

***Mad Seasons: The Story of the First Women's
Professional Basketball League, 1978-1981***

by Karra Porter

"Dotted Line"

Summer 1978, New Jersey.

Wanda Szeremeta listened as she carved into her steak. Her dinner this evening, and that of her family's lawyer, was courtesy of the owners of the New Jersey Gems. Earlier that summer, "Wicked Wanda," a star at nearby Montclair State College, had been selected by the Gems in the fifth round of the inaugural WBL player draft.

Since the draft, though, Szeremeta had developed some unexpected leverage. The Gems' first pick, Carol Blazejowski of Montclair State, had announced plans to forego professional basketball to maintain eligibility for the 1980 Olympics. Denise Burdick of Immaculata College was holding out. Tara Heiss of Maryland was also waiting for the Olympics. Mariah Burton "Maggie" Nelson of Stanford had opted to play in France. Szeremeta was now the team's top pick.

Although money wasn't Szeremeta's main concern, she had given it some thought. If she were to go into teaching, her starting

salary would be about \$15,000. Szeremeta figured if she were paid \$10,000 to play basketball for four months or five months, she would consider herself a very lucky woman.

Between the bite of a steak, Szeremeta visibly tensed. \$3,000? That was ridiculous! Suddenly, her lawyer kicked her under the table. "Just relax," he said. "Just relax." Szeremeta calmed down. She signed with the Gems for \$10,000.

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7.4 *Player's death shall automatically terminate **Player and this Contract. Then who the hell will care about any of this bullshit?***

Proposed additions (in bold) to the standard WBL contract suggested by Chicago Hustle player Mary Jo Pepler, 1978.

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Once a team had acquired rights to a player, the next task was to sign her up. With draft picks, often the first step was to let the player know that she had been drafted. Unlike today's drafts, relatively little publicity was given to the process, and many players did not even know that a draft was taking place, let alone that they were part of it. Kathy DeBoer, a two-sport standout from Michigan State University, was working a basketball camp when she was surprised to hear that a reporter from the *Detroit Free Press* was on the phone for her. "How do you feel about being drafted?" he asked her. "Drafted to what?" she

replied. DeBoer had been selected for the new professional basketball league, he told her. "I really don't know what you are talking about," she admitted. (Kathy DeBoer int.)

"Your name is in the paper. You've been drafted," Simms' friend said. "For the Army?" she joked. (DS int.)

Players such as Joanie Smith from Arizona State did not know they had been drafted until they started getting calls from friends. (Milwaukee Journal 4/12/79)

In Missouri, Sharon Farrah got a call from an owner of the New York Stars. "We drafted you," he informed her. "Do you want to play?" Farrah didn't know much about the league, but she didn't care, either. "Sure I do!" she replied. (SF int.)

It was that unquestioning enthusiasm that made signing players easy in the early days of the league. Iowa Cornets player Suzanne Alt's experience was typical. "They handed us a contract, I don't think I even had a lawyer look at it," she says. (SA int.) New Orleans player Kathy Andrykowski glanced at the salary, then quickly signed on the dotted line. (KA int.)

"I don't think there was a whole lot of negotiating going on in that league," as Christy Earnhardt McKinney puts it. She signed happily for \$7,500. (CEM int.)

Apart from their sheer desire to play, negotiation was unlikely for other reasons. Most players didn't have a knowledgeable representative. If a player consulted anyone, it

was as likely to be a family friend or a college coach. Kim Buelstel sought assistance from the assistant coach at Pepperdine, Dan Yocum, to help negotiate her contract with the Dallas Diamonds. (KB int.) Kathy Sacoco's brother was former major league outfielder Mike Anderson, and his agent made a few phone calls as a favor before Sacoco joined the New Orleans Pride. (KS int.; Charleston Evening Post 2/4/81) Donna Murphy had a friend, Tom Thacker, who had played in the NBA, and she consulted him about her options. (DM int.)

Sharon Farrah had help fall in her lap. Michael Latman, a stock broker in New York and fellow University of Missouri alum, called Farrah out of the blue and offered to act as her agent. "I was about to faint and fall over," recalls Farrah. "Well, what is your fee?" she asked. Free? Sold! Latman arranged Farrah's contract with New York and, after that franchise suspended operations, lined her up with New Orleans. "It was kind of unheard of then" to have an agent, Farrah realizes. "Even just scholarships for women to go to college at the time were few and far between, so for that to be happening was just amazing." Latman even helped Farrah get a part-time job at his stock broker firm while she was playing in New York. (SF int.)

As an Olympian, Gail Marquis was able to secure an agent. "I did take one for whatever God knows reason," she says. "He definitely thought I was making some money. I did not like negotiating contracts. I just wanted to play. I didn't want to do the numbers." (GM int.) After her first season in the

league, Adrian Mitchell heard others talking about agents, and decided to get one. She found the whole process unnerving, however. "It was really quite a hassle," she says. "Because you know it's hard to listen to the coaches offering you things, and your agent saying, 'No, don't take that.' Kind of tough." (AM int.)

Jody Rajcula was referred by another player to a young Massachusetts lawyer named Scott Lang. (JR int.) Lang did well for Rajcula, negotiating a round-trip ticket when Rajcula was picked up by the Nebraska Wranglers. When the Wranglers said they intended to trade her to Minnesota, Rajcula knew the Fillies were not getting paid, and she was unable to use the round-trip ticket to return to New York. Soon afterward, Lang called her: How about San Francisco? Lang had reviewed the team's books and concluded that it was doing all right financially. He had booked here a nice hotel for two weeks that the team was paying for, and Rajcula could go try out and hang out in San Francisco for two weeks, he suggested. "I am not stupid," Rajcula says, "so I went." Lang was right; the Pioneers made payroll, and Rajcula finished out the season with them. (JR int.)

Lang was helping quite a few WBL players. It started with one contact, and soon spread. "I literally was getting like a half-dozen calls per week from women athletes asking if I'd be willing to represent them," he recalls. At one point, as the league became shaky, Lang was speaking on behalf of three or four entire teams. "It almost resembled a point person for a union-

type of movement," he says. (SL int.) Lang wasn't paid for most of his efforts, and didn't really expect it. "I remember getting \$50 in the mail from someone saying, 'This is all I have,' or \$100. I think I may have gotten as high as \$400 from a player that I got a fairly substantial contract." (SL int.) Lang liked his clients and what they were trying to do. "The people I represented I thought were all courteous and pursuing their dream." (SL int.)

Lang's clients were pleased with his efforts, even if most never met him. "I would always be at every game trying to figure if he was going to be there and what he looked like," Charlene McWhorter says. "And I would get home that evening and have a message on the answering machine, 'I'm sorry I couldn't make it.' I never had an opportunity to meet him, but he did good work for me, a great guy." (CM int.)

Most players never considered an agent. "Back in those days, it didn't even cross my mind that we needed to do that," says Michelle McKenzie. "It never even dawned on me, 'Gee, maybe I ought to get somebody to represent me.' We were green. We were the athletes that wanted to see this happen and to see it go, and I don't think the money thing was a big issue or factor.

It wasn't for me, anyway. It was more the thrill of being able to play basketball for one or two years and actually earn a living at that time." (MM int.)

Overall, there was very little that agents could do, anyway. Iowa owner George Nissen wouldn't negotiate if a player hired an agent. "That always ends the conversation with me," he said. "I simply won't negotiate with third parties." ("These Cornets Play a Bouncy Tune," DMR date of first home game 1978). ("I did express the idea that I didn't trust some so much," Nissen admits.) (GN int.)

University of Texas alumna Retha Swindell and Hattie Browning's agent, Curly Ferris, advised told them not to sign the two-year contract that Dallas was offering. But as training camp began, they had no choice: No signature, no play. They signed.

(TD notes) In St. Louis, Murphy says her experience soured early with contract negotiations. Tryouts had gone well, she felt, and "Coach was pretty cool all through. Just kind of buttering me up, I guess." Afterward, the coach presented her with papers to sign. "I told him I could not sign them; I wanted to talk to Mr. Thacker," she says. "He kind of got a little upset about that, and started telling me a bunch of stuff, that this was a good contract, all that kind of stuff. I didn't know what a good contract was." Murphy contacted Thacker, who advised her to sign after discussing it with the coach. "And that's when hell broke loose," she says. (Murphy did not enjoy her experience with the Streak.) (DM int.)

A few players had some leverage. Althea Gwyn from Queens also had held out for a better contract on the advice of her agent, Al Waldon, Jr., finally joining the team just a couple of

weeks before the first season started. (Undated Donna Olshan article) Gwyn's position was unusual, though: She was a highly sought after local player from one of the few "name" women's basketball programs at the time.

"One of the problems is a lot of these girls had no real advice, like real, true professional athletes had," says San Francisco Pioneers co-owner Marshall Geller. "They didn't have agents and if they had agents, they were just crumb-bums, you know, kind of hangers-on." (MG int.) Few real "agents" were drawn to the fledgling professional women's basketball market. Absent a trusted friend, it was a crap shoot if players decided to accept offers from strangers. The drafting of Mary Sue Garrity by the Philadelphia Fox had barely been reported when she received a phone call from someone offering to represent her. ("Women's Pro Basketball has a History of Hot Air," Evening Bulletin 7/28/78) They never had any real people to advise them how to market themselves," says Geller, "and it was because it was a new sport." (MG int.)

The lack of knowledgeable representation sometimes led to difficulties, former WBL president Bill Byrne says. Some WBL coaches did not explain to their players, for example, that in a pro league, the team provided meals and a place to stay during tryouts, but they had to make the team in order to get paid. Occasionally, he he would get a call: "I was with so-and-so and I got cut so they sent me home, but how do I get the rest of my money?" Byrne would explain that these were standard player

contracts, not personal services contracts - if the player did not make the team, that was it. (BB int.) "A lot of those kids, whatever contract you sign, that is the money you are getting, no matter what. Then they would come and see 25-30 people (and think), 'Wait a minute, you can only use 12-15.' I had kids go home and call and say, 'Well, I just want to get my money off of this contract.' they didn't realize that it is a players contract. You have to pay to play. Really, I had a lot of that."
(BBint.)

College coaches were not always familiar with the concept either. Byrne would get a call, "My girl signed with Chicago, and she signed for this and this and the addendum of this and this," and had to explain that none of it mattered if she did not make the team. (BB int.) Even WBL coaches failed to understand at times. "You mean if my player comes to camp and doesn't make it . . .?" No pay, Byrne would reply, unless there was a signing bonus. "They had never been through this before," he says. "Back then, we were developing the wheel." (Byrne 1st int.)

That passion for the game was the overriding consideration for most players. At the University of Utah, four-year starter Maureen "Mo" Eckroth sought advice about her Iowa Cornets contract from athletic director Arnie Ferrin, who had himself played professional basketball with the NBA's Minneapolis Lakers after leading the Utes to NIT and NCAA championships in the 1940s. "I can remember showing him my contract, and I said, 'You

know, I'd play for nothing," Eckroth says. "Well, you're not going to tell them that," Ferrin replied. (ME int.)

As the league progressed, players became more sophisticated. Nancy Lieberman incorporated herself before joining the league in 1980. By the end of her first (and only) season in the WBL, she had a Lieberman-signature Spalding basketball, and contracts with Jordache jeans and with NBC. (WP 3/22/81) Upon graduation from Old Dominion University, Lieberman's agent arranged a book deal (Basketball My Way), a television commercial for Johnson & Johnson baby powder ("Take a Powder!"), and a shoe contract. "Before I even got to Dallas, I had \$40,000 in the bank, and that gave me a better bargaining position with the Diamond owners," Lieberman wrote in her autobiography. (LM)

It never occurred to most players, such as Iowa's popular Molly Bolin, that they could make money on appearances, Bolin says. "I guess some of the bigger name players eventually had agents who gave them some great advice to sit out a season over a contract dispute over money they were never going to see anyway." (Bolin int.) (The last is a sarcastic reference to Ann Meyers, who held out the entire third season due to a contract dispute with the New Jersey Gems).

"With the exception of the Meyers situation, the owners enjoy almost absolute control of salaries," sportswriter Lacy Banks observed. "There is no union, no other league competing for the players and several owners reportedly have given

ultimatums to discourage women from having agents or lawyers. They stress that if the women don't play at their price, they won't play at all." (NOTP 2/15/80) During the WBL first season, Logan had mentioned the possibility of a players' association, "which drove some owners into a tizzy," reported the Chicago Tribune. (CT 1/15/79; see also (NFLPA envelope 2/13/81; KL int.; Undated Terbush article, scrapbook). Logan was vocal about what she perceived as one-sidedness in the standard league contract:

The player has no recourse. She has no protection in the contract, it only protects the league and the team. If we get fed up, we can leave. That's all we can do, and that's not much protection. Everything is geared so the player can't come back at the league or a team and say, "Hey, this isn't fair." The least important aspect in putting the league together was the player, they felt everyone would just be so glad to be playing. If someone was scrimping, it was on salaries. But we're their product, and they better be sure we're happy. Instead, they come in and say, "You're pros. You're property." OK, in five years, 10 years. But these are young kids, a lot of them gave up their amateur status and some good jobs to help this thing go. They've never done anything like this before; they've read about it, but they don't understand it. They should be treated with more respect. Look, I'm not trying to be a pain-in-the-ass, liberated bitch. I'm not trying to lead any insurrection. I want this league to go, I want this product to grow, and I'm just trying to make them more professional. (CT 1/15/79)

At the season's conclusion, Logan was contacted by the National Football League Players Association. "They were saying, 'You have problems in your league. There are all kinds of issues going on. Do you want us to help you unionize?' After everything I had been through, I said, 'Yeah. I'd love to. We could get some outside body to govern these folks at least to protect the players.'" Logan, though, had problems of her own. After having a worse-than-expected performance the prior year and being labeled a troublemaker from her with the Chicago Hustle, Logan was having trouble even getting a tryout. "I contacted three or four franchises to try out, and none of them would have me," she recalls. (KL int.) As the second season began, Logan was still working with NFL union representatives while trying to get on with a team. "During the first part of the second season the NFL Players Association started pushing for me to start to align players. There were horror stories going all over the place about why we needed to be a union. All the salaries and discriminations and harassments, you name it." Logan wasn't enthused about the idea. "I said, 'You know, I am the last person that you should be getting to do this right now, and I'm already on thin ice. I would just like a salary and what is left of a career.'" (KL int.) Ultimately, though, she decided that she couldn't say no. "I didn't think anybody else would do it or could do it," she says. At NFL union headquarters in Washington, she met with association representatives, who said they would

start sending her to other franchises on her days off to unionize other players.

Logan had only made one or two recruiting trips when she was waived from her new team, the New Orleans Pride, by coach Butch van Breda Kolff. With Logan's departure from the league, noises about a players' union faded. Players from the California Dreams later asked the NBA Players Association for help after not getting paid, but nothing came of the request. (MM int.)

"As long as there is no players union, owners will be more free to take advantage of the players," Meyers complained at the end of the third season. "All the rules, which few players know anyway, appear to be stacked in favor of ownership." (SLPD 4/5/81) Lang agreed. "The best thing for this league will be a players union, mutually agreed upon by the players and owners so that contract violations can be grieved and investigated and signed contracts can be enforced." (SLPD 4/5/81)]

Salaries

Women who joined the WBL were not going to be playing for money, Minnesota Fillies owner Gordon Nevers said before the first season. "If that were the only motivating factor involved, I don't think it (the league) would succeed. I think they have to have that charisma of being a pioneer." (Courier-Journal 12/?/78) There was no set salary schedule, but league administrator Jane Rath predicted that "some franchises will open their pocketbooks, while others will proceed more cautiously."

(CAD 3/10/78) Rath predicted that some franchises would pay enough to support their players full-time, and others might help players find part-time jobs. (CAD 3/10/78) One thing was for sure, vice president Dave Almstead predicted: "Women aren't going to get rich by walking on the court in basketball shoes."

(Undated Ridenour article) No one in the WBL's early days expected salaries comparable to those in established male leagues. In the NFL, O. J. Simpson was the highest-paid player at just over \$800,000 annually; Walter Payton of the Chicago Bears was second at \$450,000. (LAT 2/1/80; "Payton (450G) highest paid NFL player," NY Post 2/5/80) The average salary all NFL players in 1979 was \$68,893, a ten percent jump from 1978. (LAT 2/1/80) The average salary in the National Basketball Association exceeded \$100,000 (Courier-Journal 12/?/78), and owners were grouching. "Today's salaries are way out of line," said Seattle Supersonics general manager Zollie Volchok in 1979. "If they continue to escalate like they are, the only people who will be able to afford to buy tickets will be the players and their agents." (LAT 12/12/79)

Byrne repeatedly cautioned WBL owners against signing players for big dollars. "I've seen high salaried players kill new leagues," he said. (WP 2/25/79) During the 1980-81 season, Dallas Diamonds coach Greg Williams was chewed out by the athletic director at the University of Mississippi, who thought second-round pick Peggie Gillom's pay was inadequate. "His line of thinking may have been right when he had only dealt with male

athletes playing pro football or basketball,” assistant coach Tom Davis concluded. “But we are not the NFL or the NBA. So our offer was very fair.” (TD notes)

Players’ contracts prohibited them from disclosing any information about their terms (*read: salary*) to third parties. Sometimes word got out inadvertently, such as a training camp in Dallas when draftees were told to bring their contracts. They were left out where they could be (and were) seen by a veteran player, who was offended. (TD notes) At other times, players knew because the salary had been publicized. In Chicago, for example, organizers announced the team’s base salary before the season began, which rendered moot the prohibition against discussing salaries. “The first year we thought it was stupid because everybody knew that everybody was getting \$10,000 max,” says Janie Fincher. (JF int.) For the most part, though, players and media speculated wildly about salaries. In early days, the WBL’s public relations director, Tim Koelble, estimated that most salaries would be between \$2,500 and \$10,000. (Columbia Daily Tribune 6/4/78). Almstead was a little more optimistic on the low end. “I can see the 12th woman on the team making \$4,000 over four months,” he predicted. “Certain women stand to make a great deal of money. Of course, every girl will be making more money playing basketball than she ever has in her life.” (Ridenour, Knight-Ridder ?)

For many players, that was true. The salary offered to play in the WBL sounded so impressive that they weren’t about to

question it. "Ten thousand dollars - I thought I was in hog heaven," Fincher says. (JF int.) DeBoer was just fine with her contract, too. "They told you over the telephone, 'Here is the deal: We'll pay you \$150 a game, and we play about 30-40 games.'" It turned out to be about \$5,000. That was just so much money to me at that point in time. I said, "That's just unbelievable, that's great." A year later, DeBoer was thrilled to renegotiate up to \$7,500. "Again, that was just so much more money than I had ever seen," she says. (KD int.)

"When I signed my first contract for \$900 a month I was ready to do backflips," said Bolin. "I thought it was incredible that somebody would pay me money to play basketball." (Palm Springs Desert Sun 6/26/89) Anita Ortega, signed by San Francisco, got her first check for about \$900 and thought, "This is incredible! I'm getting this much money for basically nothing, just playing basketball a couple of hours a day." And when she received another \$400 signing bonus, she was again stunned. "This is unbelievable!" (AO int.) Tonyus Chavers signed "a huge \$6,000 contract," she laughs. "You know, college students, we didn't have a lot of money, and \$1,000 a month sounded like heaven." (Tci) Christy Earnhardt signed with the Dallas Diamonds for \$7,500, plenty to get by on during the season, she felt. "Just out of college, I wasn't too worried about it as long as I had enough to live off of." (CEM int.)

The Minnesota Fillies, by contrast, reportedly "tried to get players to sign for \$3,000, less than a mother with two kids

could get on welfare in many states.” (Mudville’s Revenge) The team confirmed its conservative pay scale the next season, announcing in its media guide: “When the final selection was announced and the women were signed to player contracts, the WBL found that most of the players expressed a cooperative attitude in negotiations and accepted moderate contracts, realizing that outrageous demands can only kill the golden opportunity they all dreamt of. In fact the entire team salary expenses for the first year of operation averaged about \$60,000, less than most individual players in the National Basketball Association.”

(1979-80 Fillies Media Guide) Even if players believed they could make more money elsewhere, that basically didn’t matter. “Good players were not all put off by low salaries,” author Ted Vincent wrote in 1980.. “There was, after all, the cause to consider.”

(Mudville’s Revenge) Tanya Johnson didn’t mind signing with New Jersey for \$4,000. (TJ contract) “The first contract I had was \$6,000,” says Pearl Moore. “It had to be something that pioneers bought.” (PM int.)

“My priority is happiness before money,” said Dee Dee Mayes of the Philadelphia Fox. “And I’m very happy in what I’m doing, being a professional athlete. I think of myself as being pretty lucky . . . not rich, but lucky.” (PDN 11/7/79) Fillies rookie Angela Cotman said she hoped the financial situation would improve. “But how many people get to come out of college and do exactly - I mean exactly - what they want to do? I’m getting that opportunity.” (SPPP 11/14/80)

Over time, that sentiment shifted. Cindy Haugejorde, San Francisco's No. 1 draft pick in 1980, rejected the notion that a pioneering spirit could compensate for low salaries. "Women have gone through their programs where people say you have to suffer to get ahead," she said. "Now they're pros and being told the same thing. I want enough to live on and enough to know they're not taking advantage of me. I think the league has taken advantage of a lot of people. A lot of the owners want to push the women around. I won't take any of that crap." (Minn Trib 8/31/80) As time went by, more negotiating began to occur. During Chicago's second season, some players looked for increases in their standard \$10,000 salary. Fincher's mother worked for some lawyers in Tulsa, one of whom renegotiated the player's contract for free. (JF int.) After her MVP season, Rita Easterling's salary doubled. (RE contract) Others made less than the \$10,000 average that had been negotiated the previous year. (E.g., Travnik, Caldwell, Rajcula, Stachon, Kennedy, Thomas, Mitchell contracts; Hustle payroll records.)

Donna Murphy signed with St. Louis in 1980 for \$11,800. "I thought that was big money at that point," she recalls. "And I was willing to play just to say that I participated in it, I helped get it off the ground. I was looking at it with pioneer eyeballs, I guess." (DM int.) Chicago Sun-Times sportswriter Lacy Bank estimated that first season salaries averaged around \$6,000, with the highest at \$15,000. In the second season, Banks reported, the average salary was around \$7,500, with the highest

(excluding Meyers) at \$20,000. (NOTP 2/15/80) *Mademoiselle* indicated that the league's average salary had increased from \$5,000 in 1978-79 to \$15,000 in 1980-81 (*Mademoiselle* 3/81), but that figure was skewed by the infusion of three high-profile - and high-dollar - players into the league that year. (*See The Super Rookies.*)

The contract

Most WBL players signed a standard, nine-page contract. One copy each was supposed to go to the player, the franchise ("Club" in the contract), and the League, although some copies apparently went astray. (In 1979, members of the Washington Metros rant into a problem. "We don't have copies of our contracts," Jodi Gault reported. "We had to turn them in. I don't know if we have a say until we have a contract in our hands." (WP 12/7/79) Teammate Carmen Fletcher said that, when she asked to make a copy of her contract, she was told, "You're not allowed to." (WP 12/7/79).

The league had ten days to reject a contract. Byrne rejected eight contracts in the first season, usually because they had no-cut or no-trade guarantees. "I killed them because it was not conducive to what we were doing," Byrne says. "Financially, we didn't have any marketing money, no TV money, no radio money. Hell, we hadn't even sold a season ticket yet." (BB int.)

Among other things, the standard contract obligated players:

- 4.1 *To report to Club in good physical condition and training at the time and place fixed by Club at the beginning of each season.*
- 4.2 *To play and participate in, to the best of her ability, all practice sessions, League, and other games scheduled by or for Club.*
- 4.3 *To comply with and be bound by League By-Laws, Operating Rules, Playing Rules, and decisions of the League President, and to submit to discipline of the League and Club for any violations thereof.*
- 4.4 *To stay in the best physical condition possible during the season.*
- 4.5 *To give her loyalty to the League and Club and to participate in their promotions and publicity and to cooperate with their basketball and business activities.*
- 4.6 *If invited, and if physically able, to play and participate in, to the best of her ability, any all-star game sponsored by the League, in accordance with the terms and player compensation established for such game.*
- 4.7 *When requested by the League or Club, to submit herself, at a mutually convenient time and place, for medical examination to be conducted by a physician selected by the League or Club. The League or Club will pay all expenses connected with such examination.*

If a player was injured, the league would pay for medical care, if the hospital and doctor were selected or approved by the club, and she would continue to be paid through the end of the season (offset by workers' compensation or other insurance benefits). That particular provision occasionally led to disputes, according to Dallas Diamonds assistant coach Tom Davis.

The day before final roster cuts were to be made, a free agent, who was not having a good pre-season, injured her knee, but new team president David Almstead did not believe she was really injured. The two sides were at a stalemate, when suddenly management discovered a technical defect in her contract, and there was nothing to stop them from waiving her. The player complained that the team had cut her while injured, but she had no recourse. (TD notes)

In another section of the standard contract, players also agreed to accept any trade, with the acquiring club to pay reasonable moving expenses. Mariah Burton Nelson's playing days ended with a dispute over this provision, she says. Having been traded to Dallas in the 1979 pre-season, she approached management about retrieving her belongings. "I said to the people at Dallas, 'Great, I know that you want me to play with you. Now I need to go home and get my car and drive back out here and get some more clothes,'" she recalls. "And they said, 'We don't want you to do that until we happen to be in San Francisco playing against them.'" That was a month away, though, and Nelson pointed out the moving expenses provision. "The next day, they

fired me because I had been 'too aggressive off the court' - that was the phrase they used - by negotiating this aspect of my contract with them, and asking in a very assertive, probably exasperated way for them to pay the moving expenses." (MBN int.)

Contract clauses

After the WBL's first season, individual contract provisions began to appear, as players negotiated performance incentives. Debra Waddy-Rossow's 1979-80 contract with the Hustle included a \$1,000 bonus if she averaged 10 boards per game, and another \$1,000 if Chicago won the championship. (DWR contract) Rita Easterling would earn an extra \$500 bonus if she led the league or division in assists. (RE contract) Most third-season Hustle contracts offered a standard \$500 bonus if the team won division or league titles, and \$1,000 if the player were voted MVP. (See, e.g., Ethel White contract, Pamela Kilday, Pat Hodgson, Paula Mayo). Liz Galloway's contract would have paid \$1,000 if she accumulated 100 assists during the season, \$500 for 190 rebounds, and \$500 for 133 steals, \$500 if she led the team in minutes played, and \$500 each for MVP or winning the division or league championships. (LG contract 10/20/80) Belinda Candler also got another \$500 if she averaged 10 rebounds per game. (BC contract)

Linda Matthews' \$500 bonus was triggered if she were in the top five in the league in assists, or was named an All-Star. (LM contract) Charlene McWhorter's 1979 Washington Metros contract was for \$7,000, plus six month of \$175 toward apartment rental. (CM contract). Bonuses were set at one percent if the Metros made

the playoffs, another one percent for the finals, and three percent for the championship. Individual players who made All-Star, All-Pro, or All-Rookie received an extra five percent, and MVP or Rookie of the Year added another ten percent. Leading the league in field goal percentage, rebounds, assists, or free-throw percentages were worth another one percent each. Among other things, McWhorter agreed "to be neatly and fully attired in public and always to conduct herself on and off the court according to the highest standard of honesty, morality, fair play, and sportsmanship and not to do anything which is detrimental to the best interest of the Club or of the League."
(CM contract)

San Francisco's standard contract included a minutes-played clause: Averaging 25 minutes per game generated a \$500.00 bonus, with another \$500 at 30 minutes, and another \$500 at 35 minutes.
(San Francisco contract). Being named an All-Star added another \$500, leading the team in rebounds \$500, and leading the league was another \$1,000.00. A league MVP would receive \$1,000.00. The player voted MVP by the team's fans would receive \$500.00.
(San Francisco contract)

By far, the most significant WBL contract ever entered into was that negotiated for UCLA star Ann Meyers by the William Morris Agency. Meyers was not only the biggest available name in women's basketball, but she also had a guaranteed \$50,000 contract from the NBA's Indiana Pacers already in hand. The combination made for a sizeable hammer to use against the New

Jersey Gems, who agreed to some significant changes to the standard contract: Compensation. For the period September 1, 1979, through August 31, 1980, Meyers would receive \$50,000 in salary, paid by certified check twice monthly. For each of the 1980-81 and 1981-82 seasons, her salary would be \$40,000. (Those figures were for the regular season only; All-Star and playoff appearances would be an add on determined later.) Gems owner Robert Milo personally guaranteed the first season's \$50,000 salary, and \$35,000 of the next year's \$40,000. Meyers would also have the use of a new car each year with a list value of not more than \$10,000. The Gems agreed to pay her half of the gross sales receipts (less manufacturing costs and taxes) of concessions items with her name or likeness, and 25 percent of any other licensing agreements entered into by the club using her name or likeness.

- No-cut guarantee. The Gems agreed to maintain their obligations under Meyers' contract even if she were cut from the team.

- No-trade guarantee. The Gems could not trade Meyers without her consent.

- Promotions. The Gems agreed to delete the obligation "[t]o give her loyalty to the League and Club and to participate in their promotions and publicity and to cooperate with their basketball and business activities."

· Physical condition. Unlike other players, Meyers could not be suspended for being in inappropriate physical condition unless it resulted from “pregnancy, or the use of alcohol, narcotics or drugs.”

· Death. Like most players, the players’ death would terminate the contract. However, Meyers’ contract required still required payment of her salary to her designee (unless the death resulted from suicide). While Meyers’ contract may have been the most important in the league’s history - creating the “Annie Meyers Syndrome” that heavily influenced next year’s super rookie -- the most novel approach to negotiation definitely was that of Utah State volleyball coach Mary Jo Peppler, a 1964 volleyball Olympian who won the ABC television “Superstars” competition in 1975 and at 34, would be the oldest player in the league. When her proposed contract was returned, Peppler had retyped it with a few irreverent insertions of her own. The new contract provisions (with Peppler’s annotations in italics):

7.4 Player’s death shall automatically terminate ***Player and*** this Contract. ***Then who the hell will care about any of this bullshit?***

8. GAMBLING. If the league President shall, in his sole judgment, find that Player has bet, or has offered or attempt to bet, money or anything of value on the outcome of any game participated in by any Club which is a member of the League, the President shall have the power, in his sole discretion, to

suspend without pay and/or fine the Player, and the President's finding and decision shall be binding and conclusive. If Player feels the President's decision in this regard is unreasonable, Player has the right to have the decision reviewed by an independent arbitrator mutually acceptable to both Player and the President. The decision of this arbitrator shall be binding on both Player and the League. ***If Player is found to be unjustly accused of gambling charges, President must apologize, send flowers daily for one month, and take Player to dinner at least once.***

9. DRUGS. Player warrants that at no time during the term of this Contract will she use any drugs. Player agrees that the League President shall have the sole power and discretion to suspend, terminate, and/or fine Player for violation of this paragraph, and the President's finding and decision shall be binding and conclusive on all parties. ***If player is found to be unjustly accused of gambling charges, President shall send Player at Season's end to Tahiti, at President's expense, to recuperate from the ensuing mental cruelty cruelly inflicted by President.***