

# real SPORTS® e-Zine

Collector's Edition

The Authority in Women's Sports™

## 10th Annual Most Important Moments in Sports



# 2010 REAL SPORTS

## Top 10 Most Important Moments in Sports and Sports Person of the Year

10th annual edition

# 10

## Media Firestorm

Media coverage of women's sports and athletes remains a point of contention for athletes, coaches, fans and investors in women's sports.

Coach Geno Auriemma created discussion in media outlets across the country when he said interest in his Connecticut basketball team's record-setting win streak garnered the attention it did only because it was breaking a men's record. Many sports writers called his comments out of bounds.

However, coverage of women's sports remains miniscule relative to men's. Part of the reason rests squarely with the perceptions of media editors. According to the Women's



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Sports Foundation, "The results of a survey of 285 newspapers found that nearly 25 percent of editors agrees with the statement, 'Women are naturally less athletic than are men.'" Part of the reason also rests with the inability of women's sports promoters to secure consistent fan support, which would demonstrate a critical mass of interest.

UConn's run-up to, and surpassing of, UCLA's consecutive-game winning streak drew significant national media coverage. The debate continues regarding media coverage – with some saying if more women's sports teams filled the stands like UConn does the issue of media coverage would subside, while others point to without media coverage how do you fill the stands.

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## 9

# Salute to Champions

Despite limited media coverage, all victories count. REAL SPORTS salutes the NCAA Division I student athletes, their schools and their national championships in 2010.

Basketball – Connecticut  
 Bowling – Fairleigh Dickinson  
 Cross Country – Villanova  
 Fencing – Penn State  
 Field Hockey – Maryland  
 Golf – Purdue  
 Gymnastics – UCLA  
 Ice Hockey – Minnesota-Duluth  
 Lacrosse – Maryland  
 Rifle – Texas Christian  
 Rowing – Virginia  
 Skiing – Denver  
 Soccer – Notre Dame  
 Softball – UCLA  
 Swimming & Diving – Florida  
 Tennis – Stanford  
 Track & Field (indoor) – Oregon  
 Track & Field (outdoor) – Texas A&M  
 Volleyball – Penn State  
 Water polo – USC



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Danica Deckard of Ohio State (right) tries to defend against Maryland's Harriet Tibble during the NCAA field hockey championship semifinals in College Park, Md. Maryland defeated Ohio State 3-1.

## 8

# WNBA — One Seeks Redemption, One Finds Suspension

On March 10, the WNBA's Tulsa Shock announced the signing of former Olympian Marion Jones. The rookie, who spent years as the poster child for Olympic track and field excellence before being exposed for taking performance-enhancing drugs, seeks to continue her road to redemption. Like the NFL's Michael Vick, time in prison seems to have provided ample opportunity to consider how to make the most of a second chance. Jones speaks out now against using drugs and released a new book this year, *On the Right Track: From Olympic Downfall to Finding Forgiveness and Strength to Overcome and Succeed*.

On Dec. 24, it was reported that Phoenix Mercury star guard Diana Taurasi tested positive for a banned drug while playing in a pro league in Turkey. She allegedly tested positive for modafinil, a stimulant that has been involved in several major doping cases, including that of U.S. sprinter Kelli White. A second sample is to be tested in January 2011, but following the preliminary test, Taurasi was suspended from the Turkish league. The WNBA has not yet weighed in on the matter, but a positive "B" sample result could lead to Taurasi being banned from the 2012 Olympics.

## 7

# The Miracle on Grass

by Brian Straus



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Carli Lloyd of the U.S. (left) goes against Natalie Vinti of Mexico during the semifinal match of CONCACAF Women's World Cup qualifying tournament held at Estadio Quintana Roo in Cancun, Mexico. Mexico prevailed 2-1.

The U.S. national soccer team had compiled a 26-0-4 record since winning the Olympic gold medal in August 2008, and few took notice. It was a talented but methodical and relatively unknown group, especially compared to its famous predecessors. One shocking loss, however, thrust the American women back into the spotlight.

On Nov. 5, the U.S. fell 2-1 to Mexico in the semifinals of the regional Women's World Cup qualifying tournament. Many called it the most stunning result in the history of the sport. The U.S. had never lost to Mexico and had won every one of its previous 19 qualifiers, by a combined score of 121-3.

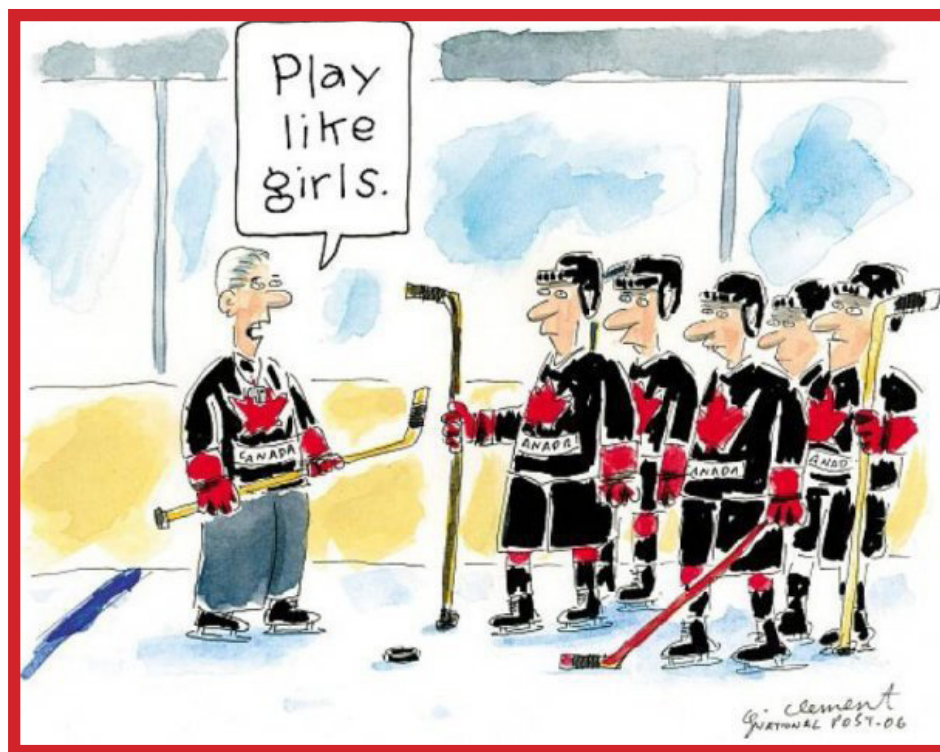
Relegated to a do-or-die consolation game against Costa Rica, the U.S. women suddenly had the country's attention. Soccer journalists shifted their focus from the Major League Soccer playoffs, and ESPN moved in to televise the game. The Americans regrouped, won 3-0 and then defeated Italy in a two-game playoff to claim the 16<sup>th</sup> and final berth in next summer's Women's World Cup in Germany.

"We don't ever get this much coverage," midfielder Carli Lloyd tweeted following the Mexico loss. Unfair? Probably. But two successive World Cup semifinal losses and the retirement of most of the "Girls of Summer" have eroded the team's stature significantly. And the rest of the planet has caught up, to the extent that Tony DiCicco, the coach who led the U.S. to that famous triumph in 1999, said the technically deficient and tactically naïve Americans were a dozen years away from another World Cup title.

# 6 Beer & Cigars — Redefining 'You Play Like a Girl'!

Feb. 12 marked the opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> Winter Olympics, hosted by Vancouver, Canada, the third time Canada has hosted the Games. With more than 2,500 athletes from more than 80 nations competing in more than 80 events, there are several memorable moments from a fan's perspective.

Expectations were high for the U.S. Olympic ski team, and performances did not disappoint — the squad made an eight-medal haul. Among the victories, Lindsey Vonn, the first American woman (and second ever) to win three consecutive overall World Cup and downhill championships (2008-2010), became the first American woman to win gold in the downhill event; and Julia Mancuso won silver in the downhill and combined.



Canadian News Agencies put the pressure on the men's hockey team as the women's hockey team excelled early on in the Olympic games.

The most memorable event, however, occurred around ice hockey. For many in Canada, the success of the Olympics would be measured by one feat — gold in hockey — men's hockey. But with the Canadian men losing to the United States during early play, the women winning it all became quite the media story, and certainly put pressure on the men to succeed.

The Canadian women even savored the gold-medal victory in a fashion more typically reserved for the guys as they lingered on the ice long after medal ceremony and were photographed smoking cigars and drinking beer — much to the dismay of the International Olympic Committee. In the end, Canada swept both men's and women's hockey.

## 5

# FC Gold Pride — Worst to First to History

by Brian Straus



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FC Gold Pride's Marta takes it to the goal despite the best efforts of the Philadelphia Independence's Val Henderson. FC Gold Pride shut out the Independence 4-0 for the 2010 WPS championship at Pioneer Stadium in Hayward, Calif., on Sept. 26, 2010.

It's hard to imagine any professional sports team having a more eventful year than the San Francisco Bay Area-based FC Gold Pride. The worst team in Women's Professional Soccer's inaugural season, Gold Pride benefited from the January demise of the Los Angeles Sol and selected Brazilian superstar Marta in the subsequent dispersal draft.

Several other shrewd acquisitions, including Camille Abily and Ali Riley, gave the club the confidence to jettison captain Leslie Osborne and the iconic Brandi Chastain. Even at 41 years of age, the 1999 Women's World Cup hero may have been the league's most recognizable player.

The move may have made for some rough going on the PR front, but there's no arguing with the results on the field. Gold Pride easily was the best team in the WPS, finishing atop the regular-season standings by a comfortable margin and crushing Philadelphia 4-0 in the championship game.

Some argued it was the most talented women's soccer club team ever assembled. In October, Chastain hosted a charity send-off match featuring some of the biggest names in soccer — male and female. With the region's biggest name prepared to let go of the past, it seemed its club now could focus on the future.

Except there was none. FC Gold Pride folded in mid-November, joining the Sol as first-place teams who didn't stick around to defend their titles.

"I don't know if there's an appetite for women's professional sports, much less for women's soccer, in the Bay Area," Gold Pride General Manager Ilisa Kessler told the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The announcement spooked potential investors in the Chicago club, forcing it to withdraw. The club that should have been WPS' shining light instead became a symbol of its troubles.

## 4

# WPS Survives, Barely

by Brian Straus

**W**omen's Professional Soccer kept making news for all the wrong reasons in 2010. Its marquee franchise, the Los Angeles Sol, folded in January. St. Louis Athletica followed suit in May, shutting down midseason in a move that embarrassed the league, forced operational changes and scared potential investors. Despite the addition of expansion franchises in Atlanta and Philadelphia, the departure of two high-profile clubs and a staggering 23 percent plunge in attendance commanded the spotlight.



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WPS Commissioner Tonya Antonucci and Brian NeSmith, owner of FC Gold Pride acknowledge the crowd at the 2010 WPS Championship.

Evolution was inevitable. Most of the league's front office staff was laid off during the season, and in September, commissioner and founding executive Tonya Antonucci agreed to resign. The remaining investors wanted more control, less overhead and greater protection against another Athletica-like fiasco.

"We've always been fiscally conservative, but the league is going to a deeper cost-cutting mode," Antonucci told *AOL FanHouse* just after her departure was announced. "We've eliminated a number of functions on behalf of the league. Staff, infrastructure and other things have been shifted to the teams. We're becoming an even more localized model."

Even with the withdrawal of the Chicago Red Stars and the addition of the Western New York Flash, WPS will

maintain six teams in 2011. However, the Washington Freedom remained in flux as the new year approached because of the transfer of a controlling stake from WUSA founder John Hendricks to Florida telecommunications entrepreneur Dan Borislow, sparking rumors that the Freedom would move some of its home games to Florida.

When the dust settles, there will be professional women's soccer in 2011. But it won't be major league.

## 3

## Women Swimmers Get Their Own Coach

USA Swimming made a statement with its selection of Teri McKeever as the head coach of the women's team as it sets its sights on London for the 2012 Summer Olympics. UC Berkeley's longtime coach, and the person credited with resurrecting Natalie Coughlin's career, will be the first woman to be head coach of an Olympic swim team.

McKeever's accolades have been growing since her Cal Bears won their first national title last year — which earned her NCAA women's coach of the year. Beyond success, the decision points to the importance swimming is to the U.S.' overall Olympic outcome — splitting coaching duties will allow Gregg Troy, Florida's coach, to focus on the men while McKeever guides the women.

## 2

## Loss of Orender— Timing Gives WNBA an Opportunity To Win NBA Fans

David Stern, the ever-doting father of the WNBA, has a very important decision to make. As the WNBA completes its 14th season, he must choose the league's third president. The WNBA is the longest-running professional women's sports league, and its longevity is due in large part to the NBA commissioner's commitment to own the brand "basketball." Stern also seems to be a true fan of the game, even loosely predicting that women will one day play in the NBA.

While some have tried to paint the departure of WNBA President Donna Orender as the ultimate sign of the pending demise of the WNBA, REAL SPORTS views this as a truly unique opportunity for the NBA to tout the WNBA brand during what is expected to be a tumultuous summer, since many predict an almost-certain NBA player lockout.

While the boys will be painted as over-the-top, money-grubbing players, the women's game can be showcased as a throwback to a time when players were approachable, played team ball and entertained the fans. Should the lockout proceed, the WNBA should consider a traveling squad of all-stars as a way to introduce the product to basketball-hungry fans left hanging.



WNBA President Donna Orender addresses the media during the June 2 announcement of the groundbreaking sponsorship deal between Foxwoods Casino and the New York Liberty.

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# 1

# True Dominance — Yet 90 and done!

The University of Connecticut rode the momentum of the last two seasons to break the 88-game win streak set by John Wooden's and UCLA men 1971-74 when on Dec. 21, the Huskies beat No. 20 Florida State 93-62 for their 89th straight win.

During UConn's historic run, the last basketball team to not fear Connecticut was Stanford in the 2010 national championship game. Yet the Cardinal's night of poor shooting led to its demise in a 53-47 victory for the Huskies. Still Stanford had reason to be confident; it was the last team to have beaten UConn, in the 2008 national semifinals.



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UConn rode the momentum of the last two seasons to set a college basketball all-time record of 90 consecutive wins. Nine days later, the streak ended.

Since then, the Huskies simply had been unstoppable. A master motivator, Coach Geno Auriemma had been able to prevent a team letdown by putting challenge upon challenge in front of his highly touted and talented young women.

Still, all streaks come to an end, and on Dec. 30, the Huskies entered Maples Pavilion with a 90-0 record to face the last team to beat them. This time there was no poor shooting, as Stanford lead from wire to wire, with Jeanette Pohlen scoring a career-high 31 points to lead the Cardinal to 71-59 victory.

Coincidentally, Notre Dame was the last team to defeat Wooden's Bruins before their history-making 88-game win streak; and the Fighting Irish broke that streak. **[RS]**

# SPORTS PERSON OF THE YEAR

The first nine REAL SPORTS Sports Person/Athlete of the Year recognitions have all gone to women, yet for 2010 there is no denying the power, influence, success and presence Auriemma has had on women's sports. He has delivered seven NCAA Division I basketball championships to his school.

Connecticut's success is directly tied to Auriemma — the school had posted just one winning season prior to his arrival as head coach in 1985. Since then, his teams have posted four undefeated seasons and have finished above .500 for 24 straight years. He has proved to be a master recruiter, motivator, teacher and leader, producing 10 players who garnered multiple All-America honors. For his team's success, and the role he plays in it, he is this 2010's Sports Person of the Year. **[RS]**



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Connecticut coach Geno Auriemma confers with Lorin Dixon (30) and Tiffany Hayes (3).

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