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Monarchs coach Jenny Boucek poses with players from left, Ticha Penicheiro, Yolanda Griffith and DeMya Walker before a home game on July 1. Boucek played at the University of Virginia with Walker, played against Penicheiro in college and is younger than Griffith, the face of the franchise.

By Martin E. Klimek, for USA TODAY

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By Martin E. Klimek, for USA TODAY

Sacramento coach Jenny Boucek is the first to be a player, assistant coach and head coach in the WNBA. The 33-year-old Boucek has the Monarchs in first place in the West and will coach the Western squad in the July 15 WNBA All-Star Game.

STEP BY STEP TO THE TOP

Jenny Boucek's road to becoming the Sacramento Monarchs' head coach:

1992-96: Four-year starter at University of Virginia; twice named the Cavaliers' defensive player of the year

1997: Played with the WNBA Cleveland Rockers and in the Icelandic Basketball League, earning MVP honors

1999: Assistant coach to Nancy Darsch with the Washington Mystics

2000-2002: Assistant coach to Ron Rothstein with the Miami Sol

Sacramento's Boucek succeeds in style

By [Oscar Dixon](#), USA TODAY

More than a few eyebrows were raised when in November the Sacramento Monarchs handed the coaching reigns of one of the original WNBA franchises to 33-year-old Jenny Boucek.

But Boucek — the first to be a player, assistant coach and head coach in the league — is making believers of the naysayers.

WAITING IN THE WINGS: [Six others could follow Boucek's path](#)

"She is still relatively young and I knew she would be coaching players who were going to be older than her," ESPN analyst Doris Burke says. "You're also replacing a successful person and taking over a team that has achieved at a really high level. That said, I was thrilled she got the chance."

The transition has been so seamless that Boucek has earned the right to coach the West in the July 15 All-Star Game. The Monarchs, in the WNBA Finals the last two years and winning it all in 2005, are first in the West.

"I'm enjoying the ride," says Boucek (pronounced Boo-sec). "I'm loving every day of what I do. I have no aspirations except to enjoy every step of it. The highs and the lows, the challenges, the hardships ... and the successes."

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One experience that has helped is the time during the 2005-06 NBA season that Boucek was a scout for the Seattle SuperSonics.

"That was a huge blessing because ... they've never had a woman do advance scouting," says Boucek, who was an assistant with the WNBA's Seattle Storm. "Advance scouting in the NBA is about as good as it gets to learn.

"Advanced scouting is strictly Xs and Os. You are just studying NBA teams at the most minute level of what they do

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2003-2005: Assistant coach to Anne Donovan with the Seattle Storm

2005-06: Advance scout for the NBA Seattle SuperSonics

Nov. 15, 2006: Named Monarchs head coach

By Oscar Dixon, USA TODAY

scientifically. It's a huge learning experience. You're seeing arguably some of the best coaches in the world."

Boucek, in her own right, is in a position unlike any WNBA colleague:

- She is younger than her star player, center-forward Yolanda Griffith, the 37-year-old face of the franchise.

- She played against starting point guard Ticha Penicheiro, 32, when Penicheiro was a junior at Old Dominion University and Boucek a senior at the University of Virginia.

- She and forward DeMya Walker, 29, sidelined by a season-ending knee injury, were UVA teammates.

Boucek has been in the WNBA eight years, seven as a coach. She played for Cleveland and was an assistant coach for Washington, Miami and Seattle.

"This is nothing new for me," Boucek says of coaching older players. "I've been the coach for people who have been older than me — a lot of players I played with, a lot of players I played against. So you learn to lead in a different way. ... When I was playing I was the leader on the team, and my job now is what I love to do, help players."

Boucek says she has leaned on her three captains, Griffith, Penicheiro and guard Kara Lawson, 26: "They don't need me a whole lot. ... They can just about coach themselves."

Sacramento's early success doesn't surprise Griffith, an eight-year WNBA veteran, who says Boucek's age gets too much attention.

"It doesn't matter how old you are, as long as you understand and know the game — and she knows the game," says Griffith, the 1999 league MVP and 2005 Finals MVP.

Monarchs general manager John Whisenant, who hired Boucek after he stepped down as head coach last season, agrees with Griffith.

"I had observed Jenny ... since the middle of '03 through last year," Whisenant says. "As I would see her around and I became more familiar with her, I recognized that No. 1, she is really smart, No. 2 she has played the game ... and worked her way up the ladder with some good coaches.

"She is a good learner, an A student, daughter of a doctor, granddaughter of two doctors. And she has spent a lot of her intellect analyzing the game."

'She can flat-out coach'

Boucek says her approach to coaching is primarily based on lessons learned from her time as an NBA scout and from working with Ron Rothstein, former coach of the WNBA Miami Sol and current assistant on Miami Heat

coach Pat Riley's staff.

"Ron is a great manager of people," Boucek says. "He has been around all different personalities, weathered all kinds of storms ... has a real good perspective about how to handle things emotionally.

"If I get too out of whack with anything I can call him now and he keeps it in perspective.

Boucek is one of four female coaches in the 13-team WNBA, but Rothstein says being a woman has nothing to do with doing the job.

"She can flat-out coach," says Rothstein, adding he wasn't aware of any other woman who had scouted in the NBA. "When I was coaching in the WNBA, people asked me what the significance was of men coming into the league as coaches. I said it's really not a gender thing."

Debbie Ryan, coach of the UVA women's basketball team, says Boucek's passion for the game was evident in college.

She says she is not surprised her former standout has turned out to be a player's coach.

"She is extremely positive. She is just a very good person," says Ryan, who won four ACC conference titles and made three Elite Eight appearances in the NCAA tournament during Boucek's four-year career as a Cavaliers starter.

"So that bleeds down into her coaching style, which I think players gravitate toward immediately."

Penicheiro experienced Boucek's passion for the game firsthand. In the 1996 NCAA tournament, UVA beat ODU in the Sweet 16. Boucek guarded Penicheiro.

"I was like, 'Oh, wow, this little feisty thing,' " Penicheiro recalls. "We still talk about that. She was a defensive stopper. They beat us so I can't even say nothing."

No apologies for nice attire

Besides winning, Boucek's wardrobe — which includes sleeveless blouses and colorful ensembles that hug her 5-8, 135-pound frame — has gotten attention.

"I don't want this to be taken out of context, but I don't think there is anything wrong with seeing the players or coaches for what they are, which is very bright, talented, beautiful feminine women," Boucek says.

"I don't think we have to act like the men to be respected."

Boucek, who says she has no fashion sense, says assistant coach Monique Ambers, 36, takes her shopping and her staff and players pick out her game-day outfits.

"She always asks for help," Penicheiro says.

"She is young, so she probably dresses differently than someone older. But that's something that is irrelevant to what she does. ... As long as we keep winning, I don't care what she has on."

One thing Boucek is focused on is to help those who would like to follow in her footsteps. There are six former WNBA players working as assistant coaches in the league.

"We all talk about being the next generation," Boucek says. "There is going to be a powerful generation coming up that has experience playing in this league under some great professional coaches."

Whisenant says he wasn't trying to make a statement by hiring Boucek but says it's a trend to keep an eye on.

"There will be more Jennys," he says, "players spending their post-college graduate careers learning to be a good coach."

"Just being a player, just knowing the game is not all there is to it. You have to know how to teach the game, how to communicate, how to express what you know and get the attention of your team while doing it."

"Jenny has spent most of her waking life after college trying to figure out how to be a good coach," Whisenant says. "And she seems to be doing a pretty good job at it."

Six wait in wings

Sacramento coach Jenny Boucek is one of four female head coaches in the WNBA, with Pat Coyle of the New York Liberty, Anne Donovan of the Seattle Storm and Karleen Thompson of the Houston Comets. Six former WNBA players are assistants in the league, hoping to follow in Boucek's footsteps:

Player	Team	Years as asst.	Last played
*Monique Ambers	Sacramento	5th	1997
Sandy Brondello	San Antonio	3rd	2003
Teresa Edwards	Minnesota	1st	2004
Bridget Pettis	Phoenix	2nd	2006
Crystal Robinson	Washington	1st	2007
Stephanie White	Chicago	1st	2004

**Activated for two games in 2002 for injury-depleted Sacramento*

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