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Your *Inside Scoop* (TM)

NIGHT AND DAY

The difference between a frown and a smile for Duke star Monique Currie was literally the difference between night and day.

Those expressions were the result of the WNBA's new concept of holding its draft less than 24 hours after the NCAA basketball championship at the host city of the Women's Final Four.

Thus in one moment near the stroke of midnight, Currie and her Duke teammates suffered the agony of having a 13-point, second-half lead evaporate against Atlantic Coast Conference rival Maryland, which then went on to take a stunning 78-75 triumph in overtime at the TD Banknorth Garden in Boston.

The emotions from Currie's failure to help the Blue Devils win their first national title in four tries at the Final Four, however, were quickly stored away.

By the following morning at the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center, Currie was smiling again in nervous anticipation of the selections. She did not have to wait long, having been selected by the Charlotte Sting as the overall third pick in the first round of the draft.

Her selection followed the Minnesota Lynx choosing LSU sensational guard Seimone Augustus as the top pick of the draft, before the Phoenix Mercury stepped to the clock and quickly selected Rutgers star backcourt all-American Cappie Pondexter.

The event was the official kickoff of events proceeding the WNBA's 10th anniversary season. The draft activities also included the announcement of New York City as the site of the All-Star game and a new branding campaign with the theme "Have You Seen Her."

During her draft day press conference, WNBA president Donna Orender was asked about the roller-coaster sequence of emotions involving players competing for a national championship and then having to turn around the next morning and quickly move on to the draft.

“It’s wonderful, and it’s life – isn’t it?” Orender responded. “We live, we absolutely thrive, and we experience it, and then we have to go on to the next thing.

“And today is about the next step in their lives, and I think that’s tremendously exciting.”

However, many of us around this sport were thrust into emotions of a different sort by events that began to play out elsewhere at the very same moment.

REMEMBRANCE

Army first-year coach Maggie Dixon, 28, was having tea at a friend’s home when she suffered an arrhythmia heart episode.

On Thursday night, the former top assistant to DePaul coach Doug Bruno, passed away.

Three weeks earlier, Dixon was one of the top stories of March Madness, leading Army to the Patriot League title and a debut in the NCAA tournament.

She had taken the job just before the preseason when her predecessor suddenly resigned.

Her brother Jamie coached the Pittsburgh men’s team, making the pair the first brother and sister combination to be coaching Division I basketball at the same time, let alone the NCAA tournament.

It’s been a tough loss on the DePaul family as well as the Army folks.

When the NCAA tournament got under way in Chicago, legendary men’s coach Ray Meyer, a friend to the Blue Demon women, passed away.

But Meyer’s passing occurred at the end of a long and vibrant life. Dixon was still at the beginning of what no doubt appeared to be a future of success.

Based on reaction at women’s basketball message boards, as well as accounts in the Chicago papers, Dixon touched far more lives than she probably could have realized.

On Friday night at Temple’s postseason dinner for men and women, which featured the farewell speech of legendary men’s coach John Chaney, athletic director Bill Bradshaw, who was the AD at DePaul when Dixon was hired, asked for a moment of silence.

Bradshaw was visibly shaken by the news, as we all were.

Dixon was yet the latest in a series of younger mentors entering the profession who are turning heads with instant success at places not to known for the commodity.

Think of it, how much money could somebody have won by predicting a year ago at this time, wait till you see what's going to happen at Army.

A touching video at the CSTV site shows the Patriot title game and the sea of cadets who stormed the court after Army's triumph and lifted Dixon on their shoulders.

WAIT UNTIL NEXT YEAR

Way back in October, at Maryland's preseason media day and exhibition, it was clear that the squad was young and loaded. Kristi Toliver and Marissa Coleman were the latest arrivals as high school all-Americans. Sophomore Laura Harper, one of two stud sophomores, was recovering from a ruptured Achilles tendon that cost her most of her rookie season. Crystal Langhorne, the other of the two, was coming off a summer in which she was the MVP of the gold medal-winning junior national team. Junior Shay Doron was coming off a summer in which the U.S. squad won the Maccabiah games in Israel.

In short, the ingredients were there for something special. However, in the powerful and newly expanded Atlantic Coast Conference, Duke and North Carolina remained formidable opponents.

At the sparsely-attended exhibition game, I remarked to New York Liberty assistant coach Marianne Stanley that the scene reminded me of the movie Major League, which ends in a sellout stadium crowd cheering a pennant-winner at the end of the movie. And continued with what if Maryland could find a way to steal a win from either North Carolina or Duke, who knows what could happen?

Also along the way, early in the season, the Terrapins picked up Sa'de Wiley-Gatewood, a transfer guard from Tennessee, who will be eligible in December, 2006. That transaction had people talking title for this coming year. But the mindset of coach Brenda Frese's bunch was a little different.

Not only did they get end-of-the-season wins over the Tar Heels and Blue Devils, the latter snapping a 14-game win streak in the series, they then beat both back-to-back to claim the NCAA title.

It's the youngest group to ever capture a championship in the 25 years of NCAA competition. Toliver's three-pointer to put the game in overtime will be an NCAA highlight in years to come. And the scary thing is, they're all back.

Some other dazzling moments of the weekend were events celebrating the 25 years of tournament competition, punctuated by a special salute reception between the championship and national semifinals.

Robin Roberts emceed the event, with Diana Taurasi, Bridgette Gordon, Cheryl Miller, and Sheryl Swoopes of the all-time team being interviewed. Chamique Holdsclaw was in Europe. Pat Summitt, who else, was named as coach.

The same weekend, Connecticut's Geno Auriemma was announced as a member of the newest class of the inductees to the Naismith Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass.

Auriemma will also be in Knoxville later this month for the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame induction ceremonies.

CHANGE OF VENUE

Well, the move of the WNBA draft to Boston proved to be beneficial for most all concerned. The set and operating facilities was far better than the cramped NBA headquarters in Secaucus, N.J. As a result, the presentation was definitely a big-time setting and the pro league was able to increase its on-the-site media attendees.

Between the new additions and the switch of players under free agency, the league should be even more competitive this year.

The new Chicago Sky selected Temple's Candice Dupree as the sixth overall pick, setting up June 2 as a date to watch. That's when Chicago travels to the Houston Comets and Dupree will go against her former Temple coach Dawn Staley, marking the first time that situation occurs in league history.

Staley, who will conclude a hall of fame player career this season, commented of the matchup: "I told Candice, I won't try to steal the ball from her if she doesn't block my shot."

Exclusive to REAL SPORTS
by Mel Greenberg