

Legendary basketball coach Mendoza hired at Chinle High School

Written by By Bernie Dotson
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Wildcats won four games last year

CHINLE, Ariz. - Raul Mendoza is the new head boys' basketball coach at Chinle High School, officials recently announced.

Mendoza, who previously coached the boys' basketball team at Window Rock High School, takes over a Wildcats' team that went 4-17, 0-11 Sectional, last year, but also a (Chinle) team that went 22-7 a year prior under then Head Coach Brandon Tso. Tso has since moved on to revive a Rough Rock boys team that featured superstar forward Devin Smith last year.

The Fighting Scouts were 26-10, 8-4 Sectional, with Mendoza at the helm and advanced to state before losing to Scottsdale Christian Academy 54-34.

"I'm very happy to be at Chinle," Mendoza said. "Already, we have had an open gym where about 20 kids came out. We look good. I think we will do well this coming year."

Mendoza, who lives in Holbrook, Arizona, said one of the reasons he took the Chinle job was because of the commute from Holbrook to Window Rock.

"I was driving almost 90 minutes each way," Mendoza said of his commute. "[Chinle] offered housing, so that was a reason why I decided to jump ship."

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Housing at Chinle and time saved without a long commute will allow Mendoza to take on the added responsibility of coaching both varsity and junior varsity squads.

Shaun Martin, athletic director at Chinle, said Mendoza was formally hired May 11. He said factors like parent feedback, the team's overall win-and-loss record last year, and the lack of progress made by the basketball team lead to the change in head coaches.

Martin, one of Arizona's best-ever cross-country runners while a student at Page High School, said there was a pool of candidates who applied for the Wildcats' job, and previous coach Johnson was a consideration.

"It was a fair process," Martin said. "Coach Mendoza is a well-respected professional in Arizona sports."

This coming year, Chinle will play in a re-aligned North Conference that includes Monument Valley, Ganado, Tuba City, Window Rock, and Page high schools, Mendoza noted. The Wildcats will be a regional post-season host, he said.

Mendoza, who is a certified high-school counselor, said he probably won't elect to teach at Chinle. An Arizona native, Mendoza has coached for more than 30 years, amassing honors such as a 2011 state championship at Holbrook High, a two-time Arizona Coaches Association Coach of the Year award, and the 2011 *Arizona Republic* Small Schools Coach of the Year.

"We will set goals," Mendoza said of the upcoming Wildcats season. "We will start there and hopefully go far into the playoffs at the end of the season."

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