



e-Zine
May 2005

by Mel Greenberg

INSIDE SCOOP™... WNBA and Collegiate Torches Pass

By the time the next special monthly report rolls around, the WNBA's ninth season will be under way.

However, with training camps barely under way, cuts to be made, and players still competing overseas, it's much too early to get a firm handle on specifics for this season.

Still, what can be said about the summer ahead is this will be a season of transition.

The women's pro basketball league has now lasted long enough that it will begin to reflect more on where it is going as to where it has been.

A new president is in charge in Donna Orender, who is already getting rave reviews on the side from team beat writers who have attended sessions she has held in making introductory visits to the various franchises.

Val Ackerman was the perfect person to guide the WNBA from its birth to its formative years.

She was already in place in the inner sanctums of the NBA, enabling her to already hold the respect of the NBA owners who had to give the go-ahead for a women's operation.

Ackerman is still around, by the way, in a less hectic job as the first female president of USA Basketball, a title she'll hold through the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China.

Now, as teams begin to operate more on their own with less restrictions from the home office, Orender, who has a track record of being business savvy in her previous role with the PGA tour, may be the right one to help guide the franchises, individually.

The face of the competition, itself, is changing, and the league seems more prepared to emphasize the performance on the court, along with the entertainment aspects alongside the action.

During the WNBA's first two seasons, it had to deal with

comparisons with the former American Basketball League.

The ABL got credit for its skill level, while the WNBA's muscle was in marketing itself all over the sports cultural landscape.

Few followers on the American sports scene did not know what "We Got Next" was all about in the WNBA's inaugural summer.

This year's theme is "This Is Our Game," which clearly demonstrates the emphasis.

Few players are left on training camp rosters from the group that took the floor in 1997.

As of this transmission to make the deadline, former Charlotte Sting Angie Stinson, who had started every game, and Teresa Weatherspoon, who played the first seven seasons in New York before using free agency to move to Los Angeles, had yet to sign contracts.

A year from now, Chicago will be on line, and Orender sees room for further expansion in the future.

In fact, Chicago could put together an interesting roster when one considers the expansion draft, the regular draft, free agency, and the number of decent players who will be cut loose from current rosters in the next several weeks as salary cap considerations come into play.

A year ago, everyone thought the Detroit Shock would be the team to beat after it brought down two-time defending champion Los Angeles in 2003.

As it evolved, the Shock barely made the playoffs in a late rush and then was dispatched by New York on a buzzer-beater.

Now the Seattle Storm enters the season off a bunch of roster alterations caused by free agency.



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There is no clear favorite after every team has helped itself, some a little more than others, since the title was decided last fall.

Richie Aduvato and Dan Hughes are back on the coaching sidelines.

Hughes, whose Cleveland Rockers squad folded in the winter of 2003, is with the San Antonio Silver Stars, and Aduvato, who had been with New York until his dismissal last July, is now in charge of the Washington Mystics.

The Collegians.

The annual coaching carousel continues to make news.

Last week Kathy McConnell-Miller, a sister of WNBA Minnesota Lynx coach Suzie McConnell Serio, left Tulsa to take over Colorado after veteran Ceal Barry retired.

The former Virginia player became involved after Wisconsin-Green Bay's Kevin Borseth withdrew just as he was about to be named to head the Buffaloes.

Joanne Boyle, the former Duke assistant who brought Richmond back to prominence, was named at California after Caren Horstmeyer was fired.

The Cal situation is a matter of curiosity in that Horstmeyer's success at Santa Clara University prior to being hired by the Golden Bears, was similar to Boyle's track record.

Sometimes, coaching itself may not be the entire problem at a university. However, with a sold group of newcomers about to join Boyle at Cal, perhaps the Bears will begin to make inroads in the annual Pac-10 title race. [RS]



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