

# Kings choose Rebel alumni as next coach

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
Reggie Theus' mercurial rise through the coaching ranks has propelled him all the way back to the Sacramento Kings.

The Kings reached an agreement in principle Tuesday with Theus to become their new coach, ending a meandering two-month search for Eric Musselman's replacement.

The club introduced Theus, the New Mexico State coach and a former Kings player who twice led the team in scoring, at a news conference Wednesday.

Yet, Theus, a 13-year NBA veteran, has almost as much experience playing a coach as an actor on the Saturday-morning kids' show "Hang Time" as in real life.

He transformed the New Mexico State program into an NCAA tournament club in just two seasons, but has never coached in the NBA — and didn't even get serious about a coaching career until 2003 as an assistant to Rick Pitino at Louisville.

"People that know me know that I am not someone who gets speechless, but right now I am," Theus said Tuesday night. "When I got involved in the interview process, I really didn't give it much thought. It was just a chance to experience an NBA interview, and I never

thought about this really happening."

Musselman was fired April 20 after one season that began with his arrest on a drunken-driving charge. The former Golden State coach coached just 33 victories from a fractured locker room filled with grumpy veterans — most of whom are under contract for next season.

The Kings' search progressed deliberately after the club's first losing season since 1998. Sacramento nearly hired Stan Van Gundy two weeks ago before he chose the Orlando Magic, while veteran coach Larry Brown recently expressed interest in the opening.

"During the course of working through all the interviews and different possibilities, we really felt in the end that we wanted to go with a young coach, someone we could grow with," said Geoff Petrie, the Kings' president of basketball operations. "I think Reggie brings a lot of enthusiasm and charisma."

Kings assistant coach Scott Brooks and Los Angeles Lakers assistants Brian Shaw and Kurt Rambis also got second interviews with Sacramento owners Joe and Gavin Maloof, who picked Musselman after the coach wowed the brothers in an interview last summer — just as Theus apparently did last

Friday at the Maloofs' Palms casino.

"He's the King of Kings," said Gavin Maloof, whose family is from New Mexico. "He had a great career as a player with this franchise, and now he has a chance to be the head coach of the team. He did a wonderful job with the New Mexico State program. He's very well thought of and revered in Las Cruces, and were just really excited to have him on board."

Theus will leave New Mexico State after a historic two-year run. The long-suf-

fering Aggies finished 25-9 last season, capping the NCAA's biggest turnaround in the past two seasons by winning the WAC tournament and playing in the NCAA tournament for the first time since 1999.

"I have never been so happy and so sad at the same time," Theus said in a statement released by New Mexico State. "The program here at NMSU is like my baby and it means so much to me. ...The support I have received while at NMSU has been second to none."

"The one thing that I am

sure of is the program is very solid and it is without a doubt one of the best mid-major jobs in the country."

After Theus interviewed for the Charlotte Bobcats' vacancy last month, the school rewarded him last month with a new long-term contract worth \$466,000 per season, making him the WAC's highest-paid coach.

But Theus' skills and style — his players called him "Hollywood" because of his designer suits and preening poses on the sideline — along with his winning record and Sacramento roots

appealed to the Maloofs and Petrie.

"I'm happy for coach and extremely pleased with the shape our program is in," New Mexico State athletic director Dr. McKinley Boston said in the school's statement.

"We're happy and disappointed, but at the same time we recognize what a wonderful opportunity this is for Reggie and that in time he will do a wonderful job."

Theus, a two-time All-Star from UNLV, joined the Kansas City Kings during the (See Theus, Page 11)



New Mexico State coach Reggie Theus cuts down the net in this file photo after his team defeated Utah State in the Western Athletic Conference hoops tournament championship game this year, at the Pan American Center in Las Cruces, N.M. Theus played for UNLV and in the NBA.

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