

HBCU's left out as floodgates open for women's pro basketball

Once the doors were open for women's professional basketball in this country, a flood of players were there to rush in.

The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) and the American Basketball Association (ABA) have paved the way for the nation's top women players to ply their trade on the hardwood.

But like other professional sports, players from the nation's historically black colleges/university (HBCU) haven't been welcomed with open arms.

The facts speak for themselves. The WNBA will start its second season on June 11 and run until the end of August. Only one of the leagues players hails from a HBCU, Denique Graves a 1997 graduate of Howard University and member of the Sacramento Monarchs. Of 28 games played by her teams last summer, Graves played in 22. She accumulated 86 total minutes for the season, averaging less than one point and one rebound per game.

This year, only three HBCU players were even included in the WNBA draft pool this year. Those were Howard graduates Karen Wilkins ('91), Alisha Hill ('98) and Florida A&M graduate Aquenda Clark ('98). Wilkins was drafted by the Phoenix Mercury in the fourth round.

The ABA doesn't look any better. After playing through the winter months of the year and finishing up its second full year, there weren't any HBCU players represented in the league. Only two



Denique Graves

players, Konecka Drakeford ('98) of Johnson C. Smith and Rosalyn Spann ('98) of Jackson State could be found in the draft pool this year. Neither was drafted.

Why is it that after one full season of both leagues, only five players total made their second draft pools? Are HBCU players not talented enough?

"I think a lot of times it's not about their skills but it's because of the notoriety of the University they attend," said Eric Tucker, Fayetteville State's women's coach Eric Tucker. Tucker's top player, guard Tammy Brown, did well at the draft combines but did not make any league pool. "You know as well as I do that they can play at the next level."

In looking at the resumes of some of the women who have played in HBCU's, it appears that some have the ingredients to make it on the professional level.

Before heading out to Sacramento, Graves scored 1,555 points and grabbed 908 rebounds for her career at Howard University. She was a three-time All-MEAC player and received Player of the Year honors in her senior year. Hill, a teammate of Graves, scored 2,099 career points and grabbed 1,088 rebounds. Her 13.5 rebound average in her senior year led the nation and the 5-11 forward was All-MEAC three years. She also received the 1998 MEAC Player of Year award.

Wilkins, a 6-1 guard/forward, only played three years for Howard, but she made the best out of it by being an All-MEAC selection in those years. She accumulated 1,320 and averaged 20.7 ppg. and 8.6 rebounds while garnering the 1991 MEAC Player of the Year honor.

Spann's numbers are just as impressive. The 5-9 guard from Macon, Mississippi was a three time Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) player of the year

for Jackson State. The Jackson State graduate is the leading scorer in school history with 2,035 points. Her career rebounds is 808 along with 271 assist and 297 steals.

Drakeford terrorized the CIAA for two years after transferring from Atlantic Coast Conference power, the University of Virginia. The two time CIAA Player of the year averaged 22 ppg and 10 rbg her junior year. She took her game to another level this past year, leading the nation in scoring. She averaged 31 ppg and corralled 2 rbg, while shooting 50 percent from the field and 69 percent at the foul line. The Charlotte, N.C. native scored a season high 59 points against Fayetteville State in February and pulled down 23 boards against Livingstone in January en route to being tabbed as the 1998 Division II National Player of the Year.

You could continue to go down the line of players who played at HBCU's that coulda-woulda-shoulda have been drafted but just by looking at these few players it's clear that something is wrong. Tucker says the problem lies within the NCAA division affiliation and not so much a colleges historical background.

"A lot of people overlook Division II schools," Tucker says. "You just don't see scouts evaluating talent at CIAA games."

"(HBCU's) are still going to get those sleeper players who were missed by the bigger and more well-known schools," said Ed Hill, Howard's Sports Information Director.

- Damon Ford

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colleges. When the recruiting season rolls around they don't go after the top talent. They are willing to settle for second best rather than outwork their counterparts to secure the services of blue-chip players.

What they don't realize is they too have a product to sell. The history and tradition of their programs can serve as major selling points.

*Here today,
gone tomorrow*

Is the number of basketball hir-

ings and firings that have occurred since the conclusion of the 1997-98 season exceptionally high this season?

From the early indications, there seems to be a lot of uncertainty in the air. It appears that more coaches are getting the ax than normal.

There were some openings that became available in football, most notably the position at Grambling that was occupied by Eddie Robinson for nearly six decades, but not nearly as many as have happened in men's and women's basketball.

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If the firings are justifiable is one situation. If they're not, then something needs to be done to prevent a ripple effect through black college sports.

Black College

Sports Review

