

# ASU's Remy Martin having career year, among elite point guards

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Arizona State junior point guard Remy Martin walked into the media room at Desert Financial Arena moments after the Sun Devils disposed of Utah. Before he took his spot behind the microphone he placed a white piece of paper with gold lettering in front of him. The small poster was made for him by a young fan, a gesture he appreciated.

In less than three years in Tempe, Martin has indeed become a fan favorite, while boosting the school's national profile in the sport at the same time. The Sun Devils are the only team in the Pac-12 to advance to the NCAA Tournament in both of the last two seasons.

The conference has enjoyed a resurgence this season, with a plethora of point guards serving as catalysts.

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ASU coach Bobby Hurley knows a thing or two about the position, having excelled there at all levels. His career record of 1,076 NCAA assists in his tenure at Duke is unlikely to be broken because players seldom stay in college the full four years any more.

Hurley loves what he has seen out his floor leader.

"He makes some plays out there that very few guards instinctively, athletically, can make off the dribble and especially in the open court," Hurley said of Martin. "He's doing a much better job of finding the balance that a point guard needs to have because he has such a natural ability to score but he's also hitting the paint, making the good read, kicking the ball out to the right player for the shot."

A showdown between two of the Pac-12's premier point guards comes at 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Desert Financial Arena as Martin and the Sun Devils (11-7, 2-3) play host to rival Arizona (13-5, 3-2) which is led by freshman phenom Nico Mannion, a product of Pinnacle High School who is projected as a high

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Arizona State Sun Devils guard Remy Martin (1) pumps up the crowd against the Utah Utes on Jan. 18, 2020 at Desert Financial Arena in Tempe, AZ. (Brady Klain/The Republic) (Photo: Brady Klain/The Republic)

Martin has scored 78 points in the last three games against the Wildcats, including 31 with eight assists in last year's win in Tempe.

"He's ASU's heart and soul for sure," Arizona coach Sean Miller said. "He's a great competitor, brings it game in and game out. He does it on offense and on defense. He's a winner. I don't think ASU has had a player that means more to their team than what he means to them."

While this has been a breakout season for Martin, it's not like the Sun Devil with a flair for the dramatic was an unknown commodity. He was the conference "Sixth Man of the Year" as a freshman and a second-team all-Pac-12 selection last year as a sophomore. But Martin's game has continued to evolve.

He is averaging 19.5 points, tied for third best in the conference. He has scored 20 points or more in six straight games, five of those Pac-12 games — something that has not been done to start conference play by any athlete from any team since the 1996-97 season.

What is the reason for Martin's improve performance?

Good old fashioned hard work. Instead of returning to Southern California for the summer Martin stayed in Tempe, arising as early as 4 a.m. when he started the each day at Weatherup Center by spending an hour just working on ball-handling skills, something he says Hurley and the other coaches didn't know at first.

When sports performance coach Daniel Marshall arrived at a more traditional hour, it was on to strength and conditioning work. By the time 4 p.m. rolled around Martin had put in a full day, which often included scrimmaging with heralded ASU alums in James Harden, Ike Diogu and Jeff Pendergraph.

"I wanted to be able to say I left it all out there," he said of his commitment. "I didn't want to have any regrets that I could have done more to improve my game or my team's chances of winning. I was willing to do whatever it took."

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The Sun Devils may be off to a 2-3 start in conference play, but their schedule was front-loaded with games against the tougher opponents coming right out of the box. They have already played at Arizona, Colorado twice (although only one counted toward Pac-12 play) and made the difficult road trip to the Oregon schools.



Jan 18, 2020; Tucson, Arizona, USA; Arizona Wildcats guard Nico Mannion (1) shoots the ball past Colorado Buffaloes guard McKinley Wright IV (25) in the second half at McKale Center. Mandatory Credit: Jacob Snow-USA TODAY Sports (Photo: Jacob Snow, Jacob Snow-USA TODAY Sports)

So Martin and Hurley have already seen the cream of the crop when it comes to point guards. That group includes not only Mannion but senior Payton Pritchard of Oregon and junior McKinley Wright of Colorado.

"There is definitely a lot of mutual respect," Martin said. "They know what it's like to play the game at a high level and I know I have to be at my best when I am playing against them. It's what you live for as a competitor, the chance to play against those players."

Hurley has a high regard not just for those players but junior Ethan Thompson of Oregon State as well. He also singles out freshmen Rylan Jones of Utah and Tyrell Terry of Stanford as stars in the making.

"This is the best depth at that position I've seen since I have been here," Hurley said. "Multiple teams have guys they wouldn't trade for anyone else. I know I feel that way about Remy and I'm sure the others feel that way about their guy too. In this conference now you gave guards running the teams that can dig their heels into a game and really are about winning and are premier point guards."

Hurley isn't shy in giving his assessment of the adversaries.

Pritchard, the heavy favorite at landing conference player of the year honors, is averaging 19.5 points with 29 coming against ASU earlier this month. His latest heroic act was a game-winning shot with three seconds left in overtime against Washington.

Pritchard led his high school team to four state titles and is a former player of the year in Oregon.

"I appreciate a guy that shows up when the chips are down and delivers," Hurley said. "That's what he has been doing in our conference at a high clip. Down the stretch of games he gets better. The second half of games when his team needs him to close it out he does. If you give him clean looks late in game, not giving him the appropriate attention, he's going to break your heart. He's in full command out there plays with so much confidence and swagger. The guys around him believe in him and he believes in himself."

Mannion, a former Arizona high school player of the year, is averaging 14 points and a conference-best 6.1 assists.

"He has got his pulse on his team, really good mix of looking for his plays and finding his teammates," Hurley said. "Has a real fire about how he plays which I like out of a young guy."

Wright, a former high school player of the year out of Minnesota, is at 13.5 points, 5.4 rebounds and 5.3 assists.

"He is a guy that is maybe the best at playing every play," Hurley said. It might be a missed shot by one of his teammates but if you don't check him out he's going to go get the rebound. He's one of best rebounding point guards- brings a toughness to his team, especially on the defensive end."

Martin says he has played against a lot of quality players in his not-yet finished three years but singles out former teammate Luguentz Dort, now with the Oklahoma City Thunder, as bringing out the best in him because they squared off against each other in practice and few bring the intensity on defense like Dort, with whom Martin is still in touch.

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As far as the opposition, Martin singles out a former Wildcat and current Phoenix Suns standout Deandre Ayton whose only year in college was Martin's freshman year.

"I wasn't guarding him but I've never seen a guy that big that could do everything," Martin said. "He was big and long and he made the game look easy."

Martin says a big part of the reason he came to ASU was to be able to play under Hurley and he doesn't mind that the coach is tough on him.

"It's definitely tough love. He's my guy. He knows what I'm capable of and holds me to a high standard and I love that about him. I'd rather have a guy like that than a guy that sugar coats things and is not straight-forward," Martin said. "I know he wants the best for me and the team. I'll have a special place in my heart for him long after I leave here."

He does not regret making Tempe his college home.

"I love the fans. I love the love and I love Arizona State," he said.

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