but it's not that expensive. Depending on how many clothes you wear or where you buy, that's what gets expensive. It's a great investment for me. It really makes sense for my lifestyle, and I've gotten more and more interested in it. But yeah, I hate shopping so working with her is great.

AFM: What are your favorite brands and designers?

SB: Well, Vince Camuto because it has a good fit and stays how it should look after you wash it.. I buy a lot of clothes from Nordstroms and

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keep it reasonably priced. You know I'm not buying \$500 outfits. I want ones that obviously really look good and go from there. I like Vince, I like Michael Kors....some of the name brands just like everyone. My stylist is really starting to use a new company... ASOS. I like to mix it up as long as it looks good.

AFM: What do you wear off of the court?

SB: Sports gear! Whatever I have. Obviously I'm a big fan of Nike and I like Adidas. I like to wear like ¾ comfortable pants and just a comfortable shirt.

AFM: You have a very diverse family for living in Arizona (being Australian with a German husband who also coaches in Russia part of the year)– how are you guys raising your kids with that?

SB: [My children] They've lived in 3 different countries and visited probably 10 others because they travel with us. I mean for being our kids at 8-years-old and almost 5-years-old, they've really gotten to see the world, and what I like about it is they're so open to change. They just adapt so well. Travelling's not a problem for them, adapting to new situation's not a problem for them. As long as mom and dad's there, they're fine. And some might say because they're so young, they're worldly. They kind of understand. They speak differently, and they live differently. This is what we do. There's not judgment or anything and that's what I like. That's how we try and bring our kids up. We treat people how we want to be treated and we have fun with what we do and they just adapt. It's really neat in that regard, but if you actually spoke to our children, mom's Australian, Dad's German, and they're American. So that's neat, they're growing up seeing so many things. And we're very grateful to coach all around the world, but we'll only do Russia one more year and I look forward to staying put in Phoenix for hopefully many years to come.

AFM: Back into style, why is it important professional woman as a professional woman to present yourself with style?

SB: I do it for my own personal feeling because I'm the head coach and representing the organization and myself. You want to do it in the right way, and you said it, it's just presenting yourself in a professional way. Running up in tracksuits, that's not really professional. I can do that for practice, which I love to do, but we're still a product out there and you're showing that you're serious about your profession. And I think it's a personal thing for women – their style. Everyone has a style.

AFM: Every little girl that grows up in sports tends to be labeled as a tomboy who isn't seen in a feminine light. What do you think about that stereotype?

SB: Yeah, true. I totally agree with you. If you play sports, you're a tomboy. That's on the court, that's our business to wear sports gear. We're sweating, we're yelling, we're being physical and stuff like that, so we'll dress appropriately. But you see the girls off the court, and you know, sometimes you wouldn't recognize them, but they all like dressing up and looking good. I think that's just a perception. Everyone enjoys dressing up. Everyone likes looking like a woman and feeling attractive in whatever style they might have.

AFM: How do you feel being a style icon and a role model to other women?

SB: Fashion icon [laughs]! Not sure about that, that makes me laugh. That's the first time I've ever heard that. But, you know, it's just being professional. It's my position and the girls get a kick out of it – seeing what I'm going to wear every day. I have to kind of keep my act up now!

AFM: What's it like being a leadership role for young women to look up to?

SB: I think it's important being in a leadership role. They are too far and in between. I'm always going to think that if you decide between a male and a female, that females should be given more opportunities. If you decide between a male and a female, the best person should get the job, but I'm always going to think females should get a little more opportunity because there are some very talented women out there and a job will sometimes go to a man. I think it's performance based, not because of the gender, but **I think it's great to see women in those leadership roles. We're pretty good at what we do too.** And it's just getting that opportunity.

AFM: What do you have to say to people that peg women in a stereotype, considering you break many of them?

SB: I think there's always going to be naysayers out there. I don't even think about them to be quite honest. This is what I'm going to do and you'll see me in sports. I like being active; I'll be working out. I like getting sweaty and I like being comfortable around the house. I'm not going to wear any makeup if I don't need to. Stuff like that. **For me, it's all about being natural and who I am. I'm not going to pretend to be something that I'm not.** Most girls I know, that's the same thing for them. They're not trying to pretend to be what they are not. People want to talk about how they dress; they should probably find a hobby or something. Go for a run. That's life and that's ok. I'm fine with that. There're people that enjoy doing that and that's fine. I'm just very blessed to be in Phoenix and it's a great organization basically. And we have a great fan base here, and that's what I really appreciate. People are just so nice and it is nice because we're in a pressure situation, too. We're not always going to win but we're always going to do our best and I think for the most part, people see that, and that's a great position we're in.