



e-Zine
August 2005

by Mel Greenberg

INSIDE SCOOP™ ... KATIE SMITH TRADE SIGNIFIES SHIFT TO WINNING – NOT JUST GLITZ

Sometimes you just don't know what is around the next turn.

In mid-July as **Katie Smith** was approaching the 5,000-point milestone, which she's since past in her combined pro career with the WNBA and former American Basketball League, the former Ohio State all-American was involved in a teleconference with media representatives who cover the WNBA.

At the time, Smith was asked about the possibility of ever moving from the Minnesota Lynx, which she was with since 1999.

The native of Columbus, Ohio, who also started for the two-time ABL champion Columbus Quest, answered as follows:

"It's hard, I don't see it, you know, I really enjoy Minnesota," Smith began her response.

"I enjoy the people they've brought in, my teammates, the coaches, but I am winding down towards the end of my career and

definitely want to have a chance to win a championship and I think it can be done in Minnesota, but I think that my career could be in one place," she continued.

"I am the type of person, who is, you know, I get comfortable and pretty loyal. I really don't see too many [circumstances], unless they put a team in Columbus, Ohio, which is my hometown, then that might get me out of here.

"But, I love Minnesota. I like the staff, I like the owners and it's been a really good fit. I think they've continued to bring people in that will help us hopefully get closer to maybe winning a championship."

On Saturday, the Lynx made what they thought might be another move in that direction.

Only the transaction involved Smith, a five-time WNBA All-Star and the league's career leader in 3-pointers made, being sent to the Detroit Shock for **Chandi Jones**, **Stacey Thomas** and a 2006 first-round pick to the Lynx.

By Sunday, Smith had become involved in the championship race from the Eastern Conference side as the Shock, scrambling for a playoff berth, erased a 17-point, second-half deficit to give Detroit a victory over the Phoenix Mercury.

"This team has a lot of pieces and if we put them all together we can make a nice run," said Smith in the post-game press conference reported by the Associated Press. "I'm excited to have a chance to help out a good team."

One reason for the deal not spoken to by Detroit coach **Bill Laimbeer** might have been the slow recovery of **Swin Cash**, the team's spiritual leader and All-Star.

When asked about Cash's recovery after Detroit handled the East-leading Connecticut sun earlier on Saturday, Laimbeer said in a quick matter-of-fact tone that the former UConn star had a ways to go yet to return to her former self.

Deals such as the Smith trade, especially late in the season, have been few in the league, but it

shows how the WNBA has evolved to being more about the basketball on the court than the glitz that surrounds it.

The most recent blockbuster prior to the weekend involved **Chamique Holdsclaw** leaving the Washington Mystics in March to join the Los Angeles Sparks in a swap involving All-Star **DeLisha Milton-Jones**.

Holdsclaw has gone on to become the league's leading scorer, but the Sparks have become the leading disappointment after being picked to dominate the competition.

Sunday night's loss to the defending champion Seattle Storm dropped Los Angeles to a dismal 11-12, barely ahead of Minnesota and Phoenix for the fourth playoff spot in the Western Conference.

Another place where misery can be found is in Charlotte where the Sting are 3-20 after starting the season in hopes of gaining a championship, in which case veteran point guard **Dawn Staley** had said she would retire on the spot.

Now the speculation is over what the Temple coach and three-time Olympic gold medal point guard will decide when the Sting has taken its last shot.

The belief is that Staley feels she has one more year, no matter what, in herself unless she makes a last-minute decision in the winter to call it a career.

If she comes back, however, it will probably be under a new coaching staff unless Sting ownership decides differently.

Washington second-year star **Alana Beard**, the former Duke all-American, drew this comment from San Antonio coach **Dan Hughes** after she single-handedly

dominated the Silver Stars offensively and defensively on Friday night in the nation's capital.

"In another two years, she'll be the face of this league," Hughes said. "Her and **(Diana) Taurasi**."

NCAA PREVIEWS

On the collegiate front, Maryland is beginning to loom as a dark horse for the NCAA title this winter after sophomore **Crystal Langhorne** was the MVP of the USA Basketball team U19 gold medal squad at the FIBA championship. Junior **Shay Doron** captured similar honors for the United States squad at the Maccabiah Games, known as the Jewish Olympics, in Israel.



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