

# Women have 'got next'

## New professional league set to begin play Saturday

NEW YORK (AP) — They are young, fast, sweaty and yes, some of them can dunk. These are the women of the WNBA, the new professional basketball league that promises an aggressive, finesse-filled game much more than anyone expects.

The league enters a crowded sports market where male athletes rule and the American Basketball League, vying for fans.

So while the WNBA claims "We got it how long can it hold the court?" we have no idea what to expect this year," says Olympic gold medalist Rebecca Lobo, a 6-4 center/forward with the New York Liberty. "But the rea-

son we joined this league is because we believe we're part of something that's going to get much better.

"We're laying a foundation and we expect to be celebrating our 50th anniversary just like the NBA did this year."

Of course, that is also the hope of the NBA, which owns and operates the league. To try to make that happen, the WNBA's big brother has organized marketing, corporate sponsorship and national TV coverage that is unprecedented for a new league and all carefully planned to raise awareness of women's basketball.

With sponsors like GM and Nike and three nationally televised games a

week — starting with the first game June 21 — the eight-team WNBA is off to a flying start.

"This is a historic moment. The start of the WNBA marks a new era in the evolution of women's sports and professional sports in this country," WNBA president Val Ackerman said.

"Our interests are very much long term. We recognize that it is going to take time to develop a stable fan base and we're focusing on the future of the league. We believe that you cannot underestimate the importance of prime-time TV coverage. The exposure will set us apart."

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### Comparing the leagues

On June 21, eight new Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) teams start their regular season. Here's how the WNBA measures up to the NBA:

	WNBA	NBA
Ball circumference:	28.5 in.	30 in.
Number of teams:	8	29
Avg. player height:	5 ft. 11 1/2 in.	6 ft. 7 in.
Game time:	two 20-minute halves	two 24-minute halves
Time on shot clock:	30 seconds	24 seconds
Height of basket:	10 ft.	10 ft.
Distance of 3-point line to basket:	19 ft. 9 in.	22 ft.

Source: WNBA, NBA

*New league epitomizes true spirit of basketball*

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About two years ago, I wrote a column advocating the creation of a women's basketball league. At the time, women's college basketball was gaining notoriety and many fans were looking for a professional league in the United States which would allow women to show off their talents.

Well, the National Basketball Association must have gotten a copy of The Battalion and read my column that year. Starting Saturday, one of the two women's professional leagues will begin, the WNBA. While the American Basketball League finished up its season earlier this season, the WNBA players are proclaiming, "We got next!"

While many do not believe that women's basketball can create a fan base, the WNBA has a fighting shot. This league is funded by the NBA and is being heavily played up. During the NBA finals, promos were run at every commercial break and NBC, ESPN and the Lifetime channel are all going to be broadcasting games. Talk about saturation.

The ABL did not find much success earlier this year but the WNBA has more stars and more money. College players such as Rebecca Lobo, Sheryl Swoopes and Nancy Lieberman-Cline will all be participating.

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# Veterans, new stars ready for tip-off

NEW YORK — Nancy Lieberman-Cline waited 13 years for the NBA to back a women's pro league. And as she waited her time, she hoped one thing — she would age slowly.

The 38-year-old guard finally has her chance in the WNBA, which tips off June 21.

She is among the marquee players in the eight-team league, joining the likes of Olympic gold medalists Lisa Leslie, Rebecca Lobo and Sheryl Swoopes — players coming out of diapers when Lieberman-Cline won a silver medal in 1976.

Not only is Lieberman-Cline the WNBA's best player, she is already been inducted into the basketball Hall of Fame.

In 1984, she talked to NBA commissioner David Stern about forming a women's league. Stern said it was part of his plan and she just hoped she was still playing when the league became a reality.

"I hoped I would age rather slowly," said Lieberman-Cline, who played in two short-lived women's leagues in the early 1980s before the Phoenix Mercury selected her in the WNBA draft.

She made a name for herself as a no-

look-passing point guard at Old Dominion, leading the school to ALAW championships in 1979 and 1980.

After stints in the women's leagues, she played two years in the men's USBL, became a broadcaster and was inducted into the Hall of Fame last year.

"Every day I walk out to practice, I have a big smile on my face," Lieberman-Cline said. "I know it's two hours of hard work, but I see the love, camaraderie and respect. A lot of people have worked hard to build what we have, and I'm just happy to be a part of it."

As for Swoopes, she captured people's attention with slashing drives and laser three-point accuracy, scoring a record 47 points for Texas Tech in the 1993 NCAA championship game against Ohio State.

She will not be doing that in the WNBA right away. She is expecting her firstborn

this month and may not play this season.

After college, Swoopes spent three unhappy months playing professionally in Italy, then worked as a bank teller in Lubbock, Texas, staying in shape in pick-up games with men. Along with Leslie and Lobo, Swoopes made the national team, went on a yearlong undefeated tour (60-0) and won an Olympic gold medal in Atlanta.

She has been called the female Michael Jordan and is the only woman to have a signature shoe — Air Swoopes. The 6-foot forward was one of the first two players the WNBA signed and was assigned to the Houston Comets. Swoopes, 26, and husband Eric Jackson are celebrating their second anniversary this month and their present will be a son.

His name? Jordan, of course.

**"A lot of people have worked hard to build what we have, and I'm just happy to be a part of it."**

Nancy Lieberman-Cline  
Phoenix Mercury guard

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