

WNBA who???

The Women's National Basketball Association is the only existing female professional sports league in the US. And thanks to chauvinism and stereotyping, the survival of this league may well be short-termed...

Less than twenty-three seconds to the end of regulation, and the impossible happens. The ball is stolen from the forward, dribbled down the court, and at the edge of the three-point arc, the decisive shot is made. A gasp erupts from the Staples Center as the ball spins upward into the air followed by a hush of silence as the leather sphere makes its downward descent. The ten players stop dead in their places. One of whom pray the ball will meet the rim and bounce clear away. As for the other five, this last play will either define them as defending champions or repeat champions, and in answer to their prayers the ball swishes through the basket's hoop, and the crowd gives the Los Angeles Sparks a cheer. Now guess who took that heart-pounding, nail-biting, last-second shot. The LA name, "defending champion", that could only mean Shaquille O'Neal, but Shaq's not allowed in these positions. Perhaps Kobe Bryant? No way. Kobe would rather perform a rescue, helicopter, I'm-on-tactical-TV stunt. So the only remaining candidate is Robert Horry.

He's a god at three point range, very selfless as a team player, and has won championship rings with other basket clubs. The only factor that would eliminate Horry as our mystery player would be...his gender. Oh, now don't tell me you didn't know the above highlights regarded the Los Angeles Sparks of the WNBA...Women's National Basketball Association? Sure you did.

For the past several years, I have been criticized, laughed at, looked at; you name it, for my love for the game. The game being the WNBA. The only successful professional women's league in the history of American sports. Since it's inception in the spring of 1997, I have been an ardent follower of this league. I've watched as the league grew from 8 teams to 16 teams, rookies develop into MVPs, challengers develop into champions. From the mastery of Cynthia Cooper, the skills of Chamique Holdaway, the dominance of Lisa Leslie. Oh how happy I was when I bought my car in 1999. Amongst other benefits, I could finally go to the Great Western Forum/Staples Center to watch a game live at courtside! Ever since, I've been blessed to attend at least two games per season, and I do intend to increase that number over the coming seasons.

By the way, in case you haven't figured it out yet, I'm a male. A heterosexual male sports fan who appreciates this sport, this league. And this is where my gender experience comes in to play. As a basketball fan of the WNBA, I often times find myself a loser when it comes to proclaiming the good news of

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Becky Hammon of the New York Liberty and Chamique Holdaway of the Washington Mystics.

this league. No matter how hard I advertise the excitement this league generates, the usual response is: "...they don't play as well as the men..." or "...they shoot the ball funny..." and of course the most common and most irritating: "...they don't belong in the WNBA..." But what's even more irritating is the point of frustration these narrow minded critics include women. That's right. The female gender of the human species are actually involved in the running of a league which will, I'm very sure, pave the way for other female professional leagues...if supported. Understand, I'm not soliciting blind solidarity as far as supporting the WNBA, for everyone, regardless of gender.

is entitled to his or her likes and dislikes. Because one is of this gender or of this religion does not and should not necessarily mean he or she must support a cause pertaining to that race, gender or religion. Nevertheless, I also do not expect blind opposition to such and such cause. In the case of the WNBA, I've discovered of the many who have scoffed at the league,



Boxing champion, Mia St. John, poses for Playboy.

65% have never cared to watch a full game on television not to mention attend one of the games. What's even more amusing, the city of LA, supposedly the second largest in the US market, has a WNBA team namely the LA Sparks. This team is the two times defending champion, but 80% percent of Los Angeles aren't even aware the Sparks exist. Now dare you mention the Lakers and even the name will have something to say.

That said, one must now wonder why the low support for the WNBA by women? Or furthermore why the support of men's basketball over women's basketball by these same women? I believe the answer sums up this entire course perspectives on gender, i.e. the prejudice involving male vs. female where the latter always gets the shorter end of the stick...or no stick at all. The word is stereotype. From her days of toddlerhood as per your countless godsend myths, thanks to Disney, where the female character is always depicted as the damsel in distress, a la Professor Hankins' "Little Mermaid". Through her teen years, when mother will instruct her what a lady must do, say, wear, etc.; thanks to the "be-brings-home-the-hoosie, she cooks it" family culture. To womanhood as she settles for a job as an assistant manager, traffic officer, nurse or teacher, thanks to the media that constantly but surreptitiously casts them in such professions. Stereotype and prejudice are not synonymous. I believe everyone stereotypes simply because it's basically a natural reaction to a repeated message. The crime is when this message is conveyed or when one fails to deviate from the influence of the message when the facts say otherwise. Sadly enough, the party(s) involved in stereotyping usually falls prey to their stereotype. In this case, women's views on female basketball. Due to the Ms Precious stereotype of women, which I largely credit the media, the image by many of the WNBA is basketball players who refrain from catching the ball or setting up a screen, for fear of breaking a fingernail, and the likes. Yes,

men are more physical and will always be due their anatomy, but this does not mean that women can NOT get physical.

The WNBA support and hence forth survival will hinge on the change of perspective of women sports by the general public. This change must start from the league. Gossaming ones daughter to become the ideal Cinderella Little Mermaid women must definitely end. At the same time, the "what a man can do a woman can do better" must stop being preached. Instead, "what a man can do, a woman can also do", is the appropriate gospel. And this includes female professional basketball. Other factors must also come into play to win fans over such as a little more attention by the various sports media, including television and publications. At least an extra minute or extra paragraph on news surrounding the WNBA should be made. When the LA Sparks win a playoff game only the score is noted. When the Lakers win a mere preseason game, we're talking about a 45 minutes of television time or a full two pages in the newspaper on the highlights, stats, interviews, analysis; you name it. Of course the Lakers and men's pro basketball as a whole have a much larger market and therefore it would be unreasonable for me to suggest splitting time and money evenly amongst the two leagues. But as I said, at least an extra minute or paragraph.

This said, I strongly disagree with Sean Olney's journal on the "Survival of the WNBA" (1), where he deems the league's popularity could be greatly strengthened if they market towards lesbians. This common and very erroneous notion that the only people who attend WNBA games are homosexual females is just another stereotype regarding the league and female sports in general. This narrative lacks any iota of logic. Out of all the professional sports leagues, the NFL is my favorite followed by the WNBA. When I say the NFL, I am of course referring to those men who wear extremely tight pants, bend over, and put one another backside at my giving chance. And how many times have you heard gay or homosexual used in conjunction with the NFL? I also disagree with Russ Sisk's article on "Maybe It's Time To Celebrate Difference" (2). Quite antonymously to O'Leary, Sisk believes in the 'sex sells' gimmicks to boost awareness and support. He goes on to cite Anna Kournikova's curvaceous image as the source of her popularity. This is



Lisa Harrison of the Phoenix Suns and Tamika Catchings of the Indiana Fever square off.

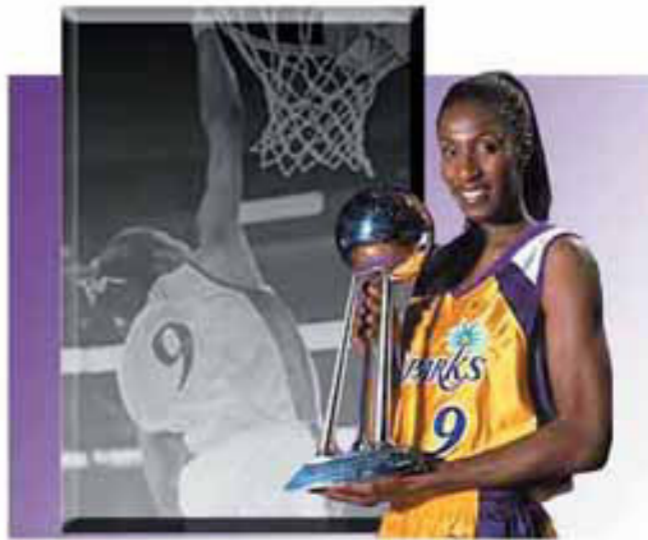


WTA tennis star/model Anna Kournikova

"...Sisk believes in the 'sex sells' gimmicks to boost awareness and support..."

very true, save for the fact that Miss Kournikova has never made impact on the tennis court. To rightly say her popularity is based on her looks and not her woeful playing skills is the ultimate understatement. God forbid the WNBA or any female sport descend so low to increase ticket sales. If there's any man(doser) who desires 40 minutes of T.R.A, he should attend his local strip bar. A woman need not shed cloths to express her womanhood. All she need do is carry herself in a respectful way which is basically just being a woman. The trend of women in our society chasing the covers of Playboy and Penthouse over the covers of Fortune Magazine and Sports Illustrated is just another of the many components of the aforementioned stereotype machine.

One may now ask how important is this topic regarding the support of the WNBA. Very important. The WNBA is the only professional sports league that has lasted over five years. The demise of this league will easily spell out the demise of any potential and prospective female professional sport. As some dream of being on basketball advertisements, baseball cards and football magazines, I do not see why our daughters should never have these dreams as well.



Two-time WNBA champions Los Angeles Sparks' Lisa Leslie.