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by Mel Greenberg

INSIDE SCOOP™... Generational Finals

And so here we are in Indianapolis, at a most unique Women's Final Four, one that promises to be a little more sedate with the party crowd than last year's raucous doings in New Orleans.

This may be remembered as the generational finals for one simple reason: the NCAA Women's Tournament will reach its 25th birthday next season.

Appropriately, the kid star players of the early days of NCAA competition back in 1982 are now becoming the forefront of a new generation of talented and successful coaches.

Consider this: In the spring of 2000, former Louisiana Tech star Kim Mulkey-Robertson was hired at Baylor, Dawn Staley was hired at Temple, and Joanne P. McCallie was lured into Michigan State. All three programs were nowhere on the map of prominent women's basketball at the time.

Five years later, Staley, who had no previous coaching experience,

has made the Owls into a nationally-ranked team that also had a 25-game win streak until Rutgers applied the brakes in the second round of the tournament.

Meanwhile, Michigan State and Baylor are both here for the first time, and Louisiana State is here for a second time after making a debut last season.

It could be a big weekend for LSU in the RCA Dome, especially if former coach Sue Gunter is named to the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame class of 2005 to be announced on April 4.

WNBA Houston Comets and former Mississippi coach Van Chancellor, who was the winning U.S. Olympic coach in Athens, is also a candidate for induction.

Pat Summitt of Tennessee, already a Hall of Famer, is still around after setting a new NCAA career record for men and women's coaches with 882 wins prior to the Final Four.

But did you know that all three of the other coaches here, including LSU's Pokey Chatman, have all played against Summitt's Vols in their careers?

Mulkey-Robertson was 6-0 as a player and helped knock Tennessee out of the first Women's Final Four in 1982.

Joanne McCallie, then known as Joanne Palumbo, lost a close game at Northwestern when she was the high scorer for the Wildcats in a 1987 meeting with Tennessee.

Chatman, of course, regularly went up against Tennessee when she was a star guard for LSU in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The games promise to be most interesting.

Over in WNBA land, the long-expected Chamique Holdsclaw trade was finally made with the former Tennessee superstar sent from the Washington Mystics to

the Los Angeles Sparks for Delisha Milton-Jones and the 13th overall pick in the April 16th draft.

Donna Orender, the new WNBA president, will be making her debut among the college crowd here at the annual WNBA-sponsored party for the coaches' convention.

Former president Val Ackerman was named the new president of USA Basketball, the first female to hold the post, and will serve through the Beijing Olympics.

The draft may not be as star-studded as last year's Diana Taurasi-Alana Beard-led selections, but there is still talent to add to the pro league.

At this hour the Charlotte Sting still hold the first overall pick, having jumped several spots when the lottery was held. [RS]



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