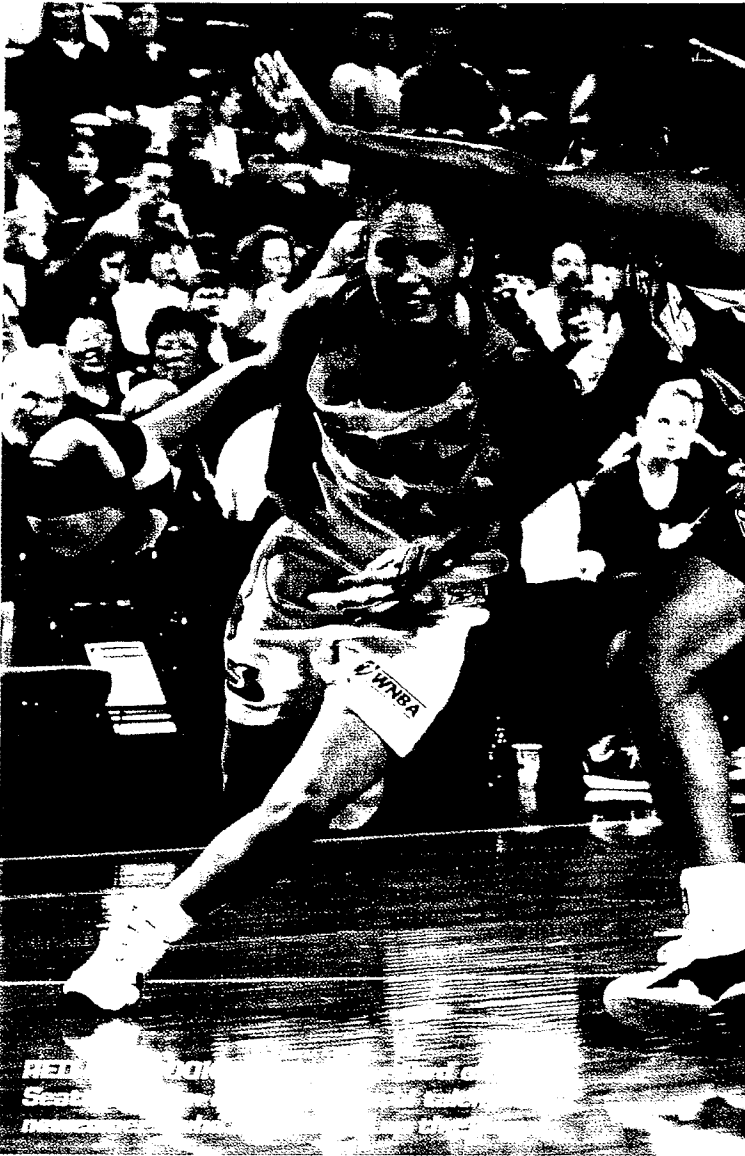


5 Reasons to Watch The WNBA

Hey, hoop heads! There's a pro league now in its sixth season that has everything a basketball purist could want, starting with sharpshooters, precision passers, and fan-friendly stars.



SELF BEHINDING/GETTY IMAGES

1 Players Who Can Hit Twos and Treys

The women's game is still played below the rim, so you won't see any dunking, but you will see money jump shooting. To get shots off, WNBA teams rely mostly on a fluid half-court offense, not one-on-one play. Players are in constant motion and use crisp passes, screens, and pick-and-roll plays to give shooters open looks.

The Washington Mystics try to free up forward **Chamique Holdsclaw** as often as possible. After 12 games of the 2002 season, she was the league's leading scorer (19.9 points per game), shooting with 50 percent accuracy from the field. Guard **Ray Allen** of the Milwaukee Bucks is considered one of the NBA's best shooters. In his first 12 games of the 2001-02 season, he shot 48 percent from the field.

Forward **Katie Smith** of the Minnesota Lynx is deadly from all distances. Opponents don't dare leave her open from 3-point range. As of July 16, her career 3-point shooting percentage was 37.4 percent. Guard/forward **Steve Smith** of the San Antonio Spurs was the NBA's most accurate 3-point shooter in 2001-02. At the end of the season, he had a 35.6 career percentage from downtown.

"You can't lay off Katie, even a little bit," says **Cynthia Cooper**, a two-time league MVP with the Houston Comets. "She can nail that jumper from anywhere."



KENT SAITHAN/GETTY IMAGES

Forward Katie Smith is deadly from 3-point land.

2 "How'd-She-Do-That?" Passing

Peter Parker was bitten by a spider and became Spider-Man. Guard **Ticha Penicheiro** of the Sacramento Monarchs grew up in Portugal, a country on the Atlantic Ocean. She must have been bitten

by an octopus and grown eight arms. How else to explain her "how'd-she-do-that?" passes?

Ticha faithfully follows the WNBA's "pass first" mentality. She has led the league in assists for four straight seasons (1998-01).

"There are so many great passers in today's [WNBA] game," says guard **Teresa Weatherspoon** of the New York Liberty, the WNBA's all-time assists leader (1,099 as of July 16). "Ticha, **Jen Rizzotti** [of the Cleveland Rockers], and **Jennifer Azzi** [of the Utah Starzz] all have great control on the floor and find their players with terrific passes."

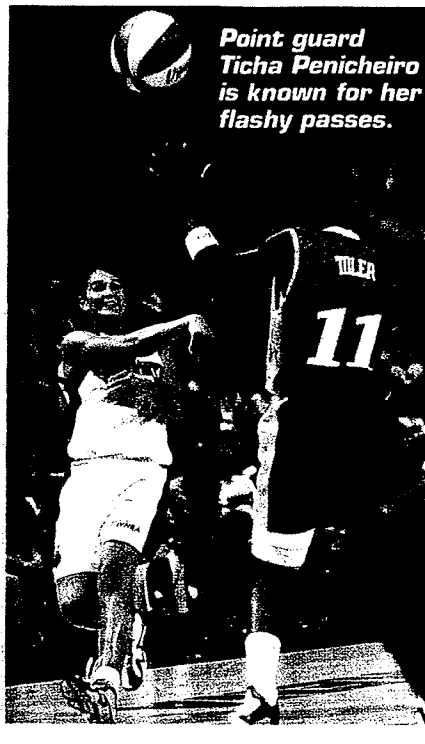
Finding an open teammate with a clean pass matters more in the WNBA than slam dunks and crossover dribbles. In 2001, 62.6 percent of WNBA field goals were assisted. In the NBA, 60.6 percent of field goals last season were assisted.

3 Foul Shooters Who Don't Stink

Nobody buys a ticket to a basketball game to watch free throws. But nobody wants to see his favorite players clank 'em off the rim at crunch time, either.

It's 15 feet from the free-throw line to the hoop in both the WNBA and NBA. In 2001, four WNBA players shot at least 90 percent from the charity stripe. (Forward **Elena Baranova** of the Miami Sol was the league's best, at 93 percent.) Guard **Reggie Miller** of the Indiana Pacers was the only NBA player to shoot that consistently in 2001-02. (As of July 16, three WNBAers were shooting 90 percent or above this season.)

Forward **Eva Nemcova** of the Cleveland Rockers must have ice water in her veins. She drained 62 of 63 from the free-throw line in 1999 for a WNBA single-season record of 98.4 percent. That percentage would be an NBA record, too. (Guard **Calvin Murphy** of the Houston Rockets holds the NBA mark of 95.8 percent, set in 1980-81.)



Point guard **Ticha Penicheiro** is known for her flashy passes.

ROCKY WIDNER/WNBA/GETTY IMAGES

4 Ready-to-Play Rookies

You'll find plenty of rookies in the starting five of WNBA teams. Five of the Top 6 players drafted in 2002 have started every game in which they played, as of July 16.

Most WNBA rooks enter the league after four years of college ball (except for some foreign-born players). That experience makes it easier for them to handle the transition from amateur to pro. They become starters because they can contribute right away.

NBA rookies, on the other hand, take longer to develop, since so few of them play four years of college ball before entering the league. In 2001, the NBA's top draft pick was **Kwame Brown**, a high school player. Kwame should be a terrific pro someday, but he started just three games and averaged only 4.5 points for the Washington Wizards in 2001-02.

Point guard **Sue Bird** was the WNBA's top draft pick in 2002. She led the University of Connecticut to the national championship (her second in three seasons) less than three weeks before the Seattle Storm chose her. Sue is a Storm starter and was

leading the team in assists (6.1) and steals (1.9), and was second in scoring (13.9) as of July 16.

Because the women's college game is so popular, some WNBA players were well-known to basketball fans even before they entered the league. Sue and rookies such as forward **Swin Cash** of the Detroit Shock and guard **Stacey Dales-Schuman** of the Washington Mystics are three examples. (Swin was leading her team in scoring as of July 16, and Stacey was her team's second-leading scorer.) Most fans had never heard of Kwame before he joined the Wizards.

5 Players Who Love to Sign

WNBA action doesn't stop after the buzzer sounds. A league rule requires that two WNBA players sign autographs after every game. And if you spot 5' 3" point guard **Debbie Black** of the Miami Sol or 7' 2" center **Margo Dydek** of the Utah Starzz in the parking lot before or after a game, chances are they'll scribble their names for you.

"It is pretty easy to get a player's autograph," says forward **Rebecca**



Even **Lisa Leslie**, the league MVP in 2001, takes time to sign.

DAVID SHENMAN/WNBA/GETTY IMAGES

Lobo of the Houston Comets, "if you are willing to wait after games."

Remember, too, that teams in the WNBA — unlike those in the NBA, the NFL, or major league baseball — travel on commercial flights. So don't be shocked if **Detroit Shock** players are on your next flight or the captain advises you that you'll be flying through a storm with the **Seattle Storm**. Try and snag a seat next to a player and enjoy the trip. ●

5 Reasons To Watch The WNBA

1. After 12 games what is Chamique Holdclaw's shooting percentage?
2. Who was the most accurate 3point shooter in NBA in 2001-02?
3. Who is the WNBA all time assist leader?
4. In 2001 what percentage of WNBA field goals were assisted?
5. Who has the WNBA record for free throw percentage for the season?
6. Most WNBA rookies play 4 years in college. T or F
7. Who was the WNBA top draft pick in 2002?
8. WNBA flies on commercial flights. T or F
9. Who owns the NBA record for free throw percentage?
10. What team does Swin Cash play for?