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Your *Inside Scoop* (TM)

It's May, which means the collegiate season is already retired to the history books, while the celebratory 10th anniversary WNBA season is only weeks away.

However, since most rosters are far from set, we'll be back at mid-month to look ahead at the competition.

So, what do we talk about it for now.

How about the fabulous class that just became the eighth group to be inducted to the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame in Knoxville, Tennessee last weekend.

The group included two successful coaches – Connecticut's Geno Auriemma, who is also bound for the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in September, and Bentley's Barb Stevens, the winningest women's coach ever in Division II – three former all-Americans and world class players in Texas' Clarissa Davis-Wrightsil, Georgia's Katrina McClain Johnson, and Louisiana Tech's Janice Lawrence Braxton; and another superb international player in Brazil's Paula Goncalves da Silva.

The weekend was highlight by a Friday night reception and another event, which we'll get to in a moment; and then the induction ceremony itself.

ESPN's Doris Burke and Terry Gannon emceed the production proceedings along with local talk show host Hallerin Hilton Hill.

The entourages of the inductees included such notables as Georgia coach Andy Landers and former Georgia great Teresa Edwards, who is still years away from induction since she continues to play overseas; Texas coach Jody Conradt; the university families of Stevens and Auriemma, including former players, assistant coaches, and school officials.

Each inductee had a video presentation from someone they chose, and then had a chosen escort to take them to the podium for their induction speech.

The special, most personal occasion, occurred Friday night at what has now become an induction weekend tradition – a storytelling session in the urban playground room located on the first floor.

It is at this free-wheeling, informal event that inductees and their followers get to tell tales of praise and, at times, embarrassment.

Well aware of that potential, Barbara Stevens noted “I have friends and family in the audience and they have been warned, so they have nothing to say about me.

“I have my college roommate, who’s here, and she has been thoroughly warned, and two of my very first players from my very first team that I coached are here, so as I said, there is nothing really to say, nothing to say.”

Goncalves da Silva, who spoke mostly through an interpreter, recalled picking up a basketball at the age of 10 and also once walking past a housing development being demolished where she found a toilet seat and brought it home for the backyard to shoot baskets.

Auriemma praised Stevens and Marsha Sharp, a past inductee who retired at the end of last season from Texas Tech.

“Barb was president of the Women’s Basketball Coaches Association for one simple reason – nobody in America doesn’t like Barb, so she won because everybody that ran against her, most people hated. Barb doesn’t have any enemies.

“It’s not like Andy (Landers) would be running for president or I would be running for president. There’s only two coaches in America I could think of that could run for election and not have any enemies – that would be Marsha Sharp and Barbara Stevens because of the way they do things. They win and they win the right way, and they coach the right way. They’re two people every coach should emulate – especially Barb. I’m just really proud to have known her.”

Auriemma took another shot at Landers, whose Georgia team he beat at the buzzer in the Bridgeport Regional Final, by lauding McClain Johnson – “If Katrina had better coaching in college, she might have won a national championship.

“And she’s not making it up because Teresa said the same thing,” Auriemma said before seriously complimenting Landers: “I don’t think there’s anybody who’s done more for women’s basketball in the last 25 years than Andy Landers.”

The Georgia coach, while lauding McClain Johnson, got back at Auriemma, recalling the 1991 Women’s Final Four in New Orleans after the Huskies lost in the semifinals and Landers ran into Auriemma and his wife Kathy the next night.

“He looked like somebody ran over his dog,” Landers said. “I thought, ‘You know, I don’t really like him,’ but I went over to say something to make him feel better, and I said something along the lines of, ‘Geno. You had a great year. The job you’ve done at UConn is unbelievable.’

“And he looked at me and said, ‘I just want to be like you.’ And five championships later, he’s still trying.”

Landers recalled how surprisingly soft McClain’s play was when she first arrived at practice on campus. He then praised her, saying, “She went from that to the best power player in the world.

“She went from that to a junior and senior year where she scared me. She was a stalker. She would walk on the floor and look for people to hit. She was the best practice player I’ve ever coached. Her senior year, she was the best captain; she was the best leader we ever, ever had.

“I said nothing to her. Not one time did I ask her to go faster or harder.”

Oregon coach Bev Smith, a past inductee and former Canadian national team star who also played for Oregon, recalled Goncalves da Silva in international competition.

“She was an unbelievable player,” Smith said. “She did just the right thing at the right time for her team. It was incredibly difficult to play against her because of her ability to do the right thing for her team. She was flamboyant, but unbelievably skilled.”

Auriemma recalled a game between his defending national championship team from 1995 and the 1996 Olympic team played in America when Jamelle Elliott, now an assistant coach, had to guard McClain Johnson.

“Every foul that has ever been put on the books and become a rule if because of the way Jamelle guarded Katrina that night. If the referees didn’t have any compassion, Jamelle would not only be the only person in the history of Connecticut basketball to have 1,000 points and 1,000 rebounds, she would be the only person to have a triple double – 15 points, 10 rebounds, and 12 fouls,” Auriemma said with a smile.

Landers, among others, said of the all-American inductees: “A real measure of greatness when it comes to basketball players is, if they teed it up today and were going to play college basketball, and I remember all three, very, very, well, they would be as good today as they were then.

“Without question, these three players could compete today with all the great players we now have. There aren’t many of these. They’re special. And thankfully they are here because of the specialness they had.”

Rutgers coach C. Vivian Stringer, a past inductee who is one of the new board members of the Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame, said, “You guys were the real players. As a coach, I do know this, you people are representing a time when all things were right – appreciating the opportunity to be a coach, appreciating the opportunity to be a player and playing with a passion. An era came and went.”

As I noted at the start, we'll be back in a few weeks to focus on the WNBA.

Exclusive to REAL SPORTS

By Mel Greenberg