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Your *Inside Scoop* (TM)

The way the early season is going, the WNBA seems set to surprise with news, events, and performances at every turn.

Take the news out of Sacramento, for example, which happens to be the home of the defending league champion Monarchs.

In the last week, reports out of the state capital of California has named coach John Whisenant, the Maloof family's favorite to switch in-house locations and take charge of the NBA's Sacramento Kings.

Whisenant did not get the job, however, leaving Michael Cooper as the only coach of a WNBA champion to later move over and head an NBA team, when he briefly led the Denver Nuggets after being in charge of the Los Angeles Sparks.

SHOT CLOCK CHANGES

Meanwhile, there was speculation that scoring might explode in the league with the reduction of the shot clock from 30 to 24 seconds.

Well the prediction bore out in an odd way, Wednesday night, with the Minnesota Lynx pounding Los Angeles, 114-71, at the Target Center in Minneapolis to set a WNBA record for a game. The previous mark was 111 points in the 2000 season by the Detroit Shock.

If the winner and loser were not made known, the guess would have been a reversal of the actual outcome. Los Angeles had zipped off to a 3-1 start, while the Lynx had yet to win in three previous efforts.

In the contest, Minnesota rookie Seimone Augustus, the overall No. 1 pick out of LSU, set a new standard in her budding pro career with 26 points in three quarters.

In Houston, the Comets had gotten off to a miserable start in the season opener, losing at home to the San Antonio Silver Stars.

Since then, while coping with injuries, coach Van Chancellor's bunch has ripped through Seattle, Sacramento and Eastern Conference leader Indiana, handing the Fever their first defeat of the season, Wednesday night, 73-60, in the Toyota Center.

The string is raising hopes that Houston, which made it four-straight Friday night with a win over the expansion Chicago Sky, might return to the form of the Comets' first four seasons in the league when they won consecutive titles.

Of course, a fifth title would be fitting for one particular veteran – Dawn Staley – the three-time Olympic gold medallist who is making her farewell tour of the league this season.

WNBA FIRST

Staley became part of WNBA in another way Friday night.

The contest placed Staley, a prolific point guard, and Sky rookie center Candice Dupree, the overall No. 6 draft pick, on opposing sides after Staley had coached Dupree at Temple in Philadelphia.

It's the first time in the WNBA that a current college head coach played against one of her former players several months after the close of the player's collegiate career.

Staley has already faced one of her former players in the Olympics in 2004 in Athens when the United States played against Greece, which included Athena Christoforakis, one of Staley's first players after taking the Temple job in the spring of 2000.

The Phoenix Mercury has struggled to an 0-4 start under new coach Paul Westhead's attempt to bring his high-scoring offensive schemes to the women's pro league after experiencing success in the NBA and at the collegiate level.

The New York Liberty is also winless at 0-4 after undergoing a major roster renovation in the offseason that saw only Becky Hammon return to the squad among five starters from last summer.

Katie Smith isn't among the seven remaining original WNBA players although she is one of the contemporaries of the group in the league who began their pro careers at the same time under the short-lived American Basketball League.

Smith, a two-time Olympic gold medallist now with the Detroit Shock helped coach Bill Laimbeer's team ruin the Connecticut Sun at the Mohegan Sun Arena in overtime last Saturday by scoring a game-high 23 points and nailing a desperation three-pointer with 1.3 seconds remaining in regulation that sent the game into the extra period.

The league, of course, has been busy with events marking its 10th anniversary season.

However, a greeting in the media room in Connecticut between two individuals before the Detroit game was notable.

Steve Raczynski, a former Stanford athletic department women's basketball media contact, now resides in New England where he helps on game days.

Chris Sienko is the general manager of the Sun. But both once worked for the same organization – the ABL's New England Blizzard in Hartford where Raczynski was the PR head of the team and Sienko was the general manager.

Thus, when the two shook hands on Saturday, it caused one veteran reporter to remark, "Hey, there they go. It's the 10th anniversary of one of the first ABL handshakes."

MILLION DOLLAR COACH

Meanwhile, in the collegiate world, Tennessee's Pat Summitt became the first \$1 million coach with a contract extension announced several weeks ago.

That puts her slightly ahead of the earnings of national rival Geno Auriemma with the Connecticut program.

RETURNING HOME

Clarissa Davis-Wrightsil, the former Texas all-American who was inducted into the women's basketball hall of fame in April, has returned to her alma mater as an assistant coach to Jody Conradt, another Women's Basketball Hall of Famer.

Davis-Wrightsil had been a general manager until recently with the WNBA's San Antonio Silver Stars.

Her hire should please Rutgers' C. Vivian Stringer, who at the induction weekend, noted that former greats such as Davis-Wrightsil should return to the college scene to set a standard for today's players.

A key transfer is about to occur with former blue chip prospect Laura Kurz moving from Duke to Villanova, near her hometown outside of Philadelphia.

Kurz was a substitute with the Blue Devils, but at Villanova when she becomes eligible a year from now, her three-point shooting skill could be a major addition for Wildcats coach Harry Perretta, who lives off the trey in his offensive schemes.

Exclusive to REAL SPORTS

By Mel Greenberg