



e-Zine  
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Inside Scoop™

by Mel Greenberg

## WNBA PLAYOFFS 2004

**There will be a few notable absentees as the WNBA onference finals get under way tonight (Oct. 1) in the first of the best-of-three games series in the cities of the lower seeded teams.**

**The overall defending champion won't be in the house at this stage of the playoffs for the first time in the eight-year history of the league.**

**The New York Liberty is responsible for that historical note, particularly Stanford graduate Bethany Donaphin. In a local-girl-makes good story, Donaphin saved the Liberty on a busted play by putting down a shot in the final second to give New York a 66-64 win over Detroit in the decisive game of their Eastern semifinal series and short-circuit the Shock dynasty to a one-year reign over the WNBA.**

**The native New Yorker was signed to a free agent contract a year ago and had seen considerable playing time recently because of the injuries that sidelined centers**

**Tari Phillips and Ann Wauters for the season.**

**Besides the injuries, the Liberty also experienced a coaching change when Richie Adubato was fired, July 3, and Patty Coyle was promoted to interim head coach.**

**Former Washington Mystics coach Marianne Stanley was hired as Coyle's assistant. The conference semifinals victory should be enough to ensure both will be back next season. "That kid's been maligned all year," Coyle praised Donaphin's fortitude. "All year we keep hearing about how good everybody else's post players are. I couldn't be more happy for her."**

**Veteran point guard Becky Hammon, herself a former free agent, also lauded her teammate. "I can't say enough about her. Coming in here as a third string after not being in the league and she hits the shot in Madison Square Garden that sent us to the Eastern Conference finals. I couldn't be any happier for any other person in this locker room."**



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**Connecticut Sun center Taj McWilliams-Franklin, whose team will face New York in the Eastern finals, had her teammates over for dinner to watch the New York-Detroit game.**

**“Bethany is my friend,” McWilliams-Franklin said of Donaphin’s heroics. “I love her and I was happy for her. I was yelling and screaming when they won. I was yelling and screaming when she shot it.”**

**Losing Detroit coach Bill Laimbeer was gracious in defeat. “It was not a great day for the Detroit Shock,” Laimbeer said afterwards. I thought it was a great day for WNBA basketball. You couldn’t find a more competitive, hard-fought game by both teams. Spectacular plays. Crowd into it. It didn’t get any better than that.**

**”I told our team, ‘Remember this feeling’ that they had in the locker room afterwards. Tough way to lose. But we put ourselves in this position this year.”**

**Prior to Detroit’s win a year ago, the Houston Comets and Los Angeles Sparks had claimed all six previous**

**titles with the Comets winning the first four championships and the Sparks following with the next two before losing to the Shock in 2003.**

**This season, Houston didn’t even make the playoffs, the only sour note in a glorious summer for Van Chancellor who coached the U.S. Olympic women’s squad to a gold medal in Athens.**

**Los Angeles was eliminated in the opening round for the first time in the Spark’s playoff participation history as the Sacramento Monarchs avenged previous dispatches to them by Lisa Leslie and teammates.**

**Ironically, two former veteran New York players were on the Los Angeles roster this season. Teresea Weatherspoon and Tamika Whitmore signed as free agents last winter.**

**Completing the field on the Eastern side is the Connecticut Sun, which ruined the Washington Mystics’ Cinderella-type late-season run to the playoffs without Chamique Holdsclaw, who left in late July with an undisclosed “medical” situation.**



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Washington found a new leader in rookie point guard Alana Beard, the second overall No. 2 pick out of Duke. However, after losing the first game in Washington, the Sun took used their home-court advantage effectively to capture the series, particular off the play of rookie point guard Lindsay Whalen, the former University of Minnesota sensation who was the fourth overall pick in last April's draft.

Second-year coach Mike Thibault rebuilt the roster, making it younger in the offseason with the addition of six new players, including veteran Asjha Jones, who was acquired in a trade with Washington in the offseason.

“Who would have thunk it several months ago,” Thibault alluded to preseason forecasts placing the Sun at the bottom of the Eastern Conference. When we scout players for our team, we look at their heart. Most of them played for winning programs in college.”

New York and Connecticut split their season series, 2-2. However, the Sun will be much more confident

than having faced Detroit in last year's Eastern Conference finals. “Last year, Detroit was just one of those teams playing above a level over everyone else,” Sun forward Nykesha Sales, a former University of Connecticut star, said.

“New York is definitely a team that we tied against, so it's going to be a great matchup,” Sales said.

In the West, Seattle had never won a playoff game before this season, having been dispatched, 2-0, by Los Angeles in 2002 in the Storm's only other postseason appearance.

The series will feature a battle inside with U.S. Olympic reserve Yolanda Griffith leading the Monarchs against Seattle's center Lauren Jackson, an Australian Olympian who is the reigning WNBA Most Valuable Player.

Jackson's national team was the runnerup to the United States in Athens. An important facet for Seattle will be the condition of Olympic reserve point guard Sue Bird, who suffered a broken nose in the Storm's second game against the Minnesota Lynx.



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**Seattle swept that series, 2-0. Bird is expected to be on the court, although that could change by game-time.**

**Meanwhile, there are many storylines involving teams whose season is over. The San Antonio Silver Stars, likely to be holding a high draft pick, has to name a coach. In Los Angeles, although they did a commendable job in leading the Sparks to the best overall record in the league, it is unknown whether management will retain the tandem of Karleen Thompson and Ryan Weisenberg, who stepped up in interim co-head coaching capacities when Michael Cooper left for an NBA job with the Denver Nuggets.**

**There will also be an abundance of free agent talent. The No. 1 story will be the future of Holdsclaw in Washington as to whether she goes to another team or remains. The Mystics seemed to be more cohesive without her and the squad certainly looked unified having a late-night meal in the casino complex in Connecticut after their elimination by the Sun.**

**New York honors**

**Late last month, the Queens College 1973 squad that lost to Immaculata in the national championship that year became the first women's team inducted into the New York City Basketball Hall of Fame.**

**Former coach Lucille Kyvallos accepted on behalf of the team, whose players included Debbie "The Pearl" Mason, Gail Marquis and Cathy Andruzzi.**

**Donna Lopiano, head of the Women's Sports Foundation, introduced the squad. In her remarks Lopiano went on to say:**

**"Just two seasons earlier...women played a six player basketball game with only two rovers allowed to play full-court. This Queens College team not only brought women's basketball into the five player game... they wrote the book on it and challenged other teams to measure up.**

**"No player was taller than 5'11"; and most had little or no pre-college playing experience. They were tough city kids who loved to play.**



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**“There were no scholarships and no recruiting in women’s sports. The basketball team’s budget was less than \$500.**

**“They came to Queens College because of a great coach... someone who expected them to be great basketball players, not women basketball players.**

**The players had to try-out for the team. No one had a free ride onto that ball club.**

**”They played against male players in practice because they wanted to be tested by players who were bigger and stronger and quicker.**

**“This group of players became icons, the first female athlete role models for a generation of NYC girls.**

**“They epitomized the promise of Title IX, the federal law that pledged that our daughters would be treated as well as our sons.**

**“They earned the respect of the media and the men who watched them play.**

**”They inspired a generation of girls and women... creating aspirations for our daughters to become athletes.**

**”This team played “team” like our soccer, softball and basketball gold medalists.**

**”They weren’t a bunch of superstars... but they were a cohesive group of hard-working role players who gave 100% effort every time they set foot on the court.**

**“No one told them they couldn’t play like boys. They introduced the women’s game to a tenacious, withering, pressing player-to-player defense from endline to endline.**

**“They played fast break, up tempo offense... disappointed if their fast break lasted more than 4 seconds before putting the ball in the hoop...**

**“They pushed their opponents to match their desire and conditioning. They were fundamentally sound.**

**”They proved that nothing was beyond the physical abilities of women and they created believers.**



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**"They were ahead of their time.**

**"They were superb in their time.**

**"And tonight, I am honored to present the Queens College 1972-73 Women's Basketball Team as the newest inductees into the New York City Basketball Hall of Fame." [RS]**

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