



e-Zine
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Inside Scoop™

by Mel Greenberg

WNBA UNCERTAINTY – Ackerman's Resignation Generates Speculation on Replacements

It certainly doesn't take long after the WNBA playoffs conclude before the other shoe drops.

For the second straight season, bits of uncertainty reared from nowhere after an uplifting finish.

A year ago, if your memory is short, the league playoffs ended with a brand new champion, the Detroit Shock, who won two exciting games at home before record crowds of 20,000 or more after dropping the opener to the then-two-time defending champion Los Angeles Sparks.

What made the story better was that Detroit had been considered an endangered species the season before with the strong potential of being jettison by the NBA-Pistons management.

Surely, if a turnaround can be experienced as it was under coach Bill Laimbeer, that would be encouragement for others in similar situations, right?

Not necessarily. A few days later, the NBA-Cleveland Cavaliers bid adieu to the Cleveland Rockers.

This time, the league gave us something a little different after a playoffs title round last month that featured three sellouts and another new champion in the Seattle Storm, also once considered to be endangered.

Val Ackerman announced she was resigning effective in February after an eight-year run as the league's only president.

And so, more uncertainty, this time a little different, because it is not known if Ackerman's successor is going to be a stranger to the public (although not necessarily to NBA types) or someone who is immediately known to the women's community.

Ackerman says she'll still be around the game, but it's time to be more around the family that includes two young daughters, ages 10 and 12.



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It's an understandable move and one that does not signal she's jumping out of the plane because it's about to flame out.

But the very reason for Ackerman's exit has spawned several suggestions about the resume of the next head of the league.

Incidentally, Ackerman will chair the search committee, yet to be chosen.

One quality called for in the next prez by observers is the individual needs to be either single or with grown children, if they happen to be running a family.

The reason is simple. In-season and off-season, there's still a lot of selling to do and it's difficult to manage two lives over the long haul. Ackerman, who was absolutely the right person for the job in 1996 as an NBA insider, did a masterful job of juggling the two situations.

It's helpful to have a basketball background, in part, so the next person doesn't have to be a stranger for half the season. True, Val was an unknown to people beyond us at the outset, but

the media blitz when the league launched quickly made her familiar to the public.

Business acumen is important, but there are ways to work around any deficiencies.

Most importantly, the person needs to be a charmer, especially one who will still have to work with NBA president David Stern and mingle with the boys in the corporate offices.

Ackerman has always been sensational in small groups or in one-on-one discussions and interviews.

However, although she did improve in recent years, her speaking to a large group in front of a microphone many times lacked pizzazz, more so in TV situations.

Exhibit A is the bland approach to announcing which team wins last year's No. 1 draft pick, also known as the Diana Taurasi sweepstakes.

That said, let's look at the names being thrown around before we offer our own idea.

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If the league stays inside the WNBA, chief operating officer Ann Sarnoff appears to be a frontrunner and would do an excellent job. Whatever happens, she might need to be a strong presence even if she doesn't get the job.

Tennessee coach Pat Summitt makes too much money, still loves coaching, and is a soccer mom. Washington Mystics' head Susan O'Malley has been mentioned, but after the disaster managing the Chamique Holdsclaw situation this summer, what happens when she has a whole league to run. (More on all this in our next item).

From the WNBA general managerships, three names pop out — New York's Carol Blazejowski, Indiana's Kelly Krauskopf, and Washington's Karen Bryant.

We all thought 'Blaze was going to get the job back in 1996 after having worked in the NBA. But at this point, imagine the sparks, and not the Los Angeles Sparks, if she and Stern have differences of opinion. Besides, who runs New York after she leaves?

Krauskopf has previous NBA and WNBA experience, so she was once an insider who is known to NBA types.

Bryant has done an outstanding job in Washington in helping turn the Storm into a winner.

Many coaches would like to see Hall of Famer and women's basketball broadcast analyst Ann Meyers take the job, but she's a parent living on the West Coast with two young children.

Besides, says Temple coach Dawn Staley who plays for the Charlotte Sting, "I've been to her house and she isn't ready to leave that place."

Three former chairs of the NCAA women's basketball tournament are worthy of mentioning.

However, DePaul's Jean Ponsetto is the overall athletic director at the school and might be making more money than what the WNBA job may pay.

Patty Viverito in the Missouri Valley Conference, who has been the



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commissioner of the Gateway Football Conference, could also be a strong candidate.

Atlantic Ten Conference commissioner Linda Bruno has dealt in the men's world, is single, and also helped negotiate ESPN's original partnership with the NCAA women.

Speaking of ESPN, women's program director Carol Stiff already is used to balancing parenthood with running around the country.

Since we've thrown her name in other places, even though this is her publication, Real Sports publisher Amy Love has the business skills and women's sports experience to make a good candidate from the West.

Texas senior associate athletic director Chris Plonsky, who serves on important USA Basketball and NCAA committees is also ideal, but is probably too entrenched in her present jobs.

However, USA Basketball women's program director Carol Callan belongs on the original long list.

Nancy Lieberman? – Not interested according to sources.

Cheryl Miller? – Wouldn't have interest over the long haul.

Now, here's how we would do it, and it's based on the way the 76ers (ok, laugh) are run in Philadelphia, at least from a business perspective. Dave Coskey, who originally began as a women's sports information director, is a marketing genius who handles the business operation. General manager Billy King is the basketball person.

Thus, we say, for the business part, make Ann Sarnoff, already on the inside, the person responsible for keeping the machine running. Perhaps, associate president could be a title because she would have many shared responsibilities.

And now the name we propose as our numero uno – Former Kansas Star Lynette Woodard, the all-time scorer in the collegiate women's game who was recently inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass.



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“That makes a lot of sense,” said Rutgers coach C. Vivian Stringer.

Here’s why.

A former national player of the year who has an Olympic gold medal to her credit, and who also played when the WNBA began, Woodard would have the respect of the veteran players.

A recent assistant coach at her alma mater, she knows the younger generation who will be transforming the league the next several years.

As a former Harlem Globetrotter, she knows all about entertainment.

Business skills. She has been a stockbroker on Wall Street in New

York, and she currently is a financial consultant in her native Wichita.

The fact that she’s also a minority is wonderful, but our rump search did not look at race to produce a list. We decided, however, that although there could be some great male candidates, it would be a shock to see one named.

Most importantly, Woodard is a charmer. Give her a microphone in front of a group and she will wow. She will have the respect of the boys of the NBA.

Asked recently if she might be interested if the WNBA came calling, Woodard’s response was in the affirmative and included this remark in her first two sentences: “What a way to help the game.”

That’s enough said. [RS]

Inside Scoop continues with the Holdsclaw Uncertainty



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HOLDSCLAW BREAKS SILENCE – League Must Learn How to Address Athlete Issues

Not content to let Ackerman surpass her as the No. 1 off-season WNBA story, Washington Mystics all-star Chamique Holdsclaw emerged from the cold last week when she discussed her mysterious midseason departure with *Washington Post* columnist Sally Jenkins and *USA Today* NBA/WNBA reporter Oscar Dixon in an interview in the nation's capital arranged by Holdsclaw's agent/attorney Lon Babbey.

Holdsclaw said she was suffering from depression, which came as no startling surprise since it was on the short list of speculative reasons why she left the team at midseason.

Claiming she had been under a psychiatrist's care, Holdsclaw said she had regained her desire for the game and will try to play in Europe this winter to determine if she should continue her career or retire.

Before we rant, let's first and foremost say, 'Mique deserves sympathy. She has done much for

the sport and it is easy to see how things could go awry after transforming from programs that always won in college and high school to a situation with the Mystics, who were always changing coaches and didn't know much about winning.

Susan O'Malley, president of Washington Sports and Entertainment, says that the organization wanted to help their star, a private person, and respect her confidentiality.

In the process, the organization's moves created a major credibility problem and put Holdsclaw's problems ahead of the team and the WNBA itself.

If her condition had been alluded to in some way, the quest to find out what was wrong would have been quickly subdued.

However, O'Malley said they kept the circle so small that she didn't even tell first year coach Michael Adams what the problem was.



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All he did was bite his lip and rally the team to a playoff berth and a .500 record, something that's usually an unknown with the franchise.

Holdslaw's condition was characterized as a "minor medical condition" not said to be life threatening?

Depression? Minor? Not life-threatening? Suicides have been known to occur from the depression.

Soon the mystery had columnists in both Washington papers ripping the former love of the Washington fan base.

Even the WNBA brass was kept out of the loop. We've heard non-women's types bash the league for allowing a star to disappear in a manner that would never occur in the NBA.

Last week's news spawned a bunch of conspiracy theories.

One is that everyone involved has to find a way back to enable the Mystics to prove that if they offered Holdslaw in a trade, perhaps for a fresh start, they need to show she's still a valuable commodity.

If O'Malley has desires on the WNBA presidency, although it's hard to believe she'd give up a position over an organization that includes the NBA Wizards and dormant-NHL Capitals, then perhaps she needed to get the Holdslaw's situation resolved before interviews begin.

None of these may be true. But once deception begins, it's hard to maintain credibility.

Whatever the case, this story promises to continue deep into the winter before anything near a final chapter emerges. [RS]

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