

# ◆ The Houston Roundball Review ◆

© Copyright 2003, The Houston Roundball Review, All Rights Reserved.

September 2003

September 30, 2003

**BASKETBALL FOR THOUGHT** by Kris Gardner, e-mail: KGardner@TheHRR.com

## The WNBA needs to Change



I have followed the WNBA (as a Comets' season-ticket holder and as a credentialed media member) since the inception of the league. I've seen the overall talent of the players improve leaps and bounds in those seven years. I've seen the game become more physical and fast-paced. However, I've also seen the attendance numbers dwindle as more and more fans are disguising themselves as empty seats. Why are fewer and fewer people attending a better product than in previous years? A few reasons for the decline exist; but, one factor overrides everything: the WNBA needs to change. Period.

The novelty of the Women's National Basketball Association wore off 3 years ago. Ironically, the talent level has improved during those same 3 years; but, except for the hard core fans of the WNBA, who would know the talent has gotten better?

My suggestions may seem to be a "physician, heal thyself" dichotomy since my business hasn't exactly taken off; but, the Houston Roundball Review will be heading into its tenth year in 2004; so, I do know something about survival if

nothing else. Plus, I do not possess the financial backing from the NBA like the WNBA does which means the



so, trying to cater to them on a physically attractive level is a waste of time.

If the WNBA wants to get men in the seats, then return to

*Today's players are more athletic than ever before.*

WNBA has much more resources available to use in order to get out of the rut which it currently resides.

First things first: do not ignore your fans. The WNBA has taken its fans for granted with a sorry marketing campaign over the last 2 seasons. The league has tried the "sex sells" approach with its athletes by dressing up the ladies in sexy clothes and make-up in order to appeal to a male audience. Pardon me; but, this league is the "WNBA", right? The 'W' stands for women; so, why appeal to men? I know men spend money; but, women do, too! Plus, the plain truth is many men view the WNBA as a league "run by lesbians" and "full of players who are lesbians";

the days of marketing to dads whose daughters admire the players and aspire to play in the league someday.

Next, do not ignore the older women in America. The older women consist of many women who were told as little girls "That's not lady-like."; "Girls don't play sports."; "Girls don't sweat"; etc. Today, older women feel a tremendous sense of pride watching women play basketball at a very high level which, years ago, they were told was "something a lady does not do". As our society gets older, more and more women will have the time, money, and interest to follow their daughters and their granddaughters

excelling on the basketball court.

The Connecticut Huskies, the number one team in women's college basketball, sells out all of its home games and a very solid part of its fan base consists of older women and men. Plus, they travel to see the Huskies play! The Tennessee Lady Vols also have a large fan base of older citizens. Both programs draw great crowds; so, each must be doing something right to attract the fans. Follow their example!

The Women's Final Four has drawn crowds of 30,000 plus in recent years; and, no one in the know talks about the impending demise of women's college basketball like they do the WNBA's end. Due to graduation, college hoops turns over every four years; but, attendance continues to increase year in and year out.

Lastly, the WNBA needs to market its product: basketball. Today's players are more athletic than ever before. The league needs to showcase the athleticism to the public. Display the spin dribbles; the no-look passes; and the fast breaks instead of players swinging back in forth in hammocks or leaning against sports cars. The WNBA should promote its players doing what they do best instead of taking them out of their element.

"WNBA. We have a problem." Fix it.