

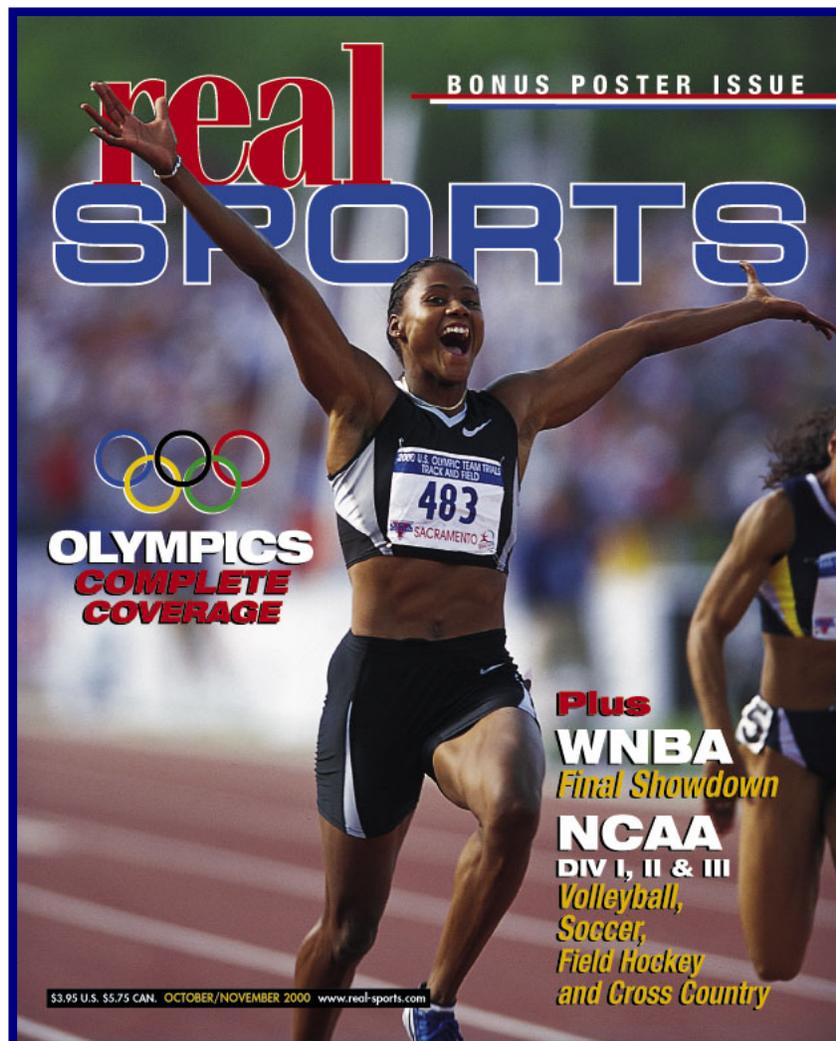
real SPORTS[®] e-Zine

The Authority in Women's Sports[™]

Collector's Edition

7th Annual Most Important Moments in Sports and Athlete of the Year

The Controversies and the Accomplishments that defined 2007



7th Annual
Most Important Moments in Sports

Keeping Women's Sports in Focus

Best Athlete of 2007

Lorena Ochoa cements her place
on the LPGA Tour and repeats as
REAL SPORTS
Best Athlete of 2007.

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Most Important Moments
in Sports

2007 was a year when athletes came clean,
when controversies were what made the
national media headlines, all while
accomplishments stayed visible
in the micro-markets
of devoted sports fans.

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Join the Team

Team REAL SPORTS

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Best Athlete of 2007

Cementing Her Position



The *Real Sports Athlete of the Year* award has gone to golfers for the last three years. Annika Sorenstam won the honor in 2005 but was eclipsed by fellow linkster Lorena Ochoa in 2006.

Ochoa racked up eight tournament victories on the LPGA Tour this year, including the British Open at St. Andrews, the Samsung World Championship and the ADT Championship, and became the first woman to earn over \$4 million in a season.

Ochoa's dominance in the sport secured her repeat selection as the *Real Sports Athlete of the Year*.

Athlete of the Year and Most Important Moments in Sports selections are determined by REAL SPORTS Editorial Board.

7th Annual Most Important Moments in Sports

#10 NCAA Division 1 Championships

2007 was a year replete with repeats. Northwestern won its third consecutive women's lacrosse national championship, joining Maryland as the only schools to win at least three straight titles. Maryland won seven championships in a row from 1995-01. The Pac-10 continued its dominance in softball, with the University of Arizona repeating as champs. The telecast of the deciding game of the 2007 NCAA Women's College World Series between Arizona and Tennessee logged 1,676,000 households and a 1.8 rating, the most ever for a WCWS game.

ACC teams have won the field hockey title 10 of the last 12 years. Maintaining the ACC's stranglehold, North Carolina claimed this year's trophy. Penn State's volleyball team, which last raised the championship trophy in 1999, left Stanford as the repeat runner up. The Nittany Lions lost only two games in six tournament matches. Bucking the trend, USC bagged the Pac-10's first ever NCAA women's soccer championship. UNC's grip on the College Cup (18 titles) seems to be loosening; five different teams have won in the last seven years.

#9 Tennessee Earns 7th Basketball Title

Okay, it's still a D-1 NCAA championship, but the largest women's college sports event deserves its own line item! This goes beyond repeats to dynasties... Pat Summitt is the all-time winningest D-1 hoops coach, consistently recruits a top-5 class, and is a fixture at the Final Four. It doesn't hurt that the number one player in the country, Candace Parker, is on her roster. Parker picked up just about every player of the year award available - State Farm Wade Trophy, John R. Wooden, Honda Award, Basketball Writers Association - and was selected as WBCA/Kodak All-American, John R. Wooden All-American, Associated Press All-American, ESPN.com All-American, NCAA Final Four MVP, and SEC Player of the Year.

#8 *WNBA Maturing*

The Phoenix Mercury captured its first league championship, with their young players leading the way. Second-year player Cappie Pondexter was named WNBA Finals MVP. Teammate Diana Taurasi was marking her third year and looking to add to her ring collection. After her three-peat at UConn, the WNBA hardware seemed almost inevitable. The Mercury duo was selected to the 2007 All-Star squad along with teammate Penny Taylor. Taurasi and Taylor were also named to the All-WNBA Team at the end of the season. Phoenix was the first team in the WNBA's 11-year history to win the title on the road.

Long a bastion of former NBA players and coaches, WNBA head coaching positions might be opening to a wider demographic. Jobs in Phoenix, Atlanta, and Indiana were filled recently, and two of the three teams hired female coaches. This is an encouraging trend - especially for some of the league's pioneers who are nearing the end of their playing days. Currently five of fourteen head coaches are female; as of press time, Ann Donovan's replacement in Seattle had yet to be selected.

#7 *Women's World Cup Hits the Wall in China*

"It was the wrong decision, and I think anybody that knows anything about the game knows that. There's no doubt in my mind I would have made those saves," declared goalie Hope Solo after national team coach Greg Ryan tapped Brianna Scurry for the Brazil match. Solo had dedicated the World Cup to her recently deceased father, who had supported and encouraged her soccer career.

The women's national soccer team is a tight-knit group, and Solo's publicly aired criticism broke an unwritten rule and earned her persona non grata status. With the support of veteran players such as Kristine Lilly, Ryan banned Solo from the team. Not only did she not play in the third-place game against Norway, Solo wasn't even allowed to sit on the bench during the game, receive her bronze medal with the team, or fly home with them.

Did the punishment fit the infraction? Certainly in hindsight there seem to be lots of lessons learned: the choice of Scurry, who hadn't played a minute in China, over Solo, who hadn't been scored on in 300 minutes, was wrong, as was Solo's decision to vent her frustration outside the locker room, as was shunning Solo.

Swedish coach Pia Sundhage was hired to replace Greg Ryan. Let's hope she concentrates on generating some goals to take the pressure off the keeper – whoever she might be.

#6 NCAA Coaching Controversies

Coaching problems weren't confined to the national team. UNC Soccer Coach Anson Dorrance's sexual harassment trial is set for April 2008. For the third time in four years, UNC was eliminated from the NCAA tournament on its home field in the third or quarterfinal round. Has this ongoing controversy affected recruiting or would the emerging parity have happened anyway?

Renee Portland's 27-year tenure at Penn State came to a close in the spring. In 1986, Portland told the *Chicago Sun-Times* that she didn't allow lesbians on her team. Due in part to Portland's stance, Penn State's nondiscrimination policy was amended in 1991 to include sexual orientation. In December 2005, Jennifer Harris sued Portland and the university over her removal from the team for her perceived sexual orientation.

Harris was dismissed in March 2005 after having played in all 30 games, 22 as a starter. Penn State's internal review concluded in April 2006 that Portland created a "hostile, intimidating, and offensive environment" based on Harris's perceived sexual orientation. Portland was fined \$10,000, required to attend diversity training, and placed on "zero tolerance" for future violations of the nondiscrimination policy. If the finding had been based on race rather than sexual orientation, Portland would likely have been fired instead of fined. Harris's lawsuit was settled in February 2007; Portland resigned the following month.

After 18 years at LSU as a player and a coach, Pokey Chatman resigned shortly before the NCAA tournament in response to charges of an inappropriate sexual relationship with a former player. If the relationship was confined with a former player, then this issue is different than the Dorrance and Portland cases, which deal with abusing trust and/or power.

However, if there was a history other than such, then the case runs afoul as well. All parties are tight lipped about the facts but it's important for LSU and all universities to ensure that they are not confusing sexual misconduct with sexual orientation and that more universities adopt a code of conduct for professors and coaches that governs behavior, not orientation.

#5 *The Re-Retirement of Martina Hingis*

The news that Hingis tested positive for cocaine following her third-round defeat at Wimbledon shocked the tennis world. Hingis denied using the drug but decided to retire rather than endure a protracted legal battle. The youngest major champion of the modern era when she won the 1997 Australian Open at 16 - and the youngest woman to achieve the #1 ranking - she went on to win Wimbledon and the US Open that year. Only a loss in the French Open final kept her from earning a calendar-year Grand Slam. Hingis retired in 2002 due to injuries but made a successful comeback last year. "My weapon on the tennis court is and always was one single thing: the game, the ingenuity on court," Hingis said. "And for this style of tennis, there is only one performance enhancer -- the love of the game." Poor judgment seems to be to blame here rather than a desire to gain an advantage over competitors.

#4 *Tennis Anyone?*

After finishing the year with a 55-4 record and the #1 ranking, it would be understandable if Justine Henin couldn't find anyone willing to stand across the net from her. In a game increasingly dominated by six-foot-plus athletes, Henin stands out for being just 5'5". She effectively combines power and finesse and is proficient on all surfaces. Henin won her first Grand Slam tournament, the French Open, in 2003. She has since collected 39 career titles, including seven Grand Slams: one Australian, two US, and four French Open titles. The Belgian star, who won this year's French and US Opens, was selected as the runner up for AP's Athlete of the Year award.

#3 *Nation Reacts With Disgust to Don Imus' Sexist and Bigoted Outburst*

There were several positive outcomes in the wake of Imus' despicable comments about the Rutgers University women's basketball team. One was the swift reaction of advertisers; they pulled their support leaving CBS and MSNBC no recourse but to fire Imus. Rutgers coach C. Vivian Stringer and her players hit the cable news circuit and presented a striking contrast to the ignorance spewed by Imus. The articulate student athletes expressed their outrage over the on-going acceptability of discrimination towards women athletes and African Americans.

New Jersey's governor was seriously injured in a car accident on the way to the face-to-face meeting he had brokered between Imus and the team. His involvement was a tribute to the professional way this very special and talented team handled the controversy and the national spotlight.

Imus returned to radio and TV in December and declared, "I will never say anything in my lifetime that will make any of these young women at Rutgers regret or feel foolish that they accepted my apology and forgave me." His broadcast team now includes two African Americans - a man and a woman - and Imus promises, "an ongoing discussion about race relations in this country."

#2 *Passing of the LPGA Torch*

Lorna Ochoa's dominance in the sport – selected as REAL SPORTS Athlete of the Year.

#1 *Marion Jones in the Clear*

Unfortunately, it was BALCO's "the clear". According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, documents seized from BALCO show that Jones regularly used the synthetic steroid THG – also known as "the clear" – plus human growth hormone, insulin, and EPO. Jones pleaded guilty in October to lying to federal agents about her drug use and involvement in a check-cashing scheme. Jones had put up an Olympic-caliber defense over the years. She sued BALCO founder Victor Conte for \$25 million in 2004 after he divulged her drug use on national TV. In documents filed with the lawsuit, Jones claimed to have never taken performance enhancing drugs nor failed a drug test, including those performed during the 2000 Sydney Games.

Jones' former husband and shot putter C.J. Hunter was banned from competition at the 2000 Summer Olympics for testing positive for a banned anabolic steroid. She worked with Steven Riddick, who coached others implicated in drug scandals, including Tim Montgomery. Montgomery, Jones' ex-partner and former 100m world record holder was suspended for two years for doping in December 2005. She also trained with Charlie Francis, the Canadian coach who admitted providing drugs to Ben Johnson, who tested positive for steroids after winning gold at the 1988 Games.

Though the dots were there waiting to be connected, we wanted to believe that the talented athlete with the megawatt smile was clean. Jones was the face of the US Olympic contingent in 2000 and graced the cover of numerous magazines, including *Real Sports*.

She accepted a two-year suspension from track and field competition, and announced her retirement on October 5th. The IOC stripped Jones of her five medals from the Sydney games, and the runners from the 400-meter (bronze) and 1600-meter (gold) relay teams are being asked to give up their medals too. Prosecutors are recommending that Jones spend six months in jail. Sentencing is scheduled for January 11.

REAL SPORTS Most Important Moments in Sports 2007 are selected by the REAL SPORTS editorial board.

*The Moments were written by:
Leslee Hamilton*



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