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Your *Inside Scoop* (TM)

Invincible does not seem to be the name of the summer movie that is the WNBA.

“Detroit has the best overall talent, and after that, there is a whole bunch of us,” said San Antonio Silver Stars assistant coach Brian Agler recently while filling in for Dan Hughes on a recent East Coast swing.

Hughes was home at the time rehabbing from surgery on his Achilles.

The Shock may have the best talent, but the defending WNBA champion has managed to wilt unexpectedly on given nights, even with the transactions through a trade that brought in Katie Feenstra and a free agent signing of former Silver Stars guard Shannon Johnson.

Indiana is right about where they left off and are challenging for the Eastern Conference crown again. New York took a gamble in trading star attraction Becky Hammon to San Antonio for former Ohio State star Jessica Davenport, the number two overall pick of the draft.

But the new-look post presence with former Texas star Tiffany Jackson through the draft, former UConn player Ashley Battle, and Janel McCarville through the Charlotte dispersal draft has the Liberty contending for a playoff berth after struggling at the bottom of the standings last season.

Rookie Chicago coach Bo Overton is contending for coach of the year honors after taking last season’s league doormat and expansion group into playoff contention.

The big story in the Windy City is the performance of second-year pro Candice Dupree, the former Temple star who no longer will see her former college coach Dawn Staley on an opposing side in the WNBA.

Staley, who retired after last season, has been busy anyway as coach of the Pan American team for the United States and later to join up with Seattle’s Anne Donovan on the senior national team.

Dupree, however, has become the star of the Sky and is one of two products of Staley, including Connecticut rookie Kamesha Hairston.

However, the Sun have been on a major downslide after owning the regular season East the past three seasons. Some point to the previous off-court influence of former center Taj McWilliams-

Franklin, no longer around to be the den mother after requesting a trade, which sent her to Los Angeles.

But Connecticut may be coming around after a competitive loss at Detroit and a rally at home against Indiana. Whatever the Sun's problem, the fan base in casino-land has remained solidly behind its team.

Washington was said to be the most stable going into the season, but had trouble getting on track. Richie Adubato made a surprise announcement resigning from the team, and then Tree Rollins moved up from assistant and finally led the team to some victories.

In the West, although John Whisenant left the two-time conference champion Sacramento Monarchs as coach, replacement Jenny Boucek has kept the team in the hunt at the top of the league.

San Antonio, with the acquisition of several veteran players such as New York's Hammond, has gotten into the playoff hunt, as has Phoenix with a full year of coach Paul Westhead's running offense under its belt. The Mercury, however, have also had several tough losses and recently survived a two-game suspension to league superstar Diana Taurasi, the former UConn sensation who has developed a temperament similar to her collegiate coach Geno Auriemma.

Los Angeles had a surprising departure when Chamique Holdsclaw, the former Tennessee star, suddenly retired, saying she had lost "passion for the game."

It's hard to say which way the Sparks are headed because they've had both unpredicted wins and losses.

Minnesota had a tough start, but, again, the Lynx have won games on nights as a decided underdog. Seattle, whose Lauren Jackson is getting challenged by Taurasi as the world's top player, has had to deal with internal strife. Houston, suffering with the absence of Sheryl Swoopes sidelined by injury, has drifted way beyond the pack after Van Chancellor who usually had the Comets in the playoff hunt, retired.

The All-Star game, which will have Detroit dominating the East roster, could be intriguing in Washington. Expansion will probably be discussed when league president Donna Orender makes her mid-summer report. Atlanta and Colorado are said to be frontrunners for a team next season.

In the collegiate world, after the coaching shuffle finally settled down, the month of June kicked in with news that Tennessee coach Pat Summitt had terminated the fierce Connecticut-Tennessee intersectional rivalry for unspecified reasons.

Exclusive to REAL SPORTS
By Mel Greenberg