



e-Zine
August 2004

Inside Scoop™

by Mel Greenberg

Around the WNBA

All- Star Game – USA vs WNBA

For the time being, peace has come to the midsummer East vs. West showdown known as the WNBA All-Star game. The two conferences will be allies on Thursday in New York for another fun war when the WNBA goes against USA Basketball. In reality, the WNBA will actually be playing against itself when the exhibition game at Radio City Music Hall helps send off the Olympic squad to Athens, Greece, to compete to extend the gold-medal win-streak to three.

Radio City is the temporary home of the New York Liberty while the Republicans occupy Madison Square Garden to re-nominate George Bush for president. The Olympic streak began at the Atlanta Games in 1996 and then continued in 2000 in Sydney, Australia. Except for Thursday's game, the WNBA is taking a month-long timeout in the manner the National Hockey League suspends its schedule in the winter of the year the other Olympics are held.

One of the casualties of the WNBA vacation was the regular all-star game, whose starters are usually voted by the fans. But Thursday's game is no cheap substitute and many of the players on both sides would have appeared in the summer classic, if it had occurred.

The affair will also be a good tune-up for the Olympians, assuming things don't get out of hand considering the nature of female participants who take any competition serious.

The USA team consists of Sue Bird (Seattle Storm), Tamika Catchings (Indiana Fever), Yolanda Griffith (Sacramento Monarchs), Shannon Johnson (San Antonio Silver Stars), Lisa Leslie (Los Angeles Sparks), Ruth Riley (Detroit Shock), Swin Cash (Detroit Shock), Katie Smith (Minnesota Lynx), Sheryl Swoopes (Houston Comets), Tina Thompson (Houston Comets), Diana Taurasi (Phoenix Mercury), and Dawn Staley (Charlotte Sting), who will be competing in her last Olympics as a player. The Temple women's coach in



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the winter said she wouldn't mind joining the Olympic coaching staff in the future.

Houston Comets coach Van Chancellor will head the Olympic staff, the first male to do so. Seattle coach Anne Donovan, a former Olympics gold medalist, will be one of his assistants and joined from the college ranks by Rutgers coach C. Vivian Stringer, and Duke coach Gail Goostenkoers.

Riley, who would have been on the WNBA team, was named as a late replacement for Los Angeles' DeLisha Milton-Jones, who re-injured her knee and is sidelined for the season. Katie Smith suffered a recent ankle injury and won't play Thursday but is still set for the Olympics.

A special media panel voted for the five WNBA starters, who will be Connecticut Sun forward Nykesha Sales and teammate center Taj McWilliams-Franklin, Phoenix guard Anna DeForge, Los Angeles guard Nikki Teasley, and Detroit forward Cheryl Ford, who replaced Washington's Chamique Holdsclaw.

The Mystics star, who declined Olympic participation last winter, also

declined this game for the WNBA after being voted a starter, because of a conflict with a camp she was planning to run during the break.

Holdsclaw has been in the news the past week after being away from the team, except for Wednesday's game, to deal with a "small medical" situation that is unknown throughout most of the league, and Mystics officials haven't provided any explanation.

Five substitutes to the WNBA squad were named by the league's coaches and they are New York guard Becky Hammon, Detroit guard Deanna Nolan, Charlotte forward Allison Feaster, Los Angeles forward Mwadi Mabika, and Indiana center Natalie Williams, a former Olympic center named when Riley moved to the USA squad.

The 11th player, rookie Lindsay Whalen of Connecticut, was named in a vote by fans at the league's web site. Bill Laimbeer, coach of defending champion Detroit, and his staff, will head the WNBA lineup. The former Detroit Piston "Bad Boy" has been criticizing Chancellor all summer over various items, so the night might be amusing off the byplay of these two mentors.



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Not Forgotten

In case you're wondering about several other players who you think should be in the game, Seattle's Lauren Jackson, New York's Elena Baranova, and Phoenix's Penny Taylor, have left to be with their respective national teams in Russia and Australia, who will compete in Athens.

T-Factor

The Taurasi factor continues to impact the league this season. Of course, we're speaking of Phoenix rookie Diana Taurasi, the youngest player on the Olympic squad who helped lead the University of Connecticut to three straight NCAA titles, including last April in New Orleans. Taurasi's replica jersey is second to Lisa Leslie's in WNBA sales, while her internet page is second to Seattle's Lauren Jackson in terms of number of visits.

With the Mercury, the native Californian has maintained her reputation of making teammates better, considering the emergence of Anna DeForge, a former Nebraska star.

Phoenix has already won more games than last season and is in the playoff hunt.

As for TV, the rookie class has helped ABC increase its ratings for WNBA games by 21 percent, while ESPN2 telecasts are up 16 percent, according to the league. Two Taurasi appearances, one on ABC, and one on ESPN2, drew the highest WNBA ratings ever for each network.

Logjam Continues

Although some pecking order has developed in the Western Conference race, the Eastern Conference has been in a season-long logjam with only two games separating first-place to last. Ironically, part of the cause has been the surprising performance of Connecticut, which was forecast for last place, and the disappointing play of Washington, which was considered to be a threat to dominate the East. Connecticut has dominated play within the conference and already is holding a bunch of tie-breakers that may be needed for both playoff qualification and seeding position.

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Coaching Vacancies

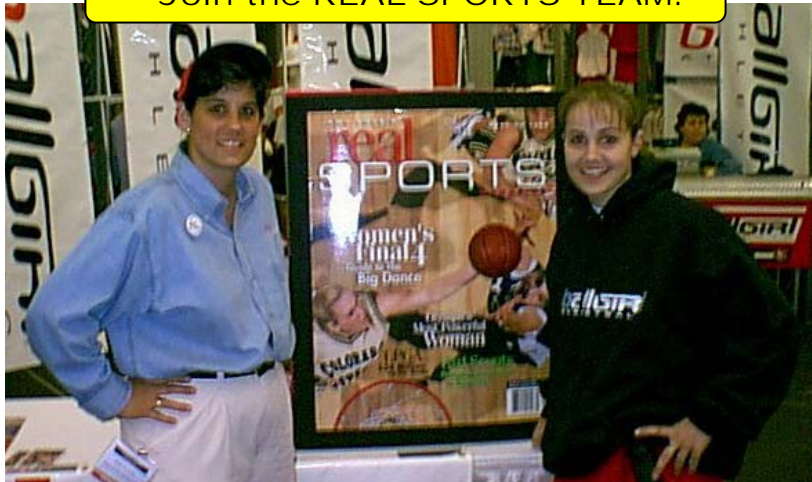
Three coaching situations are now up in the air after Dee Brown quit the San Antonio Silver Stars, Friday, having returned to the WNBA this season. He had coached Orlando before the team moved to Connecticut last season.

In New York, Patty Coyle was promoted to interim head coach following the firings of Richie Adubato and assistant Jeff House, who was replaced by former Washington coach Marianne Stanley. The Liberty has played better since the losing streak that got Adubato

ousted, but the team has been predominantly home since Coyle became in charge.

In Los Angeles, Michael Cooper's departure for an assistant position with the NBA's Denver Nuggets, left assistants Karleen Thompson and Ryan Weisenberg in charge of the team. The Sparks have played well under the duo, taking over the West, but general manager Penny Toler also has a long list of candidates she'll interview during the August break. [RS]

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New York Liberty's Becky Hammon (r) and REAL SPORTS Founder Amy Love



Olympic Preview Table Tennis

Olympic Previews –
Sixth in a seven-part series

Traditionally around the time the U.S. Open in tennis is played, public tennis courts across the country become jammed with players seeking to emulate their favorite players. With this year's Olympic coverage, many ping pong tables may soon see the same fate.

The networks of NBC, consisting of NBC, MSNBC, CNBC, USA, Bravo, Telemundo and NBC HDTV, will broadcast over 1,200 hours of Olympic action – more than the past five Summer Olympics combined. As a result, sports like table tennis will find an outlet for national coverage. In fact, the 24-hour coverage will include action from all 28 Summer Olympic sports for the first time, with table tennis featured on MSNBC, Bravo and CNBC.

To prepare you for the coverage, we wanted you to get to know the four table

tennis women representing the USA in Athens. In women's singles, Gao Jun, Jasna Reed, and Tawny Banh have made the team and in women's doubles, Jun will partner with Banh, while Reed will partner with Whitney Ping.

Jun lists her official residence as Gaithersburg, Maryland, but is studying in China and was born in China. Reed resides in Chicago, Illinois, but was born in Bosnia & Herzegovina. Banh, resides in San Gabriel, California, but was born in Vietnam. Ping resides in Beaverton, Oregon and was born in Oregon.

Team USA's best shot for a medal resides with Jun, who already owns one Olympic medal, a Silver from 1992. Jun is currently ranked number 14 in the world. To learn more about Team USA, visit usatt.org. [RS]

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Olympic Preview – Table Tennis Athletes



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