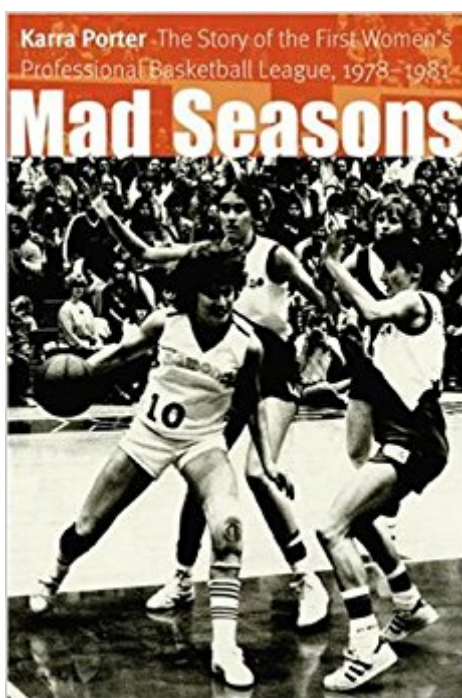


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# Mad Seasons: The Story Of The First Women's Professional Basketball League, 1978-1981



## Synopsis

As the popularity of women's basketball burgeons, Karra Porter reminds us in *Mad Seasons* that today's Women's National Basketball Association, or WNBA had its origins in a ragtag league twenty years earlier. Porter tells the story of the Women's Professional Basketball League WBL, which pioneered a new era of women's sports. Formed in 1978, the league included the not-so-storied Dallas Diamonds, Chicago Hustle, and Minnesota Fillies. Porter's book takes us into the heart of the WBL as teams struggled with nervous sponsors, an uncertain fan base, and indifferent sportswriters. Despite bouncing paychecks, having to sleep on floors, and being stranded on road games, the players endured and thrived. Karra Porter brings to life the pioneers of the WBL: "Machine Gun" Molly Bolin, who set lasting scoring records then faced an historic custody battle because of her basketball career; Connie Kunzmann, a popular player whose murder rocked the league; Liz Silcott, whose remarkable talents masked deeper problems off the court; Ann Meyers, who went from an NBA tryout to the league she had rebuffed; Nancy Lieberman, whose flashy play and marketing savvy were unlike anything the women's game had ever seen. A story of hardship and sacrifice, but also of dedication and love for the game, *Mad Seasons* brings the WBL back to life and shows in colorful detail how this short-lived but pioneering league ignited the imagination of a new generation of female athletes and fans.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For a nearly forgotten league that lasted just three years, the Women's Professional Basketball League (WBL) enjoyed a surprising share of good stories, recorded here for the first time. Having represented WNBA players in her law practice, Porter is well-versed in women's basketball past and present, and treats her subject with care. From the beginning of its first season in October 1977, the league was populated by women whose motivation was "love of the game"-unsurprising considering the pay they were (supposed to be) pulling in, but surprising considering their astonishing level of commitment to the chaotic league. Players washed their own uniforms; crammed three or four to a hotel room; traveled long distances to games by van (often driven by their coach); and, of course, were generally paid very little, if at all (by December 1979, Washington Metros players had yet to be paid). Through it all, there was some good basketball played-and some really good players making it happen; WBL stars included Ann Meyers, Molly Bolin, Nancy Lieberman and Carol Blazejowski, some of whom remain in the game as coaches, managers and commentators. Still, Porter's account is largely about the forgotten names, the players who sacrificed so much to advance women's basketball long before the success of the WNBA, and pays fitting tribute to them. Dramatic and insightful, this should please anyone with an interest in the history of hoops. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

“Porter has a keen eye for the telling detail, a raconteur's love of storytelling, and amid the important cache of stats and box scores, she creates vivid heroes of the league. •Cassie DeHahn, Aethlon (Cassie DeHahn Aethlon)“Relive all of the great moments, the troubling challenges, the highlights, the star players, and gain a whole new perspective of what it took to get professional basketball into the spotlight that is today's NBA and WNBA. There's plenty for men and women alike to enjoy about Karra Porter's Mad Seasons. •Bill Ingram, Hoopsworld.com (Bill Ingram Hoopsworld.com 2006-07-24)

This book from new author Karra Porter was well worth the wait. It is not a dry history of the oft forgot WBL, but rather an engaging and fun read. The years of research that went into this book is obvious with its detailed accounts and interviews. A true labor of love by a dedicated basketball fan, "Mad Seasons" offers an objective "insider's" look at the rise and fall of this pioneering effort. Fans and women's basketball professionals alike should read this book to see just far we've come and what the phrase "playing for the love of the game" really means. I would, however, have included the unpublished "Media Glare" chapter (see the book's website for more info) rather than the

"Snapshots" chapter. While the snapshots are interesting and amusing, media coverage remains a hot issue among fans and I think many would have been greatly interested in it - particularly as it also gives us the history of the first women's college basketball poll.

What would you say about a league that survived for three tumultuous seasons due to players who many times had paychecks bounce higher than the basketballs, a handful of owners who truly wanted to operate a first-rate league and a fandom that came out in impressive numbers for the final championship series? Karra Porter, an attorney who has represented several WNBA players, pens the first history of the WBL, that operated from 1978-1981. It is an important addition to the knowledge of a reader who enjoys exploring basketball history or wants to better comprehend the battle waged in women's team sports to have viable leagues at the professional level. Porter covers every facet of the game - from the front office and hardcourt, to the media and fans - and thoroughly describes the financial stumbling off the court that doomed the product on the court. Ultimately it was the shabby treatment of players that destroyed the league. In the final season, several teams and individuals staged walkouts in protest of not being paid. A showdown between owners who wanted the league to be operated professionally and those who had more shallow verbiage than cash caused a rift that sunk the WBL in a sea of broken promises. But how close the WBL came to making it. At least one NBA owner was interested in investing in an existing team, but watched to see if the league would stabilize financially. The league just missed on what became the sports boom in cable television, when a then regional operation in Bristol, Conn., ESPN, began its search to show sports 24 hours a day. As much oral history as it is research, *Mad Seasons* is a great read.

I was in college when the WBL existed - I remember we used to talk about going to see a game when we were home on semester break in D.C. but we never got around to it. The biggest game of the year was always when ODU and Lieberman and Nissen would come to maul our women's team - the gym was packed to beyond capacity and always outdrew the men's game. This is an interesting read with all the funny and poignant stories of a league's startup and also some sad stories, too - well worth it.

This book is good insight into the first women's professional basketball league. This is all I wanted to say, but this program is making me type more words.

Devotions and dedication can be such admirable qualities, particularly in an author. Karra Porter

certainly has those qualities. She's worked very hard on this history of the Women's Professional Basketball League. The research is evident throughout the book "Mad Seasons," and a peak at a Web site indicates she had been trying to sell the book to a publisher for some time. She found one in the University of Nebraska Press. Books like this really need to be published. Otherwise, parts of sports history would be more or less forgotten. What's more, Porter has done a good job assembling the story, albeit with some flaws. The WBL, as it became known, played from 1978 to 1981. Women's basketball was just starting to catch on in the college ranks, and players had received some publicity. It seemed a natural to give those players a next step, although everyone involved knew there would be obstacles ... mostly in the form of money. New leagues always have money problems. This league's woes were compounded by the fact that there were no professional women's team sports. The WBL was moving into uncharted territory. But the owners, coaches and players pressed on. Porter takes an unexpected approach to the book. Each chapter represents one particular issue surrounding the three-year life of the league. There are stories about starting up, promotion, travel problems, racial matters, stars, etc. Three of the chapters at the end are particularly interesting. There's a tale about the murder of one of the players, the story of an entire team walking off the court in a financial dispute, and a divorce case involving one of the WBL's players that turned into ground-breaking law. Still, it's the funny/sad moments, moments that were sad then but funny now, that are good to read now. For example, New England one time was supposed to play New Orleans in a preseason game, but New Orleans didn't show up. So the Gulls called some members of the New Jersey Gems, who drove up, put on New Orleans uniforms and played the game. It's not like any of the fans knew the difference. The book has a few problems worth noting. There are some good-sized factual errors here that do jump out. It's Julius Erving, not Irving. And it's the Golden State Warriors, not the Oakland Warriors. (A newspaper's mistake got copied.) Ouch, twice. Meanwhile, Porter crams a lot of information into the chapters here, to the point where fewer quotes and more perspective would have been useful. More importantly, there is absolutely no sense of what the leagues were like from a competitive standpoint. Who were the good teams? Who were bad? Who won championships? How did the caliber of play compare with top college ball at that point? A chapter covering the basics about those issues is badly needed here. Failing that, an appendix with season records, statistical leaders and playoff results is absolutely needed and not to be found. In fairness, a Web site is helping to fill some of those gaps now. Those issues somewhat spoil the finished product, which is likely to be the first and last word on the history of the first women's basketball's league. Still, it's nice that the league is remembered. It paved the way for the WNBA on some levels, and it introduced a smaller basketball for the

women's game that eventually became a worldwide standard. Porter deserves plenty of credit for making sure that this labor of love saw the light of day.

Very interesting since I was one of the Owners of a team and I mentioned in this book. It brought up a lot of memories and tells the story of how this league was formed and the problems it incurred.

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