

# Sports Jam

Quick shots: Deion • Fuzzy and Tiger • Lardner and Lemieux

## Two leagues of their own

As a planetary resident of New Age thinking and enlightened consciousness, I find myself in an odd position as the **Women's National Basketball League drafts players** this week for its inaugural season.

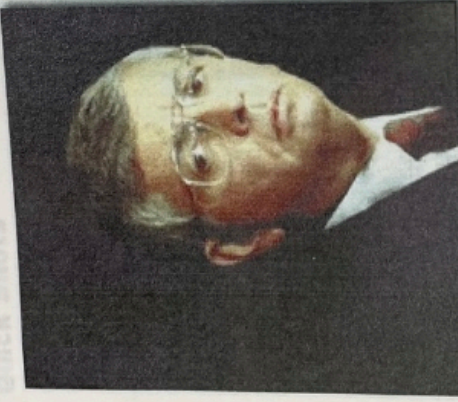
The situation is this: despite being a lifelong advocate of women's sports, I wouldn't shed a tear if the league flopped on its face.

Why is that? Because where others see a new opportunity, I see a sellout, an unacceptable compromise, an attempt to convince women

professionals that second-class citizenship is better than no citizenship at all.

Mind you, if there weren't a superior alternative out there, I'd be leading the WNBA parade, proclaiming it a great stride forward. But there is a clearly better alternative - the American Basketball League - and in my eyes the WNBA now represents a step backward.

The **American Basketball League** makes apologies to no one. It plays a long, tough, competitive season during the winter, same as the college, CBA and NBA teams. It is an independently funded and managed league courting fan bases built up through years of successful college programs. It is paying top dollar for the best talent available and stocking its franchises with solid depth.



Under the thumb of the NBA and David Stern, the WNBA will always be a second-class citizen.

While I was working at the Oakland Tribune, I learned that Apple was preparing to launch an online community called **eWorld** and it would have a variety of newsfeeds. I immediately began bombarding their offices telling them they should hire me to provide their sports commentary. My plan was not to leave the Tribune, but to work simultaneously with Apple to supplement the pittance the Trib was paying (I had taken a major payout when I left Albany because I wanted to move to the Bay Area) and save enough money to buy a house.

My persistence paid off. Apple hired me for an obscene amount of money. A few months later they realized they were bleeding money and cut the payments by half, but it was still a lot of money. When Apple pulled the plug on eWorld, my editor went to **@Home**, a similar portal but offered to clients who had internet service over cable. She took me with her.

We saved enough from those jobs to buy a home in Oakland. Alas, the cable service was not offered in our neighborhood so I had to depend on the company to mail me hard copies once a month.

The ABL is substance; the WNBA is packaging. Except for a handful of current and former big names, the WNBA players will be paid peanuts. They're scheduling games in the off-season, in essence borrowing buildings only when they aren't of any use to the men's teams: You can have the gym when we're done. Any woman golfer who has found herself blocked out of primo tee times at the club knows what that's all about.

Worst of all, the WNBA is the stepchild of the NBA, one of the most marketing-savvy operations in the history of pro sports. The NBA is providing the money, the promotion and the TV contract. That is to say, the NBA controls the WNBA, lock, stock and barrel. The image of a husband who doesn't allow his wife access to the checkbook keeps coming to mind. A league controlled by another league will always be a minor league.

*San Francisco Bay Area sportswriter **Roger Brigham** was shocked to learn that ESPN and ESPN2 did not plan round-the-clock, tag-team coverage of the WNBA draft.*