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by Mel Greenberg

INSIDE SCOOP™... Positive and Fresh ... WNBA 9th Season is Underway

The WNBA is already telling us things about itself for its ninth season after just one week. Already noticeable, as opposed to the gloom and doom pre-season narratives of several years ago, the mood seems a bit more festive this time around.

Opening volleys of competition may prove to be a reliable indicator of the near future, but, as always, it's too early to cast everything in stone.

Remember, it was only four seasons ago that the Charlotte Sting got off to a woeful 1-11 start under coach **Anne Donovan**, now with the Seattle Storm, and then reversed direction all the way to the WNBA finals.

New WNBA president **Donna Orender** has entered the pro women's basketball league's oval office in whirlwind fashion, announcing new corporate partners, as well as taking a close look at ways to refine the organization to create more appeal.

Chicago recently announced that former Boston Celtics star **Dave Cowens** will be the coach of the expansion team, which begins play next season.

Orender also talked about more expansion cities in the near future, even allowing the name, San Francisco, to be mentioned as a potential candidate.

After that teleconference call, Bay Area and a few national reporters chased after identities to potential investors and while none have surfaced, it is known that individuals involved with a new arena going up in San Francisco are targeting potential tenants.

"We have interest from a few groups (around the country) and the key is to try to match them with viable geographical sites," Orender said at a recent Connecticut Sun game in which the all-star voting campaign was launched.

This year's event will be at the Mohegan Sun Arena on July 9 in a

weekend of activity that might be quite different than previous all-star games in either the WNBA or the former American Basketball League.

History of sorts has been made in Washington where **Abe Pollin** sold the Mystics to Lincoln Holdings, which owns a few of his other former properties.

In turn, Black Entertainment co-founder **Sheila Johnson** bought in to become part owner with the Lincoln group and also have a stake in the NHL's Washington Capitals (remember the NHL?), and the NBA's Washington Wizards.

This makes Johnson, the former wife of Charlotte Bobcats and Charlotte Sting owner **Bobby Johnson**, the first black woman to have ownership authority over three professional sports teams.

She will serve as president of the Mystics, meaning **Susan O'Malley** is dispensed from the operation and begs the question, how much

longer will Tennessee coach **Pat Summitt** be involved with the organization.

That's significant because **Chamique Holdsclaw**, her former Volunteers superstar, was traded away in March to the Los Angeles Sparks where she is playing alongside **Lisa Leslie** with renewed energy.

Since it's still a free country on the women's side, DePaul women's coach **Doug Bruno** was announced as a consultant with the Chicago organization.

Another golden oldie off to a nice start is Houston Comets veteran **Sheryl Swoopes**, who's still playing for coach and general manager **Van Chancellor**.

The Comets have also been one of the opening surprises.

Also playing with new attitude is the Detroit Shock, the 2003 WNBA champion, which jumped to a 3-0 start in an Eastern Conference



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that finished in a logjam last season.

The big issue in Motown, not involving NBA coach **Larry Brown** with the Pistons, is whether Shock coach **Bill Laimbeer** will soon land with an NBA team.

If so, new assistant coach **Rick Mahorn** may be ready to assume control in what would be a seamless transition.

The Connecticut Sun, runners-up to the Seattle Storm, is looking very balanced, especially with the addition of 7-2 Polish center **Margo Dydek** from San Antonio that has allowed **Taj McWilliam-Franklin** to be more versatile in the post.

While most teams have gotten better, Los Angeles is extremely deep, New York continues to

struggle with a deficiency of the past – the inability to out-rebound many opponents.

Some teams are struggling because several stars are just getting back from performing for foreign teams during the winter.

Oreder said ways are being explored to create a smoother stop-start for WNBA players moving between the two seasons.

Down the road in September, the playoff finals will now be a best 3 of 5 affair with the team with the best record getting the home court for the first two games and, if necessary, the fifth and deciding contest.

So, we'll sign off for now, but we'll be dropping in along the way besides the monthly appearance as the news warrants either in the pros or in the collegiate ranks.

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