

Monday • September 1, 1997

# Comets smoke Liberty for inaugural WNBA title

HOUSTON (AP) — The Comets, projected as an average team before the season started, roared past the New York Liberty 65-51 Saturday to win the first WNBA championship. League MVP Cynthia Cooper thrilled a capacity crowd of 16,285 in The Summit with 25 points.

Years from now when women's basketball is going to be a trivia question and they have one of those trivia questions about who won the first title, they'll say the Houston Comets," Comets coach Van Chancellor said. "No one else can ever say they won the first WNBA title."

Houston began the season without Sheryl Swoopes, who didn't join the team until late July after giving birth on June 25.

The Comets rallied late to win the Eastern Conference title by one game over the Liberty, who lost seven of their last nine games. Houston played Saturday without starting center Wanda Guyton, who suffered a concussion in Thursday's semifinal win over Charlotte.



Cooper, the league's leading scorer, also was a unanimous selection to the all-WNBA team. Forward Tami Thompson was a first team pick and Chancellor was named coach of the year honors.

The Comets couldn't beat the Liberty early, losing their first four matchups, but they finished with a flourish.

At the start of the season, we lost three games to New York and everybody said 'when are you going to beat New York?'" Comets forward Janeth Arcain said. "We didn't win because the finals are the most important."

The Comets won when it counted and so did the WNBA in its first season, according to president Val Ackerman, who said before Saturday's title game that the league's only surprises were good ones.

Looking to next season, Ackerman said he hopes the schedule will be a longer schedule and more teams.

"It's my hope that when the NBA board of governors meets in its entirety in November in New York, we're going to be able to recommend to them that we expand by two teams next season," Ackerman said. "I wouldn't say where the teams would be located but several NBA teams were interested in joining WNBA franchises."

Fans came out in greater numbers than we hoped for with greater levels of enthusiasm than we hoped for," Ackerman said.

"To the extent that we misjudged anything, it was our underestimation of the fans' readiness for this

league and for these players."

Cooper, who guided the Comets from start to finish, scored eight straight free throws down the stretch Saturday when the Liberty tried to make a comeback. Cooper wouldn't allow it.

"A lot of people have counted us out," she said. "We didn't have Sheryl at the beginning. People said 'Well, they might be a .500 team.' We worked hard. We got in the gym. We had two and three-hour practices. This is what it's all about. This is the payoff."

Thompson scored 10 of her 18 points in the second half and did an outstanding defensive job on New York's Rebecca Lobo. New York coach Nancy Darsch said the Liberty just didn't perform.

"I think it had something to do with us not executing our offense and them executing theirs," Darsch said. "That was kind of the story the whole game."

The Comets defense also had something to do with it, New York guard Theresa Weatherspoon said.

"We turned the basketball over a little bit too much in the second half," Weatherspoon said. "And they took advantage of everything that happened. It was a little tough for us on the offensive end."

Tammy Jackson stepped into the starting lineup for Guyton and had 11 rebounds, two steals and seven points in 37 minutes.

"Tammy came in and never blinked an eye," Chancellor said. "She started the biggest game of her life. That's test to her character, her intestinal fortitude and everything else. What a game."

Now, it's the off-season and the Comets must think of the future. Comets guard Kim Perrot is looking for a job.

"I'm waiting for somebody to call me and hire me for a job," Perrot said. "If anybody is looking for an employee, they need to call me."

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# Tennessee leapfrogs to No.3

Tennessee State tightens lock on top spot in Associated Press poll

AP — Tennessee moved up, Tennessee State increased its lead in The Associated Press' Top 25 college football poll.

The Volunteers, with Peyton Manning throwing for 310 yards and five touchdowns in a 52-17 victory over Texas Tech Saturday night, jumped two spots to No. 3 in the second poll of the regular season.

Syracuse, which lost to North Carolina State 32-31 in overtime, fell out of the Top 25 a week after a 24-0 win over Wisconsin boosted the Orangemen from No. 17 to 13.

Penn State, which opens the season Saturday against Pittsburgh, received 23 first-place votes and

1,616 points from the 70 sportswriters and broadcasters who vote in the poll. Last week, the Nittany Lions collected 22 first-place votes and 1,602 points.

Florida, despite a lackluster 21-6 season-opening win over Southern Mississippi, remained No. 2 with 14 first-place votes and 1,543 points, while the Vols got seven first-place votes and 1,523 points.

Washington, which opens its season Saturday at Brigham Young, remained No. 4 with nine first-place votes and 1,502 points.

Florida State, preparing for its season opener at Southern California Saturday, fell two places to No. 5 with six first-place votes and 1,494 points.

Nebraska, a 59-14 winner over Akron, was No. 6 (four first-place votes and 1,434 points), with North Carolina No. 7 (four first-place votes, 1,335 points), Colorado No. 8 (three first-place votes, 1,323 points), Ohio State No. 9 and LSU No. 10.

The Buckeyes, who beat Wyoming 24-10 Thursday night, did not receive a first-place vote this week, after receiving one a week ago.

Notre Dame, which opens the season Saturday against Georgia Tech, remained No. 11, followed by Texas, Miami, Michigan, Alabama, Auburn, Stanford, Clemson, BYU and Iowa. Kansas State and Northwestern were tied at No. 21, followed by Southern California, Colorado State and Michigan State.

In the USA Today/ESPN coaches' poll, Florida was No. 1, followed by Penn State, Tennessee, Washington and Florida State.

Colorado State entered the poll for the first time since 1994 at No. 24. Miami and Alabama each moved up a spot after victories Saturday. The Hurricanes improved to No. 13 with a 45-14 win over Baylor, while the Crimson Tide, winning 42-17 in Mike DuBose's coaching debut, moved up to No. 15.



Osborne

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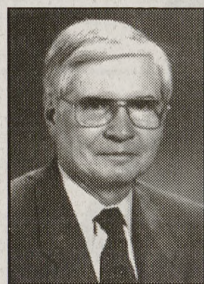


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Dr. Southerland  
Vice President for Student Affairs  
10th Floor Rudder Tower  
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