



e-Zine
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Inside Scoop™

by Mel Greenberg

Something to Smile About

In the busy life of WNBA President Val Ackerman, there have been outstanding feel-good moments in her life as head of the women's pro basketball league since its launch in the summer of 1997.

Yet, when asked on draft day on April 17, where that occasion ranked in all the events that have occurred on her watch, Ackerman did not hesitate to respond. "It's right up there," Ackerman beamed. "It really is."

The league president had a reason to feel excited. This had been the draft officials had anxiously anticipated for several seasons.

With Connecticut star Diana Taurasi and Duke star Alana Beard leading the way, the WNBA has received its greatest influx of collegiate senior talent in its eight-year history. It's a class that should put a spark into attendance figures and TV ratings, especially in an Olympic year.

Ackerman is also a realist in terms of the fight for roster spots.

After the league held its annual orientation meetings in Chicago for rookies, the league president confided, "They were all great. The sad thing is, it's still a veterans' league and some of them won't be around on opening day."

Hall of Famer Ann Meyers, who broadcasts league games and the NCAA tournament on ESPN, echoed Ackerman's comments.

"You know, after going to some of the opening day training camp sessions, I can see where there are going to be a bunch of good players not making rosters," Meyers said. The good news in this dilemma is that when the time comes next season or in 2006 to get back up to 14 teams after last winter's demise of the Cleveland Rockers, there will be enough available talent to make that expansion franchise viable.

That's certainly a different notion than several years ago when the WNBA was thought to consist of more teams than worthwhile players.

Almost a decade after the 1996 Olympics brought new enthusiasm for



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women's sports, the WNBA is the only national attempt made at a pro women's league that's still in operation. Admittedly, the largesse of the NBA has made that fact possible.

On the other hand, the alteration of the business model in the winter of 2002-03, has allowed more autonomy in running franchises at team-level as opposed to central control.

"A few more teams made money last year," Ackerman said without naming them at a media gathering in Hartford, hosted by the Connecticut Sun in March.

The inception of a salary cap and the accompanying introduction of free-agency has made player movement quite newsworthy.

Former longtime New York Liberty veteran Teresa Weatherspoon is now on the roster of the Los Angeles Sparks. Nikki McCray, who played for the Washington Mystics and Indiana Fever, was recently signed by the Phoenix Mercury.

And the offseason has seen the retirement of such 1996 Olympians as Rebecca Lobo and Jennifer Azzi.

Here's one example how things are changing in the WNBA.

For those of us who work at covering the levels of this sport year-round – colleges in the winter and the WNBA in the summer – this is usually a time to store away valuable notes from the NCAA tournament and slowly get ready for the start of professional competition.

In the past, one could go through life and every fourth day or so, check one or two places and catch up to what is happening at WNBA camps.

Not this year.

The daily transaction report at the WNBA's web site is required reading as is the coverage by beat writers of their local teams.

We cannot wait a month to look at who might challenge the defending champion Detroit Shock.

The preseason has its own worthiness in the ongoing fight for roster spots. Remember, also, many veterans are still completing competition overseas and have yet to assert their presence.



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“It’s going to be interesting,” said Charlotte Sting assistant coach Cheryl Reeve. “Some teams will want to stay older and also may be capped out paying their veterans decent salaries.

“Others will undergo youth movements. And some, like us, will do a little bit of both.” Taurasi’s arrival in Phoenix has already restored some of the luster lost after the Mercury had been one of the WNBA’s top teams the first several seasons.

Also, incoming players have more of a comfort level than several years ago because as the league gets younger, many are facing the same stars they opposed in NCAA competition.

Cheryl Ford, the WNBA rookie of the year last summer on the Detroit champions, said as much as a member of the all-star team.

“I’m on the floor and I’m thinking, ‘Didn’t I just play against you in college,’” Ford said of going against some of the younger players as Seattle’s Sue Bird, who starred at Connecticut.

Speaking of the Nutmeg State, with a year of experience and time to do more

advance marketing, the Connecticut Sun is energizing its fan base that welcomed the arrival of first-round draft pick Lindsay Whalen, fourth overall, the Minnesota star guard who led the Gophers to their first NCAA Women’s Final Four.

That move didn’t sit well in the Twin Cities with fans who wanted the Minnesota Lynx to do whatever was necessary to keep Lindsay in town.

Still, the Lynx have some solid acquisitions in the off-season with former Penn State star Helen Darling arriving in the dispersal draft of the Cleveland roster, along with help provided in the posts with Kansas State’s Nicole Ohlde and Florida’s Vanessa Hayden, the sixth and seventh overall picks in the draft.

Charlotte grabbed Stanford star Nicole Powell as the third overall pick. The Sting also took Penn State scorer Kelly Mazzante, who was still around in the second round as the 18th overall pick.

New York took Arkansas guard-forward Shameka Christon as the fifth overall pick. The Liberty also have Ann Wauters off the Cleveland roster and a healthy Becky Hammon, who’s



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recovered from an ACL suffered early last summer.

Looking back: With a record audience watching on ESPN, Connecticut beat Tennessee in the NCAA championship and joined the Volunteers as the only schools to three-peat national titles. The Huskies also reached the history books in a new dimension as the Connecticut men won a national crown in San Antonio the night before the Connecticut women did their thing in New Orleans.

That makes UConn the only school to win both gender crowns the same season, a feat not likely to be repeated unless a school such as Duke can create magic.

It was a perfect finish for Taurasi, who punted the basketball high into the rafters of the New Orleans Arena after the final horn sounded.

It also was relief for Huskies coach Geno Auriemma, who so wanted Taurasi to enjoy a glorious finish to her collegiate career that at times his anxiousness seemed to overwhelm him, especially when Connecticut endured several upsets.

Not every great collegiate star was able to finish in storybook style. One remembers such greats as Cheryl Miller sprawled on the floor in frustration after getting her fifth and final foul in Southern Cal's loss to Texas in the 1986 championship.

Or Chamique Holdsclaw in tears at the postgame press conference after Duke upset Tennessee in the 1999 East regional final. Or Dawn Staley sobbing in the locker room after a loss to Stanford in the 1992 semifinals that was Virginia third straight defeat without a title in the Final Four.

For that matter, Beard, who won every national player of the year honor for the season except the Naismith that went to Taurasi, was also denied a title in her career as Duke was upset by Minnesota in the East championship game.

But now she looks forward to helping restore Phoenix to a playoff contender. Taurasi had little time to rest. Following the triumph in New Orleans, there was a quick one-day trip home to celebrate and then on to a week with the Olympic team just before the draft.



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“She played great,” Olympic coach Van Chancellor said. “More important, she acted like a USA rookie, which means she fit right in.”

How so?

Well, this tale emerged from the week.

While waiting for a flight in the airport, veterans such as the Los Angeles Sparks’ Lisa Leslie and Charlotte’s Staley were playing a game of cards when Taurasi was beckoned to the group by Leslie.

The native Californian approached, thinking she was going to be asked into the game. Instead, Leslie asked Taurasi to get her a muffin at the concession stand, which Taurasi obliged.

A week later, Staley was asked to confirm the story as to whether it was true.

“Yep,” Staley said with a sly grin.

“Except, it was two muffins.” [RS]

2004 WNBA Pre-Season Schedule May – 2004

5 Wed Sacramento @ Minnesota 8:00 pm
5 Wed Houston @ Indiana 8:00 pm
6 Thu Detroit @ San Antonio 8:00 pm
7 Fri San Antonio @ Houston 8:30 pm
8 Sat Seattle @ Phoenix 9:00 pm
8 Sat New York @ Los Angeles 10:00 pm
9 Sun Charlotte @ Indiana 5:00 pm
10 Mon Sacramento @ Phoenix 9:00 pm
11 Tue Detroit @ Minnesota 12:00 pm

11 Tue Indiana @ Washington 7:00 pm
11 Tue Connecticut @ Houston 8:30 pm
13 Thu Los Angeles @ Connecticut 7:00 pm
14 Fri Washington @ Charlotte 7:00 pm
14 Fri Seattle @ Sacramento 10:00 pm
15 Sat Los Angeles @ New York 4:00 pm
15 Sat Minnesota @ Detroit 7:00 pm
15 Sat Houston @ San Antonio 8:00 pm
16 Sun Phoenix @ Seattle 9:00 pm

2004 WNBA Regular-Season Starts on May 20

TV Schedule May – 2004

22 Sat Phoenix @ Connecticut 4:00 pm ABC

29 Sat Los Angeles @ Detroit 4:00 pm ABC



Authority in Women's Sports™ by Brian Straus

EQUALITY FOR ALL – USA Baseball Extends Support

Participation in the American pastime slowly is being made available to the rest of America. With little fanfare, USA Baseball took a major step on April 19 by announcing the formation of the first women's national team, which will compete in the inaugural International Baseball Federation Women's World Cup in Edmonton from July 30 through August 8.

"We are very excited to move forward with this long overdue opportunity for women in baseball," said USA Baseball Executive Director/CEO Paul V. Seiler via USA Baseball's web site. "USA Baseball is excited to be working with several individuals who have shown a passion for the women's baseball movement, and our organization is proud to join them in supporting the team that will represent our nation at the 2004 IBAF Women's World Cup. USA Baseball views this as an important first step in developing a

much stronger system for girls to play baseball at the grassroots level."

An 18-member squad will be selected for the competition this summer, scheduled to conclude five days before the start of the Athens Olympics. The effort will be headed by Nicholas Lopardo, the owner of a minor league team in Massachusetts and a longtime supporter of the 26-team North American Women's Baseball League.

Four open tryouts will take place this month, when athletes can compete for a spot at a final selection camp in Lynn, Mass. the first weekend of June. Tryouts will be May 1 at City of Palms Park in Ft. Myers, Fla; May 8 at De Anza College in San Jose, Calif.; May 15 at the United States Military Academy in West Point, N.Y.; and May 22 at Northwestern University in Evanston Ill.

For More Information on Women's Baseball, visit:

American Women's Baseball

<http://www.womensbaseball.com/>

Women's Baseball League

<http://www.baseballglory.com/>



Olympic Preview – Athens Greece by Brian Straus

Going for Gold – Fencing's Family Affair

(Fourth in a seven-part series)

The United States has a decent shot at its first Olympic fencing medal in 20 years thanks to a team that qualified the fourth-highest number of athletes to the Athens games and an Atlanta fencer who is the first American woman to be ranked No. 1 in the world.

Sada Jacobson, 21, heads the list of fencers nominated on April 26 for this year's Olympic team. One of four American women heading to Greece, Jacobson competes in women's sabre, a discipline that will feature in the Olympic program for the first time. A sabre is similar to a traditional cavalry sword and can score points with either the blade or the tip.

Jacobson climbed to the top of the world ranking last July and became the first American, male or female, to earn a World Cup title. She also was the 2003

junior world champion. Jacobson was a two-time NCAA sabre champion at Yale, where she is a senior, and comes from a fencing family. Her 18-year-old sister, Emily, is the 10th ranked sabre fencer in the world as a high school senior and has also qualified for Athens. Their father, David Jacobson, competed for the U.S. national team in 1974.

Sada Jacobson, who took up the sport in part to help her get in shape for hiking, took the gold medal in last year's Pan Am Games. Emily earned the bronze.

"It would be indescribable, Jacobson said last year when asked about the possibility of claiming Olympic gold. "Before I started fencing, I would never have pictured myself as a potential Olympian. Making the team would be an honor in and of itself." [RS]

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