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by Mel Greenberg

INSIDE SCOOP[™] ... WNBA All-Star Game tips off July 9

The WNBA is about to hit the midseason and the All-Star break in a way in which success has a very strong Connecticut accent.

The All-Star game on July 9 will be held at the Mohegan Sun Arena in the vast casino-entertainment complex run by the Mohegan Indian Tribe that took over the Orlando Miracle franchise three years ago.

In some ways, we have a throwback to the era of the defunct ABL in which the New England Blizzard, housed in Hartford, was the marquee franchise and the host for the first All-Star game in the winter of 1996.

Incidentally, that all-star game was noteworthy for the famous punch in the chops to **Cindy Brown by former Texas superstar **Clarissa Davis-Wrightsil**, who will also be at this extravaganza.**

No, she won't be in uniform. She happens to be the general manager of the San Antonio Silver Stars franchise in Texas.

The starters were named by the fans and announced by the league on Thursday. Two of the all-time UConn names will reunite in the starting lineup in the West in second-year pro **Diana Taurasi of the Phoenix Mercury and **Sue Bird** of the defending champion Seattle Storm.**

****Sheryl Swoopes** of the Houston Comets was again the top vote-getter for the fifth time in six all-star games in leading the West starters. No official all-star game was held a year ago when the Olympic team played other WNBA top players in an exhibition game in Radio City Music Hall in New York prior to going overseas to win the gold medal in Athens.**

The other two West starters are former league MVP **Lauren Jackson of Seattle and **Yolanda Griffin** of the West-leading Sacramento Monarchs.**

In the East, former UConn star **Swin Cash wins the "**Rebecca Lobo**" honor.**

Like the previous former UConn star, **Cash** of the Detroit Shock has made the team without playing one minute of action. **Lobo**, you'll remember, got hurt in the first two minutes of the season opener one year but was voted on the team anyway, drawing strong support in the heavy populated New York Liberty market.

But this time around, **Cash**, recovering from knee surgery, might play since she was recently cleared to resume practice with Detroit.

Dawn Staley of the Charlotte Sting, nearing the end of a sensational playing career either this season or next, was named the top point guard in the East and was joined in the backcourt by the Liberty's **Becky Hammon**. Detroit center **Ruth Riley** was also named, as was the Indiana Fever's **Tamika Catchings**, receiving the second best overall total.

The league coaches will vote on the rest of each roster, with some tough choices to be made overall before Tuesday's announcement.

It will be a travesty if former LSU star **Tameka Johnson** of the Washington Mystics does not make the All-Stars. She leads the league in assists with a 6.1 average and is a strong contender for rookie of the year.

Meanwhile, the host Connecticut Sun of the All-Star, which finished runner-up to Seattle in last season's third and final championship playoff game, is dominating league play, especially Western opponents with one of the best starts in WNBA history at 12-2.

That's the kind of record many expected of Los Angeles, which now has former Washington Mystics star **Chamique Holdsclaw**, to have at this juncture. But injuries have plagued the Sparks and just last week they managed to embarrass themselves by blowing a 25-point lead and losing at Detroit, the first time a turnaround of that magnitude has been recorded in WNBA history.

Attendance is somewhat near where it always is at this time of year with some teams doing

somewhat better and others lagging behind previous marks. Washington, down a bit, might be getting impacted by the new baseball team, which also happens to be winning.

But don't be fooled into think things are same ole, same ole.

New WNBA president **Donna Orender** has drawn rave reviews from players as well as in the business community after meetings with her.

Having had a chance to get familiar with all the cities, expect Orender to soon begin implementing her ideas, some of which will probably come to the front when she gives her mid-summer state of the league address to the media before the game tips off.

Collegiate Happenings

Some news of note is occurring in the collegiate world where former longtime Miami coach **Ferne Labati** was surprisingly fired after the season and is in the early stages of preparing a lawsuit against the Hurricanes.

Connecticut coach **Geno Auriemma** announced he will open

up a fast food restaurant – **Geno Auriemma's Fast Break** – next year in the Mohegan Sun, a development that does not have NCAA officials thrilled, although they say no regulation exists barring his involvement.

The geographical map goes into a shift this week with several programs switching conferences. The Big East will grow to 16 teams, largest in the nation.

The Women's Basketball Hall of Fame inductions were recently held with former Auburn coach **Joe Ciampi** and former Kansas star **Lynette Woodard** heading the six honorees. The others were former longtime Kodak executive **Hunter Low**, who helped found the all-American program under his company's sponsorship, former AAU star **Dixie Woodall**, former High School legendary coach **Edna Tarbutton**, and former NAIA star **Kelli Litsch** of Southwest Oklahoma State.

That's the news at the top of the month. Active summer recruiting is about to begin and we'll be back next week from Connecticut with some of the happenings off All-Star weekend.

Mel Greenberg Honored

Long-time REAL SPORTS contributor and even longer-term supporter of women's basketball, Mel Greenberg is about to make history of sorts on Monday in Philadelphia at the annual convention of CoSIDA. The Collegiate Sports Information Directors of America will present their annual Jake Wade media award to Mel Greenberg in recognition of his role in helping collegiate athletics. It is the first time a person associated primarily with women's basketball will receive the honor.

Mel, thank you for all that you do for providing outstanding coverage of women's basketball. Congratulations! [RS]



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