

WNBA Players, Teams Hope For Roster Expansion

NEW YORK (AP) — Becky Hammon didn't mince words. With the WNBA collective bargaining agreement set to expire after the season, roster size needs to be the top item on the agenda.

"That's the first thing that has to be changed," the veteran San Antonio Silver Stars guard said. "Twelve-year old AAU teams have more players than we do. It's absolutely ridiculous and they have to do something to fix it."

In 2009, the players' union agreed to reduce the roster from 13 to 11 players to save money and ensure labor peace. That move has hampered teams over the past few seasons in both games and practices. Both sides

seem to agree that it needs to be addressed this fall.

"Roster size is one of those topics we discuss literally every season," WNBA president Laurel Richie said last month. "And this offseason, headed into the new collective bargaining agreement, it will be no different for us. I am sure it will come up. We just take things a year at a time. We are juggling some things, trying to keep them in balance and I suspect we've already started having productive discussions about it in our competition committee and will continue to do so."

The impact of the reduced rosters has been extremely prevalent this season with the rash of injuries. No team

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BECKY HAMMON, WNBA VETERAN
On The WNBA's 11-Player Roster Limit

has been hit worse than the defending champion Indiana Fever, who have routinely had to play with eight or nine players. The Fever have already missed a combined 43 games to injury and the season is barely one-third over. They've already had more games missed than all of last season when the Fever won

their first WNBA title.

"It's a pretty banged up year for the WNBA," said Hammon, who has been sidelined this season with a broken right finger. "You're bound to have years like this because the grind that we go through year in and out playing overseas and trying to supplement income that way.

It takes a toll on the bodies."

The 15-year veteran isn't the only superstar who has missed time as an All-Star roster could be filled with injured players. San Antonio teammate Sophia Young is out for the year with a torn ACL in her right knee. Seattle stars Sue Bird (knee) and Lauren Jackson (hamstring) are out for the season also. Phoenix finally got back Penny Taylor last week after she missed all last season and the first part of this year with an ACL tear.

"We're not alone, I think Indiana is another great example," Silver Stars coach Dan Hughes said. "I know if you're in the business long enough it's going to happen to you. As I look around the

league and take a look at teams with success some of those teams are also in pretty good health. It's having a bearing on that."

Tulsa has been hit hard by injuries also. The Shock have already played 14 games — three more than any other team in the league. Only four Shock players have been able to play in every game. If you factor in all the players that they've had to add as replacements the costs add up.

"We believe we'd like to see it go at least to 12. There are some other interesting ideas — an extra person on the injured reserve list maybe," Tulsa president

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Minor Leagues Give Basketball Players Second Chances

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — DeMarco Polk once had a bright basketball future.

He is a former Mr. Basketball in Tennessee, but poor grades kept him from qualifying for a Division I scholarship — limiting his chance to play in front of scouts for the NBA and overseas leagues.

Now the 29-year-old guard is one of many in minor leagues around the country, hoping for a second chance. Polk plays with the Middle Tennessee Storm, one of four teams in the newly formed Central Basketball League.

"It allows me to showcase my talent, to let people know that I still have it," said the 6-foot Polk, who averaged 24 points a game this season and was named the league's MVP.

Storm owner Carlin Alford said Polk is a "microcosm of what we want in this league," which includes teams from Illinois, Kentucky and Missouri.

"Here's a guy who was the best player in the state of Tennessee, who never went to a Division I college," Alford said. "And now he's making good on all of that talent. The CBL is a platform for him."

While minor leagues provide opportunities, they're far from the glamour of the NBA or even those overseas leagues where good paychecks make up for being far from home. Minor league players often use buses, vans, or even car pool to get to games in high school gyms, recreation centers or YMCAs. Some players make as little as \$100 a game, and nearly all have other jobs to pay the bills.

Even in the 93-team American Basketball Association, which plays in cities from Los Angeles to New York, league CEO and co-founder Joe Newman said teams "fly less than five percent" and try not to travel more than four hours to a game.

"Most of our players have jobs and family ... so we try to contain it into that four-hour bracket, so they can go to a game on a weekend and come home so they do not miss work," Newman said.

Most of the teams in other leagues also try to accommodate their players, usually scheduling games on the weekends to avoid conflicts with work.

The CBL has even gone as far as to schedule Saturday games at night so some players can observe the Sabbath.

"I'm a big Sabbath keeper," Polk said. "It's nice that we play at 8 o'clock when the sun goes down."

One perk in larger leagues such as the ABA and the 15-team Independent Basketball Association is that players can make as much as \$500 a game in a season that may have as many as 30 games.

"The challenge from a business standpoint is how to make sure ... that it's a win-win for both the organization as well as the players," said Barry Bradford, president of the IBA, which has teams in New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and California.

Nevertheless, minor league teams face stiff challenges when it comes to funding, with help coming mainly from community sponsorships and ticket sales. There are no national sponsorships. The CBL, though, is expanding and adding a fall league of five to 10 teams for players not as skilled as players cur-



JEREMY HOECK/P&D

Wynot's Scott Heine is congratulated after he doubled in a run during the Expos' matchup at Crofton in South Central League amateur baseball action on Friday.

Crofton Rallies Past Wynot



AARON SAUNDERS/MITCHELL DAILY REPUBLIC

Yankton's Tanner Termansen delivers a pitch during the third inning of a Legion baseball game against Mitchell Friday at Cadwell Park in Mitchell. Mitchell won the game 12-2.

CROFTON, Neb. — The Crofton Bluejays scored one run in the seventh and two in the eighth to rally past Wynot 4-2 in South Central League amateur baseball action on Friday.

Crofton, which has now won 12 straight league games after losing the league opener, led 1-0 after one inning, but Wynot scored both its runs in the second inning to take a 2-1 lead.

Scot Donner had a triple and a single, and Nick Hegge had two doubles and two RBI to lead Crofton. Kyle Mueller, Alex Mueller, Carl Schieffer and Aaron Losing added hits for the Bluejays.

Scott Heine had two of Wynot's three hits, including a double. Matt Hames had the other Expos' hit.

Rand Thygeson picked up the win in relief of Donner, striking out four batters and retiring all nine batters he faced. Eric Hames went the distance in the loss, matching Donner's five strikeouts.

Crofton hosts Avon on

Sunday. Wynot is off until a July 11 matchup at Menno.

WYNOT	.....	220	000	000	— 2	3	1
CROFTON	.....	400	000	12X	— 4	8	3

Eric Hames and Scott Heine; Scot Donner, Rand Thygeson (7) and Carl Schieffer

Yankton 10, Lesterville 2

Dave Schmidt and Ross Heine each had three hits to lead Yankton to a 10-2 victory over Lesterville in South Central League amateur baseball action on Thursday at Yankton's Riverside Field.

Schmidt also scored three runs for the Tappers. Derrek Nelson went 2-4 with a double and two runs scored. Corey Bromley also had two hits. Jared Miller and Heath Arens added hits for Yankton.

Tyler Edler had two of Lesterville's four hits. Ian Powell and Andy Gall also had hits. Gall and Alex Wagner scored the two Broncs runs.

Jake Broscha picked up the win, striking out eight over six shutout innings of work. Mike Thunker earned a long-relief save, striking out four over three innings. Jason

Bierle took the loss.

Yankton, 11-4, hosts Menno on Sunday. Lesterville hosts Tabor on Saturday.

LESTERVILLE	.....	000	000	200	— 2	4	5
YANKTON (11-4)	.....	230	013	10X	— 10	12	2

Jason Bierle (other Lesterville pitchers not listed) and Ian Powell; Jake Broscha, Mike Thunker (7) and Corey Bromley

Legion

Mitchell 12, Yankton 2

MITCHELL — Mitchell beat Yankton First Dakota Post 12-2 in American Legion baseball action on Friday.

Zach Benjamin had a double and a run scored to lead Yankton. Andrew Hummel had a hit and a run scored. Adam Walter added a hit.

Tanner Termansen took the loss.

Yankton, 7-14 overall and 1-5 in region play, travels to Watertown today (Saturday). Start time for the twinbill is 1 p.m.

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Daytona Breaks Ground On \$400M Renovation

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — NASCAR driver Greg Biffle climbed into a bulldozer, pulled a few levers and then dumped a load of dirt onto the ground.

Fireworks exploded in the background.

Biffle earned the honor of breaking ground on a \$400 million renovation at Daytona International Speedway on Friday. Biffle and fellow driver Trevor Bayne teamed up to win an obstacle-course race in massive front-end loaders outside the famed track.

Biffle and Bayne maneuvered the course faster than two other teams. Fellow Sprint Cup drivers Jeff Burton and Ryan Newman finished second, followed by television announcers Darrell Waltrip and Larry McReynolds.

Biffle and Bayne hoisted trophies in a mock Victory Lane celebration and were rewarded with a brief stint in the cockpit of the bulldozer.

"This counts as a win at Daytona, I think," said Biffle, who won his first Cup race at Daytona in 2003.

The event was held on a sweltering summer day at Daytona, drawing a

large, sweaty crowd that included several NASCAR and Daytona executives, all of them eager to get "Daytona Rising" started.

The three-year project is scheduled to be completed by January 2016. When done, the remodel will give Daytona's aging grandstands a modern look and feel. Wider, more comfortable seats will be installed, as well as improved concessions and countless big-screen televisions that will keep fans abreast of the action even when they step away from the stands.

"When you go to a baseball game, the entire thing is the baseball game," Burton said. "When you go to a NASCAR race, there's all the pre-race stuff, there's things going on before the race — hours before the race you get here — so you have to entertain the fans in other ways other than just the race because they've come to expect it."

"In many ways, it requires more effort from our racetrack owners than baseball or football."

International Speedway Corp., which owns Daytona and several other NASCAR tracks, believes the project

could help boost slumping attendance.

"It's up to us to provide the absolute best experience for fans," ISC CEO Lesa France Kennedy said.

Daytona president Joie Chitwood III gave spectators a memorable groundbreaking thanks to the unique race involving 42,000-pound Caterpillar loaders.

Burton and Newman were considered the favorites for the event, mostly because Burton is sponsored by Caterpillar and Newman has experience driving heavy equipment. But Biffle, who owns a small mining company with his brother, and Bayne cruised to victory — with some help from the competition.

"The biggest thing I was disappointed in was how it happened," Burton said. "When (Newman) was getting out of it, he hit the parking brake with his elbow or when I was getting in it, I hit the parking brake, and we didn't realize the parking brake was on because we didn't have a plan to put the parking brake on. We couldn't figure out why it wouldn't go. I finally figured it out, but by that time, we were done."

Busch, Kenseth Sweep Front Row

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Kyle Busch and Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Matt Kenseth swept the front row for Saturday night's race at Daytona International Speedway.

Busch turned a lap at 193.723 mph in Friday qualifying to win the pole. Kenseth was second at 193.299.

Clint Bowyer qualified second and Michael Waltrip Racing teammate Martin Truex Jr. was fifth as Toyota drivers took four of the first five spots. Kasey Kahne wedged his Chevrolet in at fourth.

Paul Menard was sixth in a Chevrolet, and MWR co-owner Michael Waltrip was seventh in another Toyota.

Daytona 500 winner Jimmie Johnson was eighth, followed by rookie Ricky Stenhouse Jr. and his Roush-Fenway Racing teammate Greg Biffle as the highest-qualifying Fords.