

Sting blending talent

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who'll backup Dawn Staley at point guard.

"I saw a lot of opportunity for me to come here and help this team get to that level," said Sam, a small forward who won the WNBA title last year with Seattle. "I saw an opportunity to do good things, and I wanted to be a part of it."

With so many roster changes, Charlotte is trying to blend quickly, especially with leading scorer Allison Feaster playing in Turkey. In the preseason opener Sunday against Connecticut, the Sun shot 57.1 percent from the floor in a 69-64 win. There's much room for improvement before the regular season opens May 21.

"We played against Connecticut and you could see the chemistry is not there yet," said Sam, who will likely start at small forward. "We're still learning each other and that why in prac-

tice we've got to go hard ... and get the reps in. Once we learn each other's game, and learn coach Trudi's system, we'll be a team to reckon with in the East."

But there is some consistency. Staley is the acknowledged floor leader, Feaster is the top offensive threat and center Tammy Sutton-Brown strengthened her game in the offseason. With experienced veterans like Sam and Darling added to the rotation, Lacey believes the Sting can contend.

"I think we have great leadership in Dawn and we have veteran players who've played in the league and had success in the league," Lacey said. "So it's a matter of us tweaking our offense a little bit and playing together enough that we know each other."

Without that familiarity, the Sting will have to rely more on defense, which Lacey always emphasizes. If the

offense struggles, which it did in the first half against Connecticut, defense can at least keep Charlotte competitive.

"One thing we can all do together is defense," Sam said. If we put that in our head and get out and stop teams, we've got time to make mistakes on offense. It's going to take time, but we've got to work on our defense and let our offense come together."

Thursday is another chance for coaches to measure players' progress against real competition. Rosters have to be trimmed to the league maximum 11 players by May 20, but there's still the matter of establishing consistency.

"It's going to take some time for us to get to know each other and learn to play together," Lacey said. "My emphasis right now is for us to play hard and play hard all the time. If we do that, it'll come to us pretty easily."

Knights struggle at plate, mound

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start getting us into games," Leyva said. "We just need to get a couple of guys going offensively, guys like (desig-

nated hitter Joe) Borchard and maybe even (shortstop Pedro) Lopez at the bottom of the lineup. We need to get those guys on base and hit the

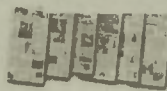
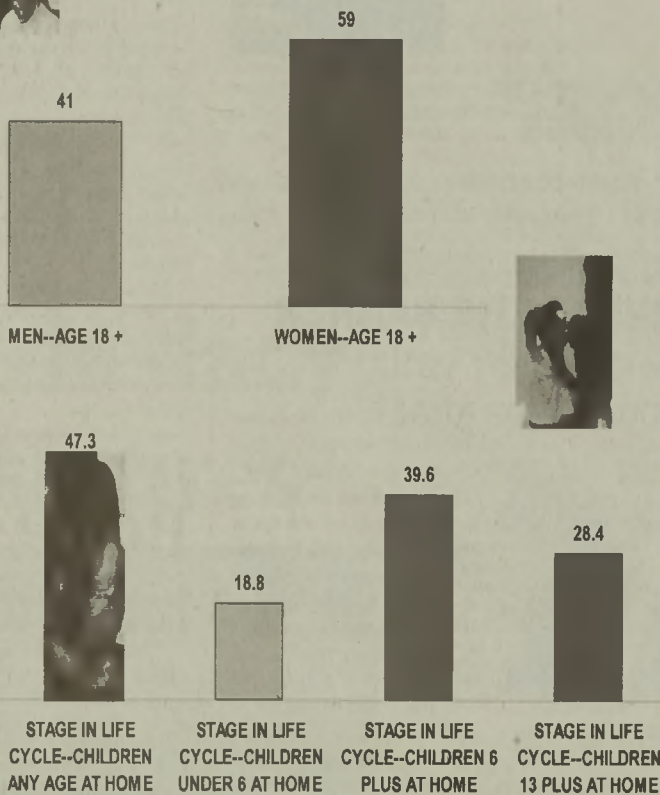
ball the way they're capable of hitting. They've hit the ball in the past, and there's no reason why they can't do that again."

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