

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – EAU CLAIRE

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BY  
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## Abstract

The Milwaukee Does have been forgotten over time and are unknown to most of the world. That was also true of the Women's Basketball Leagues, WBL, of 1978-1981 until Karra Porter, a lawyer in Salt Lake City, Utah and fellow advocate of history and sports, wrote her book, *Mad Seasons: the story of the first Women's Professional Basketball League, 1978-1981*. Her fear of the league's history going untold and erased from history is the reason she began researching the leagues and produced her book. *Mad Seasons* is the only book written on the WBL and covers the Milwaukee Does. In this paper I will look at the beginning of the WBL in 1978 and take a journey through time to give a better background of the Milwaukee Does. However, the Does only made it two of the three seasons due to many factors that took them out of the league and failed to succeed, a path the entire league would inevitably travel. This paper uses primary documents compiled together in a collection in Milwaukee that covers the Does seasons in the WBL, including newspaper clippings, pictures, and programs from games. In dealing with the limited amount of information that is available, I intend to bring the Does to life again and present their existence in a professional matter. I will finish the paper by explaining what I feel went wrong in the WBL and the main reasons it could have never made it in that era. I will also provide ideas and thoughts of what should be done in the future.

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## Introduction

“Why the Milwaukee Does?” A friend once asked me why I was doing my senior capstone on women’s sports when never in my life has it been a topic of discussion for longer than five minutes. I am not a big fan of women sports because I feel the game is different to which I have played in the past and still play today. Sports have always been a big part of my life and will continue to be until the day I die. Since I was born, my parents always took me to their softball games and every now and again my dad would take me to his basketball games when I got older. For the last twenty-five years I have played in all types of sports ranging from baseball to water polo and almost everything in-between that is accessible to me. I have never turned down a challenge even when I knew I was out matched or if I have never played before. In an attempt to change my personal perspective of women’s sports, I feel researching the Milwaukee Does could be the first step I need to take to accomplish that.

Failure is part of the game and you can never be afraid to lose because no one can win all the time (even though there are streaks out there of undefeated records that remain). With most failures there comes some form of success. Whether it is a win or a positive note, success can be measured in a variety of different ways. For the Women’s Professional Basketball League, success was the introduction of the WPBL and the opportunity to play professional basketball. Throughout its short lived existence, the WPBL was full of emotional highs and lows, hardships and sacrifices, and humor and bitterness. The most heart-felt emotions were not experienced until everything everyone had done for the WPBL went for naught. This was when it went under and had to be brought to an end in 1981. Many of those who believed in the WPBL and the Milwaukee Does had high expectations for the future. What they did not anticipate was the lack in support from the local community and sports fanatics. The following is a snap-shot history of

the beginning of the WPBL, which in time would become the WBL, and a well-documented history of the Milwaukee Does and their two year stint in the WBL. “You won’t see anybody tearing the ball off the rim, but you’ll see some quick players who can handle the ball really well,”<sup>1</sup> WBL president Bill Byrne stated about the soon to be professional basketball league.

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<sup>1</sup> Sauerberg, George. “WBL Set to Make History,” Milwaukee Journal, (University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee Does Scrapbook, Wisconsin Historical Society. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 178.)

## THE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL LEAGUE

### Bar Talk and the Beginning

Some of the best ideas come at random moments in time, sometimes at coffee shops, others while sitting at the bar talking to your friends. The Women's Professional Basketball League was no exception. Bill Byrne, who became the president and commissioner of the league, left his office one night and headed to the local sports bar where he was meeting six other sports enthusiasts like himself. The idea of a professional basketball league for women had excited Byrne for quite some time and he wanted to ask his friends what they thought. Like most people need a few drinks before they gain up enough confidence to say something, Byrne drank a few and asked them what they thought of such a league. To no avail, the conversation was over before it started and they were not impressed with the idea. Byrne believed the league was going to thrive because he began to see an increase in interest with girls and basketball. When he drove around town he saw more and more girls shooting hoops on playgrounds and more girls taking up the sport at all levels. Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), high school, and college crowds grew larger and larger. Despite being laughed at by his six friends, Byrne called in his staff and the league began its formation.<sup>2</sup>

There was a lot of hype and aspiration for the new women's basketball league. A spokesperson for the league stated that salaries will range from \$8,000 to 25,000, averaging less than \$15,000. The idea was that the average girl would be paid at least \$50 for the opening game and then \$100 for every game she suits up for after that.<sup>3</sup> Also in that same article written by George Sauerberg of the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, there were hopes to have twenty-four to thirty

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<sup>2</sup> Karra Porter. *Mad Seasons: the Story of the First Women's Professional Basketball League, 1978-1981*. (Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 2006,) 11.

<sup>3</sup> Sauerberg, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

teams in the league within the first five years and at least 10,000 season ticket holders.<sup>4</sup> Like many new ideas, among those who believed in the WBL, there were also people who doubted the league. Many people across the nation felt the league was premature and should have taken more time to develop and not rush into producing the league. They felt that a professional league would have done better if they had waited until after girl's college basketball was more popular. People were just beginning to warm up to the college level and then to spring the professional level on them was hasty. The next step for Byrne was to create a logo for the league and to drop the 'P' in WPBL to keep with the three letter acronyms like the NBA, National Basketball Association, and the NFL, National Football League, "If they can do it, we can do it," Byrne explained his reasoning. Karen Logan, both a player in the WBL and a league representative, began promoting the WBL by challenging Jerry West, a superstar in the NBA playing for the Los Angeles Lakers, to a game of H-O-R-S-E (a copy-cat skill shooting game between two people) which was won by Logan. Support was on the rise. Jason Frankfort, former stock broker, had planned a twelve-team, six-month, and sixty-two-game schedule for the league on his own time.<sup>5</sup> It would all soon come together for Byrne, his staff, and the many supporters. In January 1978, Byrne's group of professionals placed an advertisement in the *Wall Street Journal* saying: "The Women's Professional Basketball League will begin play in 1978-79 and now has membership and territorial right investments available. Evidence from national research and market studies indicates the WBL has strong growth potential for its program which includes national marketing and television exposure."<sup>6</sup> On June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1978, Milwaukee became a franchise in the league and on the 20<sup>th</sup> the Does became one of the official charter members. The

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Porter, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 13.

one question that surrounded the entire league as well as the Milwaukee Does was, ‘where will the money come from?’ It did not take long for the Does to find a financial commitment because on June 22<sup>nd</sup> Robert Peters became that commitment. The next business step for the team was to find players and on July 1<sup>st</sup> Cheryl Clark, from the All-American Redheads basketball team, became the first to sign on with the Does. Like all other professional sports leagues, the WBL would hold its draft (an event that takes place before the season starts to select players to the teams) on July 18<sup>th</sup> in New York City. A month later, the Milwaukee Does held their first ever try-out camp from August 19<sup>th</sup> through the 22<sup>nd</sup>. After all of this came together and was said and done, on September 25<sup>th</sup> tickets went on sale for the December 9<sup>th</sup> inaugural game. The first ever game was in Mecca Arena, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and featured the Milwaukee Does taking on the Chicago Hustle. “Until now, a woman basketball player’s career ended with graduation from college. It’s the girls in high school now who are the ones who will be really successful in this league,” stated George Chrisman Jr.<sup>7</sup> The fact of the matter is no one would be successful in the league from 1978-1981.

Who are the Does?

By the first official meeting of the league, Byrne had six secured franchise commitments for the WBL: Chicago, Iowa, Milwaukee, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Fetherolf from Washington, D.C. The only problem with just six teams was a bylaw enforced by officials that stated the minimum number of teams needed was eight. Byrne was given time to find two more teams and he came across many potential investors. Five businessmen in Tampa were interested but changed their minds. An owner of an x-rated movie theatre had put down a deposit but could not finalize the deal. In San Francisco, investors were intrigued by the league and had the money

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<sup>7</sup> Sauerberg, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

to go through with the deal, but they decided to wait until next year. After some time, the final two teams would be Houston and New York, putting the league at the minimum number of teams needed to get the season underway. A minor setback occurred with the team from Washington D.C. and the franchise fell through but league officials transferred the team to Dayton. When the season tipped off on December 9<sup>th</sup>, the eight teams in the league were – the Chicago Hustle, Dayton Rockettes, Houston Angels, Iowa Cornets, Minnesota Fillies, New Jersey Gems, New York Stars, and the Milwaukee Does.<sup>8</sup>

The initial coach that started but did not finish with the team was Wisconsin native Candace Klinzing. The Does actually went through five different coaches over the course of one season, the most by any team in the league. The original roster was made up of seventeen women from all over the nation, but by the season opener the roster was down to thirteen. The originals were Marguerite Keely from Wichita State, Brenda Pitts from Alabama, Cindy Henderson from Southwest Missouri, Terri Conlin from Michigan, Joanne Smith from Arizona State, Lynda Gehrke from Colorado, Gerry Lynn Booker from Benedict College, Heidi Nestor from UCLA, Sarah Williams from Southeastern Louisiana, Cindy Lundberg from Eastern Kentucky, Dori Zwieg from Watertown, Barbara Hostert from the All-American Redheads, Kathy DeBoer from Michigan State, Cheryl Clark from the All-American Redheads, Brenda Dennis from Marshall, Cindy Ellis from Illinois State and last but not least, Sheila Sullivan from Mississippi.<sup>9</sup> Karen Logan wondered, “There were a handful of players that I thought had fantastic skills but were there enough good players?”

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<sup>8</sup> Porter, 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Milwaukee Does Program, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

Most of the women that became players in the league were coming out of retirement and quit the jobs they had. Not many of the original women across the league came from college because some of the top senior collegiate athletes turned down the WBL for Olympic glory.<sup>10</sup> Ann Platte from Western Michigan was working at a Stop-N-Go that had been held up three times before coming to the WBL.<sup>11</sup> For most of these girls it was a chance of a lifetime to play basketball at the professional level and many of them were willing to do anything for that opportunity. These women were dedicated to the game of basketball and also to the WBL itself. For the women of the WBL who left everything they had to play the game they loved, it's appalling to know the community did not put forth a similar attitude.

#### Game On

December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1978 was a night of firsts for the WBL, the city of Milwaukee and the Does: the first-ever women's professional basketball game, the first women's professional basketball team in Milwaukee and the first game of the first season for the WBL and the Does. At this time in history Jimmy Carter was president, gas was at sixty-three cents per one gallon, and the reigning Most Valuable Player in the NFL was Quarterback Terry Bradshaw. Ticket prices for the game were on average five dollars and a collector's program was priced at two dollars.<sup>12</sup> Mecca Arena was chosen as the site for the first game of the WBL because of Milwaukee's history with first games; being host of the first professional baseball game in 1869, first football game in 1895, and first men's basketball in 1896.<sup>13</sup> Local papers had mentioned the game and where it was being held but the *Sporting News* never mentioned it. Jill Lieber of the

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<sup>10</sup> Sauerberg, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

<sup>11</sup> Porter, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Milwaukee Does Program, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

<sup>13</sup> Jill Lieber, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

*Milwaukee Sentinel* pointed out that many major broadcast stations and media powerhouses were present to capture the historic moment: *CBS, NBC news, ABC sports, Sports Illustrated, Time, Glamour, New York Times, and Newsday*.<sup>14</sup> The stadium was rocking with 7,824 in attendance to see the Does take on the Hustle from Chicago. Starting for the Milwaukee Does was point guard-Brenda Dennis, shooting guard-Joanne “Baby J” Smith, forward-Margaurite Keely, forward-Kathleen DeBoer, and center-Lynda Gehrke. Starting for the Chicago Hustle were Karen Logan, Rita Easterling, Elizabeth Galloway, Debra Waddy-Rossow, and Susan Digitale.<sup>15</sup> Twenty-six seconds after the 1:44 p.m. tip-off, the Does’ Smith had scored the first two points in history by hitting a mid-range jumper from the left side of the floor. The game went back and forth and in the end the Chicago Hustle came away with the win. Rita Easterling, WBL’s first Most Valuable Player, scored fourteen points, had twenty-one assists, and gathered nine rebounds. The one disappointment of the game would come from the Milwaukee Does display at the free-throw line, missing twenty free throws.<sup>16</sup> After the game Logan exclaimed, “Everybody says history was made here today, but it’s not history unless we’re all still here three to four years from now. If we’re not here next year, what is it all worth?”<sup>17</sup>

Fans’ feelings varied when asked what they thought of the game. In Bob Berghaus’ article from the *Milwaukee Journal*, Bill Lynch of Milwaukee said, “I got free tickets, but I think I’d come back and buy a cheap seat. I’d rather see the NBA, but this will do when free tickets are available.” Mike Schulte stated, “I just wanted to come to be here for the first time. I wouldn’t pay to come back. It’s not worth it.” Upon walking around at halftime, Berghaus

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Porter, 16-17.

<sup>16</sup> Porter, 20-21

<sup>17</sup> Tom Enlund, “Opener Does it for Fans,” *Milwaukee Journal*, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

overheard two high school girls saying they were bored and would go back in to watch if it got exciting in the fourth quarter. Other guys said they were just there to watch the girls run up and down the floor.<sup>18</sup> Public attendance was the driving force of the WBL, but the only problem was a driver was hard to find.

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<sup>18</sup> Bob Berghaus, "Fan Feelings Vary on Does," Milwaukee Journal, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

### Public Appeal

Sports teams need fans, it's a must. "It is the interest of the fans and their attendance at our games that ultimately helps pay the bills, including salaries," was a statement published in the Chicago Hustle's handbook.<sup>19</sup> After an amazing debut of 7,800 and then some fans at the season opener, fan attendance began to dwindle and organizations began to come up with new ways to draw fans to the seats. Promotions, discounted tickets, honoring of players, anything that would increase attendance was sought out by the Milwaukee Does. Some of the time it worked, but when the team continued its losing ways and dismal play, attendance and confidence fell more and more.

The second game headlines of the Does newly born existence read, "Does Soar but Crowd Falls to 600."<sup>20</sup> The total amount of paid tickets was 1,561, however, almost one thousand decided not to show up and watch the Does get their first victory over the Dayton Rockettes. Even more interesting was the front office's decision to make a change at the head coach position. George Nicodemus became the third head coach of the team. Coach Adams left the team before the season started due to a health issue detrimental to her performance and Coach Klingzing was fired after the Does' poor start. The next two games were extremely detrimental to the team's image and the battle was no longer on the court but off the court. In game three of the season, 678 fans showed up to witness one of the Does worst shooting displays in their two-year history. To start the game, the Does' shot a pitiful 13.6% from the floor in the first quarter and ended the game shooting just 23.5%. The battle for fans became more important

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<sup>19</sup> Porter, 82.

<sup>20</sup> Sauerberg, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

than the battle in the standings.<sup>21</sup> After game four, the Does had one win to three losses, and attendance was just over 1,500 but the play of the Does and Angels was still hard on the eyes, both teams combined for eighty-seven turnovers. The season continued down the same path of defeat and sloppy play. Attendance was still on the decline, the Does fell to one and ten. Attendance fell from 1,482 to a disappointing 641, and another coaching change. Now stepping in for the Does at head coach was General Manager Gene DeLisle, the fourth person in eleven games to become the head coach and he was not to be the last before the season ended.

As the season went on, new ideas to draw larger crowds became inevitable. With a record of three and twelve, and crowds averaging less than six hundred people, the Does were the laughing stock of the league. A “Scout’s Day” crowd of 2,659 brought a victory to the Does again. Other attendance-driven promotions were “Tavern Night,” “Student Day” where admission was just \$2.50 for college and high school students, and a “Community Support Night” that lowered prices to \$5 for reserved (better) seats, and \$4 and \$2 for general admissions. On one night, the Milwaukee Does honored one of their own, Joanie Smith. “All individuals whose last name is Smith will be admitted free.”<sup>22</sup> Changes were being made everywhere to break out of the current slump of the Does. At four and eleven, the Does made a trade to get the WBL’s top scorer Brenda Chapman of the Minnesota Fillies. In the transaction the Does lost Kathy DeBoer who was involved in an altercation with Coach DeLisle. In an article by Jill Lieber, “Does Players Blast Bosses,” it was made clear that DeLisle needed to be ousted from head coach and someone with a basketball mindset was necessary. DeLisle had apparently overridden all of the coaches that preceded him and encouraged players to break training rules.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Enlund, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

He also showed up to practice with liquor on his breathe. “It’s a screwed up organization and it’s going to set women’s sports back twenty years,” said DeBoer. “There is no way we are safe. We are at the mercy of the front office and [Gene] has announced that he knows nothing about basketball, never seen girls play.”<sup>23</sup> DeBoer went on to say that she was going to be happy in Minnesota and she had no bitter feelings towards Milwaukee, hoping that things worked out there. Twenty-two games into the season, things got get better for the Does. With a record of six and sixteen, the Does made their fourth and final change at the head coach position. Julia Yeater was fired by the Minnesota Fillies after coaching them to a record of seven and eight and became the Does fifth coach in their first season. In the Does final twelve games under Yeater, the team managed to win five more games but lost seven, to put them at eleven and twenty-three, second to last in the WBL. The only team to do worse than the Does was the New Jersey Gems, finishing with nine wins to twenty-five losses. Gerry Lynn Booker, forward for the Milwaukee Does, stated at the end of the season that, “It’s really been an experience. But I think we’ve made a big accomplishment showing that women can play professional basketball.”<sup>24</sup> George Sauerberg stated in an article of his that the Does’ club needed stability in the front office if the women on the court are to be successful – and if anyone is going to come and watch them. Not knowing what to expect led to substandard support and attendance.<sup>25</sup> With the first season in the history books, the Does made it through without filing for bankruptcy, but accumulated \$200,000 of debt. Money was hard to come by and was a large part of why the Does and the WBL suffered immensely.

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<sup>23</sup> Lieber, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

<sup>24</sup> Enlund, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

<sup>25</sup> Sauerberg, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

## Show Me the Money

Headlines were reading, “Does Franchise Hanging by Thin Financial Thread,” “More Money Woes for Troubled Does,” wrote Tom Enlund of the *Milwaukee Journal*, “Does may be Nearing Extinction,” wrote Don Kausler Jr. of the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, and “Doe\$ Woe\$,” wrote Susan Shemanke of the *Milwaukee Journal*. “What did the papers say?” Coach Yeater asked. “That some of the Does’ checks have been bouncing? I haven’t even tried cashing any of mine yet. Maybe I’ve been working all this time for nothing.”<sup>26</sup> One thing was for certain within the Does organization and that was the constant issue with money. Charlene McWhorter once said, “I haven’t been paid since I’ve been in the league.” Whether it was late payment or no payment, bouncing checks and rising debt plagued the Does every step of the way until their death. No matter how bad money problems got, the women of the WBL still showed up to play, because many of them just wanted to play the game they loved. “The only thing wrong with this league are common sense and dollars and sense,” said Butch van Breda Kolff, NBA star and coach and also a coach in the WBL. This coming after a fine of \$75 was given to a player in the WBL for a technical foul. “The fine for a technical foul in the NBA, where the average salary at the time exceeded \$100,000, was \$75. The fine for a technical foul in the WBL, where the average salary was closer to \$10,000, was - \$75.”<sup>27</sup>

Most women in the WBL just wanted to play basketball so bad that they were willing to do anything just to play. “I drove an hour and a half in and an hour and a half home every night,” Kathy Solana of the New Jersey Gems said once about going to and from practice. Joanie Smith of the Does missed the bus once and drove to the game in Iowa by herself, showing

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<sup>26</sup> Special to the Sentinel, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

<sup>27</sup> Porter, 72.

up with two minutes left in the third quarter. It was the same all across the league, money was a problem and there were not many solutions. Paydays came and went, but instead of checks, the Metros were given cash so they had money in their pockets. The desire to play the game they loved allowed team owners to take advantage of the players, “Sometimes just the first couple of checks would clear,” Muffet McGraw of the California Dreams recalled. Some players would rush to the banks just to be one of the first ones to cash their checks so they did not have to worry about it bouncing. Organizations were doing anything to save a buck or two. When flying from city to city a team might save costs by flying the team on standby. The Met center in Minnesota set the temperature at fifty-five degrees. Margaurite Keely of the Does did not start the game but started a trend on the bench by coming out with gloves on her hands.<sup>28</sup>

For some players, getting traded to other teams proved to be quite an eye-opening experience. The San Francisco Pioneers flew to all their games because they had the money. When Anita Ortega was traded from the Pioneers to the Minnesota Fillies, she had no idea how drastic things would change. “I think that’s ridiculous. I don’t think that’s a sign of a professional team,” Ortega said in response to having to ride in a vehicle eight hours to a game and then eight hours back after the game. The life of a woman in the WBL was nothing of a luxury many of them thought it would be. Most of the women needed to work a part-time job just to make extra money on the side to survive. Many took up jobs like sales clerks, insurance salesperson, substitute teacher, or work in a warehouse of a local florist; anything that would allow them to be away for days at a time to play basketball.<sup>29</sup> Some of the players shared a one-bedroom apartment just to have somewhere cheap to live. One slept on the living room

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 74.

floor and the other on the dining room floor with sleeping bags.<sup>30</sup> The women were living a second-class lifestyle with no sign of a professional's life of luxury. Some women would do it again, "If I had to go back and do it again, I would, because I think you've got to suffer through those hard times to get to the good times," Carol Chason of the Nebraska Wranglers stated.<sup>31</sup> For the Does however, the money issues were undoubtedly due to their General Manager, Gene DeLisle and attendance.

From the first season to the second, DeLisle ran up debt and continued to miss payment deadlines. During the second season, DeLisle amassed an estimated debt of \$350,000. When the debt was this high, DeLisle looked into the possibility of getting a loan from a bank because the cost of running the team was greater than initially calculated. "DeLisle has been involved in at least seven financial court cases in Milwaukee County and ten financial court cases in Waukesha County since 1969. There are currently four delinquent Wisconsin state tax warrants active against him and the United States Department of Internal Revenues has issued a federal tax lien against him."<sup>32</sup>

When DeLisle finally resigned for the better of the Does and the city of Milwaukee, not only was the total debt amount released, he was also paid for six months after resignation. Some of the key bills the Does owed were: \$20,000 to Aquarius Productions for advertisements, between \$8-9,000 to Semrau Advertisement Art Studios for artwork, \$200 to Limousine Service, \$413 to Handicab for transportation, and \$3,730 to Laabs Medical Supply Company and

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>32</sup> Enlund, Milwaukee Journal, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

Milwaukee X-ray Company for physical therapy and rehabilitation equipment.<sup>33</sup> The debt continued to rise and signs of help were nowhere to be found. Does officials were being laid off, Does front office asked for more time to pay debts, they did everything they could to avoid bankruptcy. It would not end there because the players had enough too. The Does players had given the owner Bob Peters an ultimatum, “We told him we want \$1,000 each or were not playing.”<sup>34</sup> Coach Yeater supported the women, she could not justify forcing them to play because the \$1,000 demanded by the team was for the ten games they played and were unpaid. They were eventually paid and so too was some of the debt. The Does needed between \$100,000-150,000 to avoid folding and going under. In an article by Don Kausler Jr., “For Present, Does are in the Money,” the Does came into some money from contributions by the city. “One person has pledged \$10,000, another passed a hat around a Milwaukee factory and raised \$900,” it was all up to the public now in order for the Does to make it.<sup>35</sup> Not only did the public need to help, new owner Herb Shoenherr was the sole owner of the Does and had no financial support from investors. “I don’t think they were in over their heads in what they expected to invest financially, I think they were in over their heads in what they expected to make in revenue,” Does supporter Jan Doleschal believes. “There was nothing to indicate that this was going to be a success.”<sup>36</sup> Without money, the Milwaukee Does eventually fell even after changing their name to the Milwaukee Express after their second season in the WBL. Money was not the only item on the laundry list of things to do for the Does and the WBL.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Enlund, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

<sup>35</sup> Kausler, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

<sup>36</sup> Porter, 242.

## What the WBL Needed

In “WBL rumblings may shake Does,” an article by Don Kausler, Bill Byrne pointed out, “We need more ‘heavy’ (wealthy) people in the league... people who realize you don’t put in a dime and expect to get back a million (dollars).”<sup>37</sup> While the WBL was struggling to make it, Karen Logan was in the process of creating the Ladies Professional Basketball Association in southwestern United States. In Tom Enlund’s article called “And the Circus goes on... Another Women’s League?,” Logan made it clear this league was going to learn and capitalize on the mistakes of the WBL and the mishandling of money. Unfortunately, the LPBA would not make it either. Aside from money, the WBL was losing its appeal and its support, primarily from the women of the WBL themselves.

Mary Stanislow said the women’s league needed stars. The best players coming out of college were hanging up their high tops and choosing the domesticated lifestyle. To the public, it did not matter who was out there playing because it would not have been good enough for the society of that era. “But we live in a chauvinistic society. People like to see seven-footers running up and down the court dunking the ball,” Dean Meminger, former NBA all-star and New York Stars head coach pointed out. He would go on to say that women’s basketball had the potential to prosper but it needed a solid base at the high school level. “The pros aren’t made in college. They’re made in high school. That’s where the best coaches are. And that’s where women’s basketball has to be built.”<sup>38</sup> Dave Wohl, coach of the Milwaukee Bucks at the time, commented on Bill Byrne’s style of running the WBL, “There’s very poor leadership right now. I really don’t think he knows what he’s doing. Everything he’s touched has either folded or left

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<sup>37</sup> Kausler, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

<sup>38</sup> Enlund, “Dean has Dream,” University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

a ton of bills behind. He's definitely lacking in organization."<sup>39</sup> In that same article on whether or not the WBL will last, the author, Kausler, went on to suggest that unless radical changes are made in the WBL, he did not think that there would be a third year to the league. Well, little to his knowledge the league would make it to a third and final year but just another year of disappointment came of it.

One problem that became public and was mentioned before was the attempt to get the Does name out to the public by taking them to the bars. Public Relations director Chuck Bekos told coach Klinzing that there was nothing wrong with the idea, "This is how we are going to get the word out that these are the girls."<sup>40</sup> Bar hopping was part of Milwaukee's marketing strategy and Klinzing remembered why they were the worst team in the league. "They would park the limousine, bring the girls into this bar, introduce them as the Milwaukee Does, the guys would buy them all drinks, and they would sit around and talk with different people in the bar." She went on to say that they would go on and on from bar to bar and do the same thing. The women would then barely show up to practice and not be able to do anything. When the team came forward and stated that the organization was messed up they were not kidding. The Does were one of the few teams who did not make it through the last season in the WBL. Perhaps if they had someone running the team with some desire to succeed they would have. However, instead of keeping the money in their pockets they found ways to spend it at the bars. Perhaps maybe the next women's professional basketball team to come to Milwaukee will do better and be a bigger hit than the first one.

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<sup>39</sup> Kausler, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

<sup>40</sup> Porter, 140.

## FUTURE

### Conclusion

With the Milwaukee Does out of the WBL, players were disappointed because they felt that Milwaukee was a gold mine for success. “I don’t think there was any other franchise like ours,” Heidi Nestor believed. “That’s what’s so sad.” To coach Yeater, “There had been a lack of professionalism, a lack of responsibility here.”<sup>41</sup> Milwaukee has been a big part of sports history from the start with the city’s first baseball game in 1869, first football game in 1895, and first basketball game in 1896 and again with the WBL in 1978. It was thought by many supporters that there is no reason why the Does could not have made it in the WBL. It just so happens that it was not just in Milwaukee but the WBL fell apart across the nation and inevitably collapsed and dissolved into the history books as the first women’s basketball league. So what killed the WBL? For some observers, the league went under due to poor management, disinterested media, the boycott of the 1980 Olympics, and the general lack of interest in women’s sports. Each one played their own role and had their own impact.<sup>42</sup> For the Milwaukee Does, it was the consistent change in power at the front office, mishandling of money, and a lack of support from the city of Milwaukee. Investors were limited and media coverage was lame. Even with all the madness that evolved during the WBL’s existence, there were still hopes for the future and good memories to be told. “It was discouraging to have nothing when it all ended,” Molly Bolin said. “I had no job and I had no money. All I had were a lot of good memories.”<sup>43</sup> For those that loved to play the game and played it despite all the

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<sup>41</sup> Vince Sweeney, Milwaukee Journal, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Scrapbook.

<sup>42</sup> Porter, 238.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 270.

hardships and sacrifices endured, playing was all they needed. The league itself may have ended, but their memories will always live on from one story to the next.

#### Future Work

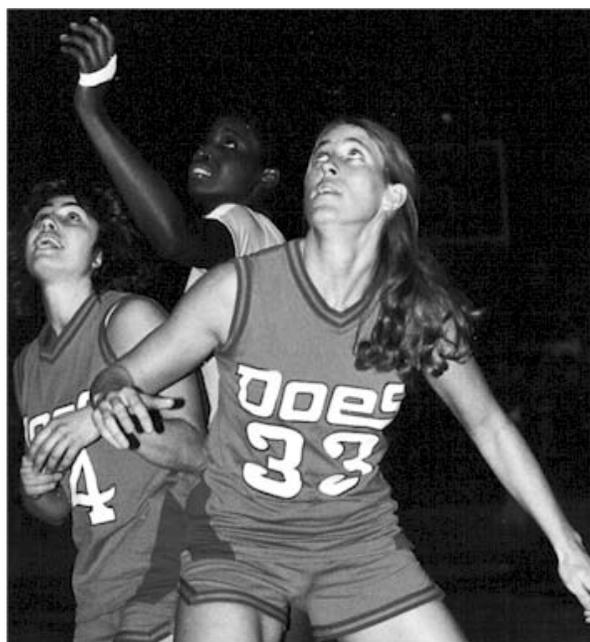
The preceding research is a small sample of the Milwaukee Does and the WBL. Some ideas for future work would be to locate some of the Does' players, coaches, or people who were in the organization's front office. It would be nice to get more background on what happened in the two seasons with the Does. Most of the information that would be insightful is that directly from the people who were a part of the team and its existence. First person accounts are the information that is most credible and most entertaining. It is hard to assume what life was like during the season and to get the real stories would be enlightening. Not only just the Does, but the other teams in the surrounding areas like the Chicago Hustle and the Minnesota Fillies could be researched and given a spot in history. Researching the teams now provides little information that is credible or worth looking at because it is usually brief and most likely a third party report. Karra Porter has taken the biggest step in providing the basics of the first women's professional basketball league from 1978-1981 and now it's up to historians like me and others who are thrilled to research sports history to continue that path. There is still much to be learned about the WBL itself and the Milwaukee Does. The only problem is getting people to have more interest in the subject; a problem known all too well by the WBL and the Does.

## NOTES AND PHOTOS

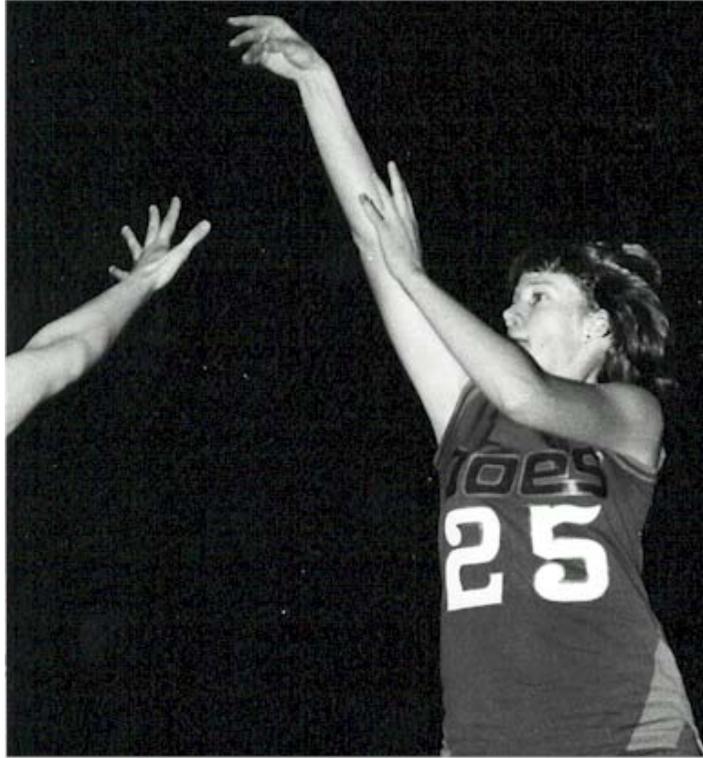
### Pictures of the Milwaukee Does



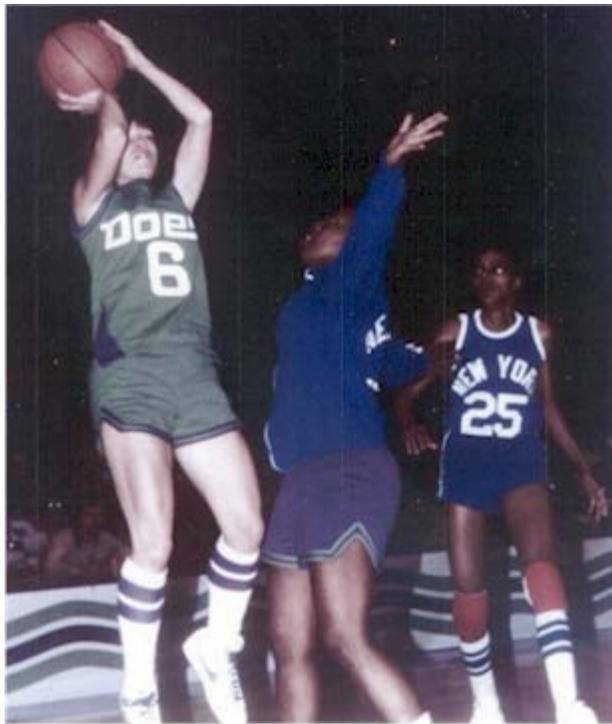
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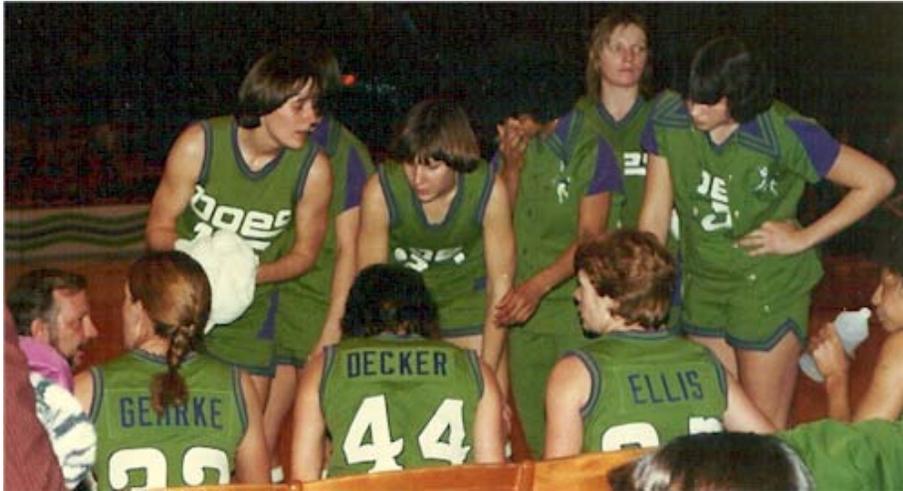
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WBL Memories, “Milwaukee Does 1978-1980,” (*Photos courtesy of Sherwin Fischer and Barb Hostert,*) <http://www.wblmemories.com/milwaukee.htm> (accessed April 15th, 2010).