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Friday, January 5, 2007

Storm forced to revamp schedule as Sting's demise felt leaguwide

By [DAVID ANDRIESEN](#)
P-I REPORTER

The Seattle Storm released its 2007 schedule Thursday -- one that does not include any trips to Charlotte.

Disappointment ruled the day around the WNBA at the official announcement that the Sting, one of the league's original members in 1997, has ceased operations. The NBA's Charlotte Bobcats gave up control of the Sting three weeks ago, citing years of losing money, and no buyer could be found. The Sting is the fourth WNBA franchise to fold, joining failed efforts in Cleveland, Miami and Portland.

"It's disappointing, more than anything," said Storm coach Anne Donovan, who was head coach of the Sting when it reached the WNBA finals in 2001. "From the outside, it looks like it's such a great opportunity to have a WNBA team. It's ACC country; North Carolina, Duke and N.C. State are all such premier programs in women's basketball that it seems like a logical place, but the reality is, as long as I've been going to Charlotte -- even before I took that job and moved to Charlotte -- it was a tough market.

"In the very early years of the WNBA, they did very well, but the novelty seemed to wear off. It was harder and harder to get people in the stands."

Charlotte was 13th of 14 teams in announced attendance last season, averaging 5,783 fans per game. Seattle was fourth, at 8,568, according to [womensbasketballonline.com](#).

The Sting's roster players will be moved to other teams in a dispersal draft on Monday, in which the Storm will pick seventh. Chicago will pick first.

The loss of the Charlotte franchise leaves the WNBA with 13 teams, forcing an adjustment to the schedule. The league played with 13 teams in 2005 before adding Chicago as an expansion team in 2006.

"It eases a little bit of travel as far as not going to Charlotte on our East Coast trips, but it does mean we'll play the West Coast teams four times," said Karen Bryant, chief operating officer for the Storm. "It will be a more conference-heavy schedule."

The Storm will open the 2007 season, its eighth, on May 19 at home against the Houston Comets and host the Phoenix Mercury on May 23.

"I'm excited about our opening weekend," Bryant said. "Any

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time you can get two teams here the caliber of Houston and Phoenix, the upside for us is getting people excited for 2007. You have to believe all three teams will be in the playoff run, so there's nothing better than to start to make a statement about the competitiveness of the Western Conference."

The Eastern Conference, meanwhile, will be without one of its founding members.

"I'm disappointed personally, but what I would like to see is 14 markets or more that are well-supported where enough people are passionate about the team that they have," Donovan said. "I know there are tremendously passionate fans in Charlotte that will be very disappointed, but they just couldn't get it going."

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