

The Living Legacy of the Women's Professional Basketball League

The League that Propelled

The Women's Professional Basketball League (WBL) represents much more than just its place and time in the history of women's basketball.

In three years, the WBL was born, thrived, and ended. However, its legacy and influence continues to stretch across the landscape of modern women's basketball.

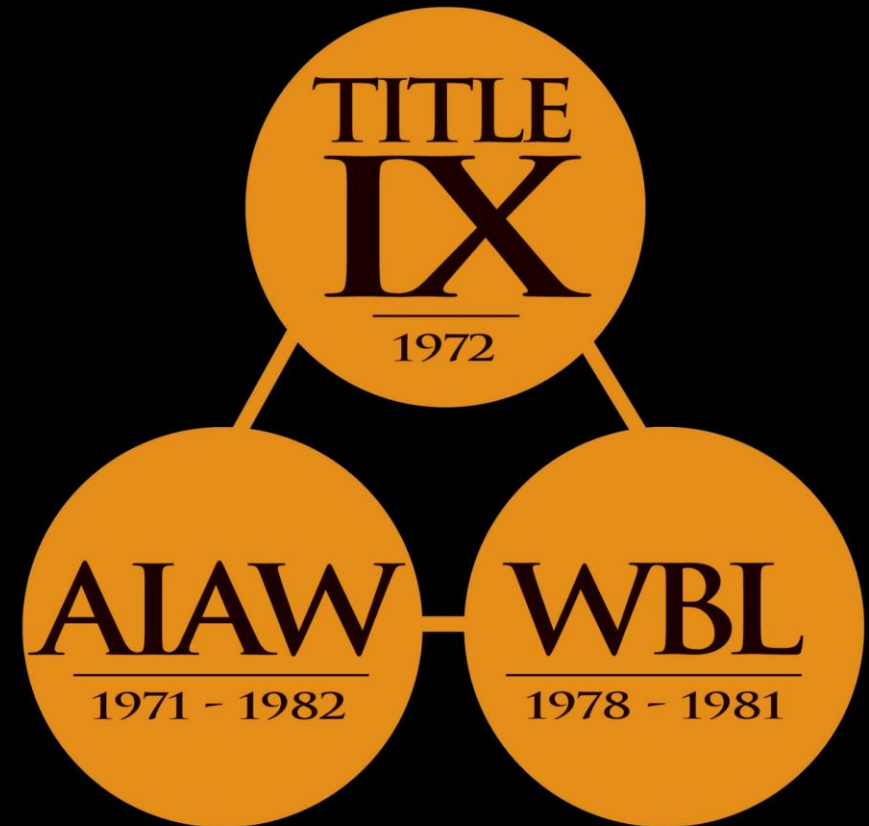


The Triad—Title IX

In 1972, Congress passed Title IX. Title IX says, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

While passed as an education bill, it quickly had impact on school sports and created opportunities for women to play at the grade school and collegiate level.

THE TRIAD



The Triad—AIAW

In 1971, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) formed to govern women's college competitions and administer national championships. From 1971 to 1982, the championships ran by and awards given out by the AIAW helped propel women's basketball and recognize the greatness of individual players.

THE IMPACT OF THE AIAW



From the left: Margaret Wade coached Delta State University into women's basketball history. In 1978, she became the namesake for the WADE Trophy, the Women's National Player of the Year Award in college basketball. Under Coach Wade, Delta State won three-straight national championships and was led by the great Lucy Harris from 1975 to 1977.



From the left: Ann Meyers Drysdale would become the first female basketball player to be a four-time All-American while at UCLA and was coached there by Billie Moore. They won the 1978 AIAW National Championship and made history again as a player and coach on the first-ever USA women's Olympic basketball team in 1976. Marianne Stanley had left Immaculata College as a national champion and went on to lead Old Dominion to two AIAW National Championships in 1979 and 1980, and again in the NCAA in 1985. All-Americans Nancy Lieberman and Inge Nissen became WBL trailblazers and coaches themselves. Stanley continued a great collegiate and WNBA coaching career.



From the left: Trish Roberts was Pat Summitt's first All-American and led her to her first Final Four in 1977. Together, they would lay the groundwork for things to come. Trish still holds records at the University of Tennessee. Pat went on to be one of the greatest coaches ever, winning eight NCAA national championships. Retha Swindell was the first African American female basketball player at the University of Texas and is one of its most decorated. She and Jody Conrady started a program that remains a national powerhouse. Many of Retha's records still stand and Coach "Jody" is enshrined in multiple halls of fame.



From the left: Debra "DK" Thomas was a JC All-American (Panola) when she came to Stephen F. Austin and with Coach Sue Gunter, started a Ladyjacks program that would launch both careers. Coach Gunter, who also coached internationally, continued her collegiate legacy at LSU. "DK" would become the first African American player to sign a contract in the WBL. Adrian Mitchell Newell was Marian Washington's first major star and remains the second all-time leading scorer and rebounder at Kansas University. Coach Washington was herself, an AAU legend. Together, they powered the Jayhawks to become a top twenty program. Coach Washington also broke barriers and led the way assigning women to athletic administrative positions.



From the left: Coach Lucille Kyvallos and future WBL stars Althea Gwyn, Donna Gells Orender, Gail Marquis, and Lynn Arturi took the small, unknown Queens College program to national prominence in the AIAW. These players went on to star in the WBL. Coach Kyvallos coached the first women's collegiate game at Madison Square Garden and has a court named in her honor there. She has also been nominated for induction into the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame.



From the left: Peggie Gilton played under two great coaches at Ole Miss University, Lin Dunn and later under Van Chancellor. Later, she would rejoin with Chancellor as an assistant coach with the WNBA Houston Comets. Peggie was the first African American basketball player at Ole Miss and remains its most celebrated. Peggie, Coach Dunn, and Coach Chancellor are all Women's Basketball Hall of Fame inductees. Debra Waddy Rossow and Elizabeth Galloway McQuitter would start their playing careers under hall of fame coach Frances Garmon at Temple Jr. College in Texas. They led Temple to the first NJCAA national championship in 1975. Then, they received the first women's basketball scholarships at UNLV under Coach Dan Ajala. Later, the two became the first two African Americans on the WBL's

It's All About the Ball

In the fall of 1978, the first Women's Professional Basketball League (WBL) was formed in the United States.

The league used smaller and lighter balls than the men's league because people reasoned women's hands are smaller on average than men's and their upper body strength also differs. However, this suggested change was not based on evidence.

Throughout the WBL's existence, women played with the smaller ball.

When the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) formed in 1996, they also adopted the smaller ball.



Basketball 1890-1910

This is a replica laced leather basketball as used in the earliest days of basketball. This basketball was crude and handmade with an irregular shape. It was made to be passed and not dribbled, and the irregular seams made the ball much trickier to shoot.

Basketball 1950

This basketball was used by the Northampton Gazette Girls in the 1950's. The ball is the official size 7 used today by men with a 29.5" circumference and weighing 22 ounces. At the time, both men and women used a size 7 basketball.



Basketball 1978

This size 6 basketball for women was proposed by Karen Logan and first introduced in the US by the Women's Professional Basketball league (WBL) in 1978. This ball is slightly smaller and lighter with a circumference of 28.5" and a weight of 20 ounces.

This ball is courtesy of Karen Logan and bears her autograph.

Basketball 1984 The Baden/Jaynes NCAA ball

Baden collaborates with Batty Jaynes (the first president of the WBCA) to create a ball for the NCAA.



Basketball 1997 The Spalding Panel Basketball

After the ABL chose Baden in their 1996 launch, the WNBA debuted their Spalding ball in the now famous, panel version.



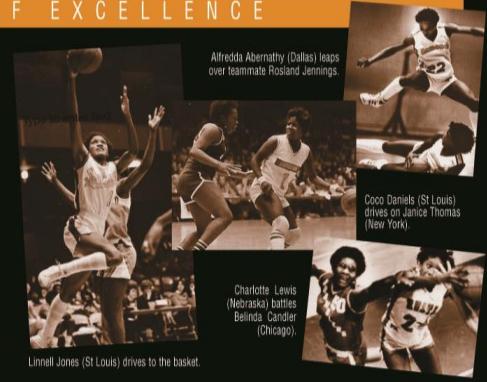
Basketball 2022 The Wilson WNBA Basketball

For their 25th Anniversary, in a full circle moment, the WNBA partnered again with Wilson who had produced the first size 6 ball for the WBL.



The African-American Women of the WBL

The African-American players of the WBL had a significant impact on the league and had to overcome racial and gender bias. The majority of the women were the first African-American basketball players or athletes at their universities. HBCU's were also represented. Their contributions were groundbreaking and helped pave the way for every generation that followed.



The League That Propelled

The pioneering members of the of the WBL broke more than records, they pushed through gender, racial, and social barriers.

For example, the majority of the African American players of the WBL were the first African American players or athletes at their universities.



From the WBL to the WNBA and Beyond

Members of the WBL left their marks on the other pro leagues that followed and helped set the stage for today's WNBA.

A large percentage of the players and coaches from the WBL chose or continued coaching as a profession. At the end of the league, members of the WBL flooded the coaching ranks at every level from middle school to college, other pro leagues, the Olympics, and the WNBA. Some, like Nancy Lieberman, have coached in both the WNBA and the NBA.

Over time, others made their mark in the front office as executives or as broadcasters.

The game of women's basketball has been shaped by the contributions of many people.

Time has shown that their contributions have had far-reaching impact on the professional game and continues today...

This is the "WBL Effect."

In this group of women you will find:

- The 1st female to receive an athletic scholarship
- The 1st to receive a women's basketball scholarship
- The 1st female player to sign an NBA contract (Ann Meyers)
- The 1st All-American, first four-time All-American
- The 1st Wade Trophy winner (Carol Blazejowski)
- Winners of the first NJCCA National Championship
- Winners of the first AIAW National Championship
- Players on some of the first international teams
- Eight players on the first U.S. Women's Basketball Olympic Team (1976)
- The 1st African-American player on a team or in women's athletics
- The 1st female player to be drafted by the NBA and the first African American woman inducted into the Naismith Hall of Fame (Lusia Harris)
- The 1st women to play in the first professional basketball league in the United States while debuting the smaller, 28.5" diameter ball in the inaugural game on December 9, 1978 - That ball was designed by player Karen Logan and produced by Wilson



Ann Meyers holding her Indiana Pacers jersey in 1979.

Members of this TRIAD have impacted almost every university with a women's basketball program. Go back in history and

FIND YOUR TRAILBLAZER.