

Collector's Edition

real SPORTS e-Zine

The Authority in Women's Sports™



5th Annual Athlete of the Year and Most Important Moments In Sports



Plus... 2006



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Best Athlete of 2005

One stands above all others



It seems fitting that in a year with no Olympics and no World Cup – no opportunity for an athlete to go for glory in their brief but all-important turn on the world’s biggest stage – that consistent excellence be the standard by which the REAL SPORTS Athlete of the Year is selected.

By that benchmark, it is an easy choice. For winning half the competitions she entered, for maintaining and surpassing an unprecedented level of excellence each and every year and for forcing national and international fans and media to pay attention, Annika Sorenstam is this year’s runaway winner.

The 35-year-old won 10 of the 20 LPGA events she played in 2005, including March’s Kraft Nabisco Championship and the LPGA Championship in June. Almost as incredibly, she finished out of the top 20 only twice and went 4-1 in a losing Solheim Cup effort. She was named the Associated Press female Athlete of the Year for the third consecutive time and now can add Real Sports Athlete of the Year to her lengthy list of accolades.



Annika Sorenstam has been a finalist for REAL SPORTS Athlete of the Year before. In 2003, despite playing in the Colonial PGA event which elevated the profile of women’s golf, Sorenstam was edged out by retiring world soccer superstar Maren Meinert.

Athlete of the Year and Most Important Moments in Sports selections are determined by REAL SPORTS Editorial Board and written by Brian Straus

REAL SPORTS magazine

5th Annual Most Important Moments in Sports

By Brian Straus



#1 DANICA PATRICK IS OFF TO THE RACES

There was no way Danica Patrick could live up to the hype. Telegenic and talented, the Illinois native was big news after ascending to the Indy Racing League at 23 years of age.

Backed by team co-owner David Letterman (well known for his enthusiastic support of the 1999 Women's World Cup team), Patrick even was criticized for stealing the spotlight from some of her more seasoned competitors.

Nevertheless, the Illinois native proved she belonged. She was the first woman to lead the Indianapolis 500 (19 of 200 laps), where she finished fourth. She logged seven Top-10 finishes, won three poles and was named the circuit's rookie of the year.

Patrick proved she was no gimmick, and that was as crucial to those interested in seeing female athletes judged on merit rather than gender as it was to her sport. Trailing badly in popularity behind NASCAR, the IRL needs Patrick as much as she needs the IRL. The TV ratings for last year's Indy 500 were the best since 1996, and the race was featured on the front of The New York Times for the first time since 1981 – a year before Patrick was born.

#2 SOFTBALL IS OUT

Just nine years after the U.S. softball team played its very visible part in a 1996 Summer Olympics that appeared to herald the coming of age of women's athletics, the sport was booted from the program by one vote at an IOC meeting in July. A sport had not been axed from the Games since polo in 1936.

Regardless of the reason – the IOC's inability to distinguish it from baseball (also cut because of Major League Baseball's uncooperative scheduling and drug testing policies), an international snub of the United



#2 continued...

States or a lack of competitive balance (the U.S. has won all three Olympic gold medals and five straight quadrennial world titles with a combined 78-5 record) – the decision clearly was contrary to the IOC’s publicly stated desire to enhance athletic opportunities for

women. It was the only Olympic sport exclusive to women. It may be not be as popular as other more traditional events, and it may not be as competitive, but it will stay that way unless the IOC reconsiders. There already is a well-established movement to make that happen that includes among its supporters the head of the British Olympic Association, which will host the Summer games in 2012.

#3 THE BRITISH OPEN TRULY IS

The British take their knocks for appearing staid and conservative, but it turned out one of the world’s oldest sporting competitions is one of its most progressive. With a simple statement published in its amended rules, a body called The Royal & Ancient Golf Club struck a blow for modernity and athletic equality.



The regulations for the British Open used to restrict qualification to “any male professional golfer” or “male amateur golfer whose playing handicap does not exceed scratch.” They now state that a player’s participation “should be based on playing ability irrespective of gender.” Eligibility to participate in qualifying rounds will be determined by performances in significant LPGA and international women’s tournaments.

Perhaps the Royal & Ancient is calling Michelle Wie’s bluff – who knows if a woman will ever actually qualify for one of the world’s most demanding tournaments? But at least the opportunity will be there when the 135th edition tees off in July, and that is all that most ever have asked for.

#4 WOMEN'S TENNIS REMAINS ON SERVE

Turn a sports conversation with your average fan toward women's tennis, and the tenor likely will change. They'll be able to rattle off half-a-dozen names off the top of their head. They recently may have watched a big match or two. They may even suggest the sport, long on rallies and personalities, is superior to the men's version.

That is the power of women's tennis, which remains the healthiest and most visible women's professional sport and which did not disappoint in 2005.

Sony Ericsson WTA Tour Top 10 Rankings (as of 1/8/06)

1. LINDSAY DAVENPORT
2. KIM CLIJSTERS
3. AMELIE MAURESMO
4. MARIA SHARAPOVA
5. MARY PIERCE
6. NADIA PETROVA
7. PATTY SCHNYDER
8. JUSTINE HENIN-HARDENNE
9. ELENA DEMENTIEVA
10. VENUS WILLIAMS

The story of the year was Venus Williams, the forgotten older sister who overcame a 14th seed to advance to the Wimbledon final, where she outlasted Lindsay Davenport in the longest championship match in tournament history.

Sister Serena won the Australian Open, Justine Henin-Hardenne triumphed at Roland Garros and Kim Clijsters took the U.S. Open title over Mary Pierce, whose surprising surge up the WTA rankings was yet one more compelling story.

Meantime, Maria Sharapova won three more tournaments and solidified her status as the face and figure of women's tennis. At least this Russian's calendar could include a photo of a trophy.

#5 DOMINATION ON THE DOWN-LOW

Do the names Lauryn Williams, Katie Hoff and Chellsie Memmel ring a bell? If they do, that bell is most certainly golden - all three won world championships in 2005. If they don't, well, they may become household names in summer 2008. Their success, and relative anonymity, say a lot about the current state of American women's sports: the opportunities, coaching and talent in the United States remain the envy of the world, but the performances often seem to merit attention only when accompanied by the pomp of the Olympic Games.

Williams raced to the 100 m. world title in August, finishing the race in Helsinki in 10.93 seconds. She had won silver in Athens the year before and added a 4X100 relay world title last summer in Finland.

#5 continued ...

Hoff, a 16-year-old swimmer, was the youngest member of the U.S. delegation in Athens and parlayed that experience into three gold medals at July's FINA World Championships in Montreal. She set an American record on her way to victory in the 200m. individual medley and meet records in the 400 m. medley and 800 m. freestyle.

And Memmel takes a backseat to Retton, Strug and Patterson in name recognition only. She won the all-around gold at the world championships in Melbourne in November, becoming the first American woman to take that title since 1994.

See you in two-and-a-half years.

#6 SWOOPES STEPS OUT

The first big-name, team-sport athlete to come out of the closet turned out to be a bit of surprise, and so did the reaction.

Sheryl Swoopes: three-time Olympic gold medalist, three-time WNBA most valuable player, mother, archetypal feminine athlete, lesbian.

In October, Swoopes coauthored a story in *ESPN The Magazine*, in which she revealed she was "tired of being miserable" and "not being OK with other people knowing who I am."



Swoopes and former Houston Comets assistant coach Alisa Scott had been a couple since 1999. She soon signed on as the spokesperson for Olivia, a cruise line catering to lesbians.

The other shoe had dropped. All of those rumors about lesbians in big-time women's sports were true. And after the media covered the story with surprising restraint and respect-it was over. There were no boycotts, no protests and no outrage. People got on with their lives. "I hope my coming out doesn't have a negative effect on the WNBA. Because it's not going to change the game, or the players, or the league," Swoopes said. It appears, perhaps unexpectedly, that she is right.

#7 THE BIG WIESY MAKES IT OFFICIAL

Michelle Wie was disqualified from her first tournament as a professional. Her illegal drop at October's Samsung World Championship certainly made for interesting copy. But it likely will turn out to be an insignificant footnote to what should be a groundbreaking career.

Wie turned pro on Oct. 5, just six days before her 17th birthday, signing endorsement contracts with Nike and Sony worth around \$10 million. She can drive a ball 300 yards and finished in the top three in two LPGA majors last year. She already is the first woman to qualify for a USGA men's national championship. Wie is polished, mature and driven, and the sports world has been unable to take its eyes off of her. Perhaps she'll fulfill her dream and earn her PGA Tour card.

Regardless, a pro career that began with confusion and a bit of controversy last fall promises to be one to savor.

#8 MONARCHS REIGN

Some rebuilding year. The Sacramento Monarchs were supposed to be a team that HAD missed its window of opportunity. Offseason maneuvering, including the release of guard Ruthie Bolton, left many observers leaving the



Monarchs off their list of championship contenders. Centerpiece Yolanda Griffith, 35, was thinking of leaving Cow Town for a club that could compete for a crown.

She chose to stay, and the pieces fell in place. The Monarchs cruised to a franchise-best 25-9 regular season record before going 7-1 in the playoffs, defeating the Connecticut Suns, 3 games to 1, in the finals. The triumph marked the first title for a basketball-crazy city whose heart had been broken so often by the NBA's Kings. The Monarchs were a complete team anchored by the imposing Griffith, who added a Finals MVP trophy to her long list of accolades.

The Monarchs unexpected success mirrored the maturation of a league where competitive balance seems to have been achieved. Sacramento was the WNBA's fourth champion in the past four seasons. It marks a welcome change in elite women's sports, where title contenders often are few and easily forecast.

#9 HOW FAR THE MIGHTY HAVE FALLEN

Just over five years ago more than 90,000 fans packed the Rose Bowl to watch the United States claim its second Women's World Cup championship. This past year, the largest crowd to witness a U.S. women's national team game was 5,394.

Soccer is not a statistics-based sport, but in this case the numbers really do tell the story.

The WUSA is history, and last year confirmed the national team's slide



Abby Wambach saved the day in Athens, but she needs help if Team USA is to create a connection with American sports fans.

into irrelevance. Mia, Brandi, Julie and company had carried the flag for women's team sports for nearly a decade. They were among the most visible and admired athletes in the country. Now they're gone, and the U.S. Soccer Federation has been unable to get anyone to care about their replacements.

Greg Ryan, who replaced April Heinrichs as coach in 2004, is an unknown - as are most of his players. As talented as Abby Wambach, Shannon Boxx and others are, they remain in the shadow of their predecessors. U.S. Soccer is not helping matters.

Although women's games are televised as part of the federation's deal with ABC and ESPN, the matchups arranged for the national team as World Cup qualifying approaches next year have been forgettable. Opponents on home soil last year included Canada, Ukraine, Iceland, Mexico and Australia. No wonder nobody turned out. And with the next World Cup scheduled for distant China in 2007, it may be a while before anyone tunes in.

#10 COLLEGES CARRY ON

Women's professional soccer is gone. So are pro softball and volleyball. Aside from the WNBA, which still has difficulty maintaining its place in the public consciousness after nine seasons, the NCAA remains the apex of women's team sports.

Thanks to 33 years of Title IX and increasing athletic opportunities for girls and teenagers, women's college sports have developed and matured, now offering a high level of competition and talent year-in and year-out.

The NCAA will not fold any time soon, so fans can enjoy their favorite sports and seasons without trepidation.



Baylor University and Michigan State University jump for the opening tip during the Division I Women's Basketball Championship held at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis, IN. Baylor defeated Michigan State 84-62 for the national title.

2005 was a good one. Baylor trounced Michigan State to win its first basketball title, giving fans of a school whose men's program was tainted by scandal and tragedy something to cheer about. Former Louisiana Tech star Kim Mulkey-Robinson took over a moribund program in 2000 and transformed it into a perennial contender. The Bears finished the season 33-3.

10 Continued ...

Michigan won its first softball title, defeating two-time defending champ UCLA in 10 innings and demonstrating the growing breadth of talent in women's college sports. Northwestern followed suit, taking its first lacrosse title with a win over Virginia.



The University of Michigan bench prepares to mob Samantha Findlay after her Game 3, game-winning 3-run homerun against UCLA. Michigan won Game 3 4-1 in 10 innings for the national title in Oklahoma City, Ok.

Incredibly, Washington continued the trend last fall with its initial volleyball championship, and Maryland ended Wake Forest's domination with its first field hockey title in six years. Finally, the Portland Pilots cemented themselves as one of women's soccer's elite programs, riding Canadian superstar Christine Sinclair to its second crown and becoming the first team besides North Carolina to conclude a season undefeated. [RS]



Christal Morrison (9) and Darla Myhre (11) of the Univ. of Washington block a shot by Dani Mancuso (7) of the Univ. of Nebraska during the Dec. 17 Division I Women's Volleyball Championship held at the Alamodome in San Antonio, TX. Washington defeated Nebraska 3-0 to win the national title.

University of Portland's #12, Christine Sinclair, celebrates her second goal of the 2005 NCAA Women's College Cup national championship game. Portland went on to defeat UCLA 4-0. Sinclair was voted the offensive MVP of the tournament scoring two goals in the finals.



Special Esteem for Their Supreme Talent

Olympic athlete stories run deep, as trend from 1996 Games continue to 2006.

By Elliott Almond

While celebrating the most important moments of the year is a time-honored tradition, it also is worth peeking into the future as we flip the pages of the calendar. It is especially true this year because 2006 promises an entertaining and engrossing start. The year begins with one of the grandest of sporting spectacles, the Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy, starting Feb. 10.

Continuing a trend that begin at the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta, women athletes should enjoy special esteem for their supreme talents. Whether skating, sliding, skiing or speeding on ice and in snow, the prospects for amazing performances are undeniable. For U.S. audiences, the storylines run deep.

BOBSLEDDING

Shauna Rohbock has helped pave a path for women bobsledders. Emerging as America's top pilot this season, Rohbock, a former WUSA player for the San Diego Spirit, was one of the athletes who insisted officials allow women to race on all of the world's top tracks. Until last year, three of the 12 were deemed too dangerous for women.

"It came to the point, guess what, 'You're going to let us on this



In November, Driver Shauna Rohbock and Valerie Fleming of the USA finished third at the FIBT Women's Bobsled World Cup race held at Lake Placid, New York.

track,'" said Rohbock, ranked second in the world heading into the Turin Games. "Men can come down and crash all day, and it is fine. If women crash the men say 'they shouldn't be there.'"

Rohbock, of Orem, Utah, has been a surprise on the World Cup circuit for two seasons. She and brakeman Valerie Fleming of Foster City have surpassed all American challengers to be considered serious medal contenders in Italy.

Four years ago, Rohbock, then a brakeman, got knocked out of the Salt Lake Olympics just weeks

before they began. Jill Bakken, Rohbock's close friend, dumped her for Vonetta Flowers. The team won a gold medal. In a more celebrated break up about the same time, Jen Davidson was replaced by then-best friend Jean Racine (now Prahm).

One columnist dubbed the pilot "Mean Jean Racine." Rohbock did nothing but publicly support Bakken, her National Guard buddy. She was the first to hug Bakken after the Olympic victory.

But the athlete also took control of her destiny. She became a sled driver because pilots get to pick their partners. Along the way, Rohbock left Bakken in the snow dust. The defending Olympic champion was all but eliminated from qualifying for the Turin Games at the end of December.

Rohbock, 27, almost didn't get the chance to exact such revenge. Last year, her National Guard unit was called for duty to serve in Iraq. While preparing in Utah for deployment, military officials discovered Rohbock still suffered from a torn rotator cuff. The injury occurred during a drill with the Spirit. Rohbock never repaired it because she didn't have insurance or time for rehabilitation.

She was excused from the deployment.

"But it didn't stop me from driving a sled," Rohbock said.



Shannon Rohbock injured her rotator cuff during a drill with the former San Diego Spirit of the now defunct WUSA. While her injury prevented her from gaining military clearance, it didn't stop her from bobsledding.

FIGURE SKATING

One of the most decorated and popular figure skaters, Michelle Kwan faced a formidable assignment in a quest to reach her third Olympics. A five-time world champion and two-time Olympic medalist, Kwan was not sure she would be completely healthy by the time the U.S. figure skating trials were held in early January.

A hip injury in October left Kwan unable to compete before the trials, other than a made-for-television event in which she skated sketchily. The injury is but one obstacle blocking Kwan, 25. The Olympics will showcase a revamped scoring system that some have suggested Kwan has yet to master.

Yet, hope remains for one of the Winter Olympics most captivating figures. Only the winner of the U.S. trials will receive an automatic bid to Turin. The other two spots do

not have to be given to the second and third-place finishers. That could buy Kwan time if she can persuade U.S. officials her hip is progressing.

Kwan's appearance in Italy would elevate interest in figure skating. She won a silver medal in 1998 and a bronze in 2002. She wants nothing less than a gold medal this time. It is much to ask. Irina Slutskaya of Russia – the silver medalist in Salt Lake – also has returned. Slutskaya has won almost every competition she has entered in the past year. The most athletic skaters come from Japan and depending upon who qualifies, they also should contend for medals.

If Kwan fails to qualify, the United States will stake its chances on Sasha Cohen, a flighty yet remarkable athlete. When in her zone Cohen is perhaps the world's best skater. But something bad always seems to happen in big events.

Other Americans to watch: Emily Hughes, Alissa Czisny or Kimmie Meissner.



WOMEN'S HOCKEY

It seemed like a breakthrough. At the 2005 world championships last spring, Team USA defeated Team Canada in the final for the first time since women's hockey held the event in 1990.

Then U.S. coaches changed the dynamics of the team in August when they cut longtime leaders Cammi Granato and Shelley Looney. Was it a mistake?

The Americans struggled in their pre-Olympic buildup. During a six-game series this fall, Canada outscored the Americans 27-3.

But Team USA, which shocked Canada to win the Olympic medal in the Olympic debut in 1998, showed signs of life. It split two games with Canada during an exhibition in the United States after Thanksgiving.

“We were finally thinking a little bit less and just playing,” team captain Krissy Wendell said after the victory. “In the first couple of months, there's a lot thrown at you and there are questions of who's going where and what position you're playing.”

In 1999, REAL SPORTS photographers were on hand as more than 70 high school, college and national team players competed at the Lake Placid training and development camp. After years of investing in talent development and with the departure of veterans, USA Hockey is hoping for an upset.

The clubs have met in the final for every Olympic and world championship. Their rivalry runs deep. But come the 2006 Games, few give the Americans much chance. U.S. Coach Ben Smith said the team was facing transition difficulties because he was switching players like chess pieces. But he also insisted the team made progress.

"I'm starting to see some things that give us a good feeling about where we want to go with this group," he told reporters in December.

While much of the attention is focused on Canada, Team USA has another powerful foe to watch: Finland. The Americans have dominated the Fins during a series of exhibition games, but almost all the scores have been close. They will face Finland in their pool play in Turin.

Angela Ruggiero, one of the world's best defenders, leads Team USA. It also relies on forward Julie Chu, goalkeeper Chanda Gunn and Wendell.

SKELETON

Noelle Pikus-Pace became the first American woman to win the overall World Cup championship for skeleton last season. She seemed on her way to an Olympic medal when a wayward four-man bobsled struck her Oct. 19 in



Noelle Pikus-Pace, member of the USA Olympic Skeleton Team, has spent a great deal of time at the Utah Valley Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine Center in Provo, Utah after her freak accident in October. Pikus-Pace, the first U.S. woman to win the overall World Cup, was a leading contender to win a gold medal at the Games before suffering a broken leg.

Calgary, Alberta. Pikus-Pace suffered a compound fracture of the right leg. Surgeons inserted a rod in one of her bones.

Pikus-Pace's sled also was crushed after she was knocked off a platform and fell 15 feet into a parking lot.

The athlete from Orem, Utah, had trouble in her return to the track seven weeks after the accident. She finished 20th out of 31 riders. One problem she has been unable to overcome is her sled. Hers is too trashed for competition. Even a new one – if the U.S. federation would buy one for her – would take time to fine tune. Athletes spend hours honing sleds to perfection as races are lost by hundredths of a second.

A new sled costs \$5,000. Her husband is a college student. She participates in an arcane sport far from the professional arena.

Pikus-Pace can't afford it. And through Christmas no one offered to help pay for one.

She also is facing \$20,000 in medical bills from the Canadian doctors who treated her after the accident. The bobsledders who caused the situation have not offered to help.

Pikus-Pace, though, has not complained. She finished eighth at a World Cup race in mid-December on a borrowed sled.

"I feel good about my result and I am very excited," she said after the race in Latvia. "Being as far behind in my push I am very happy with the way things are coming along. I am still a few tenths from where I used to be before the injury."

ALPINE SKIING

After Picabo Street, Americans have had little to cheer about when it comes to Olympic skiing.

That could change in Turin.

A couple of 21-year-olds with decidedly different personalities have resurrected the fortunes of U.S. women's skiing. Lindsey Kildow of Vail, Colo., has raced against Julia Mancuso of Olympic Valley, Calif., since they were kids.

But the irreverent Mancuso says the only rivalry they have is when it comes to clothes.

They each ski all the disciplines – downhill, slalom, super G and giant slalom. This season, Kildow posted a World Cup downhill victory in Calgary and Mancuso posted multiple top 10 finishes in her best events, the super G and giant slalom.

Mancuso, a surfer, kite-boarder, mountain biker, water skier and try-anything-once woman, won bronze medals in the events at last year's World Championships in Bormio, Italy. It was the first multiple-medal performance since Street in 1996. Kildow finished fourth twice in Bormio. She said in December that she hasn't forgotten the near-medal performance.

"It has made me hungrier," she said.

Kildow has a back story about what happened in Bormio when she appeared to be the star of the U.S. team.

She said she is estranged from her father, who showed up at the competition. She had asked him not to come and his presence spooked her. Kildow's father, a former junior ski racer, played a prominent role in her rise. He moved the family from Minnesota to Colorado in order to give Kildow better training.



Julia Mancuso of the USA gets on her edges in the FIS Alpine Skiing Women's World Cup Giant Slalom race in December in Aspen, Colorado. Mancuso, who is known for her independent streak, honed her skills this summer kite-boarding with her dad in Maui.

She told a few reporters that she no longer needed him to be so involved. Kildow lives with her boyfriend, former U.S. racer Thomas Vonn, 30. Her father disapproved.

"I'm my own person, and I think he just didn't accept that," Kildow told USA Today. "He's mad at me. He's mad at my boyfriend."

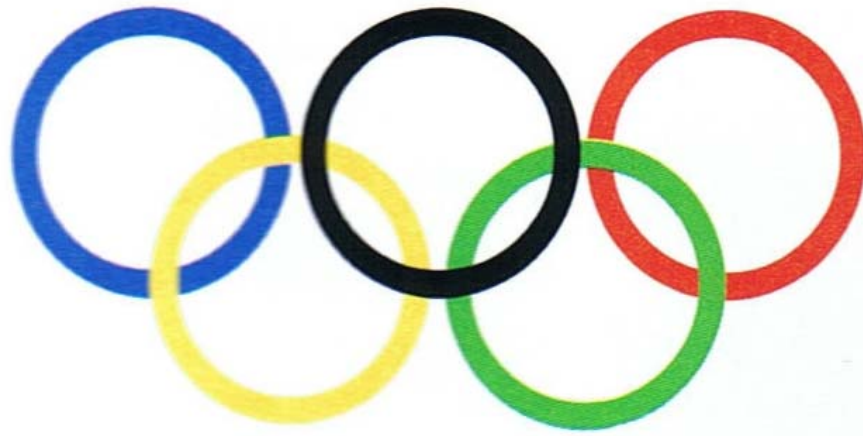
Mancuso, on the other hand, spends much of her time with her father. Instead of training with the U.S. team in Chile and New Zealand last summer, Mancuso went kite-boarding with her dad in Maui. They also trained with Scott

Sanchez, a two-time Olympic skier from Bolivia. Sanchez created a special regimen to help Mancuso increase her power and explosiveness.

"There's no right or wrong way," he said of training. "There is only a more popular way."

Mancuso's independent streak also included renting an RV to travel the World Cup circuit with her sister April, a former NCAA skiing champion at the University of Utah.

Whatever works, Mancuso and Kildow hope to turn heads in Turin.



SHORT TRACK SPEEDSKATING

Hyo Jung Kim didn't like American food. She couldn't speak English. She was homesick. Little seemed right when she left South Korea two years ago for a chance to skate in the United States.

At least her skating improved. Kim, 17, has emerged as the strongest U.S. candidate to succeed in Turin. While American men, particularly Apolo Anton Ohno, have done well in short track skating, the U.S. women have struggled.

That could change with Kim's help. Kim won the overall championship at the U.S. national championships in December and will lead the women's short track team in the three Olympic races - the 500 meters, 1,000 and 1,500.

Kim's parents lived in the Los Angeles area for 12 years where

her father became a U.S. citizen. They returned to Seoul in 1988 where Kim was born that year. But she also had American citizenship because of her father.

Kim graduated from the South Korean speedskating factories after starting the sport at age 11. In Korea, she trained six days a week, five hours a day. Kim has said she left her Korean club team because of problems with a coach of four years.

"I don't like to keep in mind bad experience," Kim told the Washington Post in December. "He just didn't teach me honestly."

For Kim, it doesn't matter who she represents in Turin.

"I didn't think about the country," she said. "I just wanted to go to the Olympics." [RS]

Elliott Almond of the *San Jose Mercury News* will be heading to Italy to cover his seventh Olympic Games. He also has worked for the Los Angeles Times and Seattle Times. During his free time he likes to study Spanish in Patagonia.

Illusiveness no more...

Championships arrive for the previously unrewarded

By Mel Greenberg



Sacramento Monarchs celebrate their first WNBA title, in what was supposed to be a rebuilding year.

In both professional and collegiate women's basketball, 2005 was a year in which former have – nots became the haves.

The **Sacramento Monarchs** became the WNBA champions for the first time after having once been considered an endangered franchise.

It was an exhilarating conclusion for many former collegians who had come up short in their NCAA careers such as veterans Tina Penicheiro (Old Dominion), Yolanda Griffith (ABL), Nicole Powell (Stanford), Kara Lawson (Tennessee), Rebeekah Brunson (Georgetown), along with rookies Chelsea Newton (Rutgers), and Kristin Haynie (Michigan St.).

Early in the year, **Chicago** was announced as the WNBA's 14th franchise and later acquired the Sky as its new name under former Boston Celtics star Dave Cowens, who will coach the team when it takes the floor this season.

Donna Orender, a successful executive on the PGA tour and former all-American at Queens, became the WNBA's second president, succeeding Val Ackerman, who did not stay idle for long in becoming the first female president of USA Basketball.

Postseason news of a different variety was made when Sheryl Swoopes, the former Texas Tech star, who is a three-time Olympic gold medalist and WNBA All-Star with the Houston Comets, announced she was gay and romantically involved with Angela Scott, a former Comets assistant coach.

In the collegiate world, Michigan State and Baylor both mounted strong rallies from deep deficits at the **NCAA Women's Final Four** as Baylor coach Kim Mulkey-Robertson's Bears ousted Tennessee and Joanne P. McCallie's team did likewise



Head Coach Kim Mulkey-Robertson of Baylor holds up the championship trophy after defeating Michigan State during the Division I Women's Basketball Championship held at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis, IN. Baylor defeated Michigan State 84-62 for the national title.

to LSU to advance to the championship at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis.

Baylor claimed the title and in doing so made Mulkey-Robertson, a former Louisiana Tech star, the first to win NCAA titles as a player (1982) and a coach.

LSU's Seimone Augustus was the consensus national player of the year and decided to return for this season even though she was eligible to move on to the WNBA.

The same was true of Rutgers' Cappie Pondexter, and Duke's Monquie Currie.

Dawn Staley, the **WNBA** All-Star and Olympic gold medalist continued to enhance her reputation as a first-time coach in leading Temple to a national

ranking in her fifth season with the Owls. Senior center Candice Dupree, who played on the USA Basketball World University gold medalist team, is an all-America candidate.

Staley also was part of a late-season trade in the WNBA in which she moved from the lowly Charlotte Sting to the Houston Comets, where she'll play one more season.

A few days after Staley's departure, Trudi Lacey was retained as Sting general manager, but was replaced by former NBA star Muggsy Bogues as coach.

Another former NBA notable became involved after the season with the hiring of former Los Angeles Lakers and Denver Nuggets coach Paul Westhead, as he was chosen to replace Phoenix Mercury coach Carrie Graf.

Henry Bibby failed to last a season with the heavily-favored Los Angeles Sparks, which had acquired Chamique Holdsclaw in an offseason trade with Washington. Joe Bryant, the father of Lakers star Kobe Bryant, replaced him but Los Angeles has yet to announce whether he'll return this season.

Former New York Liberty coach Richie Adubato became coach of the Washington Mystics.

And so we head into the New Year with collegiate conference action



about to heat up with contenders eyeing Boston, the site of this season's Women's Final Four.

This is also the celebration of the **NCAA's silver anniversary** of women's sports championships with noteworthy events as part of the festivities.

The **Atlantic Coast Conference** has dominated the nonconference action, so look for a three-team dogfight at the top among perennial favorite Duke, North Carolina, and Maryland, which has a developing talent in Crystal Langhorne to go with senior Shay Doron and a ton of talent on the Terrapins roster.

North Carolina's Ivory Latta is another prominent name to go with Duke's Currie. Virginia, new member Boston College, Virginia Tech, and North Carolina State will add intrigue to the race.

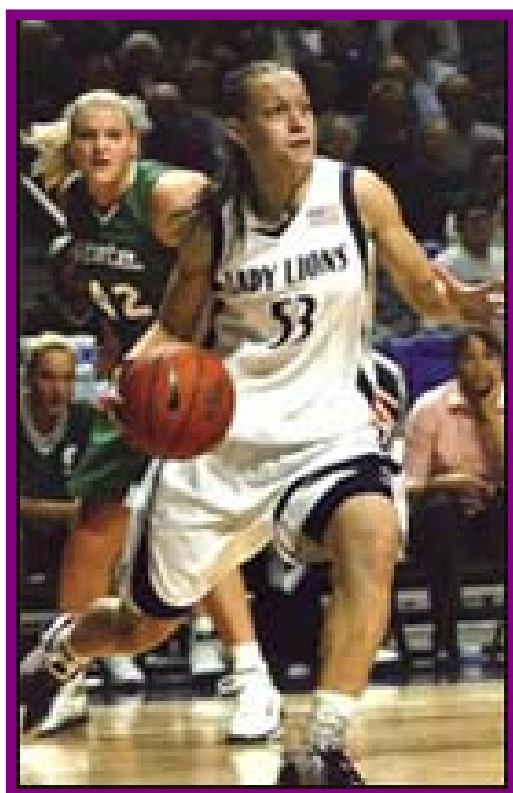
In the **Big 12**, the surprise has been Kansas' school-record 11-0 start under second-year coach Bonnie Henrickson, although the Jayhawks haven't been tested much to date. Baylor remains unbeaten going into conference play.

Oklahoma appears ready to return to prominence, but Texas Tech, for the first time in over a decade, has slipped out of the national rankings.

The **Big East**, a monster with 16 teams in the revamped league, will be the usual war with preseason favorite Rutgers, Connecticut, and Notre Dame, with newcomer DePaul perhaps getting involved. Several other former **Conference USA** members, such as Cincinnati, Marquette, Louisville, and South Florida could make things interesting, and charter member Villanova always makes life tough for the opposition.

The **Big Ten** is being paced by Ohio State, which has another name of note in sophomore center Jessica Davenport. Purdue, which just upset the Buckeyes, could make things interesting, with Michigan State and Minnesota the other key factors.

Penn State has taken a slide with the departure of several talented seniors plus a few others who left under circumstances that now have veteran coach Rene Portland facing legal proceedings for alleged bias against lesbians.



It is unknown where investigations into the allegations will lead but this is looming as a major story of the season.

Meanwhile, the **Southeastern Conference** is also loaded with Tennessee and LSU as the frontrunners.

The Vols, perhaps ready to end a seven-year NCAA title drought, feature red-shirt freshman Candace Parker as a definite new face to watch. Sophomore center Sylvia Fowles is the other big name with LSU.

National Center for Lesbian Rights, NCLR, filed a federal discrimination lawsuit on behalf of former Penn State basketball star Jennifer Harris. The complaint names Coach Rene Portland, Athletic Director Tim Curley, and Penn State as defendants. Rene Portland is widely known for her 1986 comments to the Chicago Sun Times, "No Alcohol, No Drugs, No Lesbians".

Florida and Mississippi have shown signs of returning to prominence and Georgia is trying to cope with a slew of injuries. Vanderbilt has been in the national rankings all season.

The **Pac-10** has already seen perennial favorite Stanford take a loss to Washington and a non-conference loss to Boston College. Arizona State has been the other consistent conference team of note. Southern Cal and UCLA are the other major threats unless Oregon can quickly develop its younger squad.

Whatever, maybe we'll have a bunch of clues as to the 64-team field at the end of the month, but in the growing competitive nature of the collegiate game, maybe it will still be too early to tell, especially beyond the powerhouse levels.

[RS]



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