

**Courant.com**  
**August 5, 2007**

## **Fever Helpless Without Catchings**

By **LORI RILEY**

While her Indiana teammates shot around before the game Saturday night, Tamika Catchings sat in the locker room at Mohegan Sun Arena, working on rehabilitating her left foot with a red exercise band.

"It's coming along," Catchings said. "Not as quickly as I would like it to, but we've made some huge strides and continue to do a lot every day to try to get back on the court."

Catchings sustained a partial tear in the plantar fascia of the foot during a July 20 loss to the Shock. She went to pass the ball, planted her left foot and felt a pop.

Before the pain hit, she thought it was her orthotic slipping. Then she realized that it was a little more serious.

"Any time you get hurt, initially, it's the worst pain and then it subsides," she said. "That's what I was hoping, like, 'It hurts really bad right now, but maybe by the time I run down ...' And then I got a rebound and that's when I was like, 'OK, I can't step. I can't run.'"

She will likely be out at least another week, but hopes to return for the playoffs. In her absence, Indiana is 1-6. The Fever ended a six-game losing streak Tuesday night with a 66-57 victory against Washington.

That streak comes in stark contrast to the rest of the season. On July 18, two days before Catchings was injured, the Fever beat Chicago 75-74 to boost their record to 16-4.

"It was frustrating, but we came back, got out of the slump, beat Washington," Catchings said. "That was great for the whole team as far as its confidence. Hopefully, we can forget about the six games and move forward and focus on what we have left."

Indiana (17-11) has six games left, including another against the Sun Aug. 15. The Sun are 3-0 against the Fever and would like nothing better than to leapfrog over them into second place, which would give them home-court advantage for the first round of the playoffs.

And right now, there's nothing Catchings can do about it, except keep working on her rehab.

"I hate sitting on the bench," she said. "I hate being put in a position where I have no say and no control as far as helping the team out, except for cheering and trying to get people motivated. But that's what I've been trying to do - continue to be a leader on the sidelines and support my teammates."

## **Mercury Rising**

Diana Taurasi's Phoenix Mercury finally clinched a playoff spot, after a six-year drought. Taurasi, who won three national championships with UConn, came close the last few years with the Mercury but fell short each time. The Mercury clinched Friday without playing a game when Los Angeles lost at Houston.

At 18-11, the Mercury are tied atop the Western Conference and have won six of seven, including an 84-79 victory Thursday night at San Antonio. Taurasi had 24 points on 6-for-13 shooting from the three-point line.

"Whatever we were doing, she said, 'Get on my back. Here we go,'" Phoenix coach Paul Westhead told The Arizona Republic. "The only thing we could say is, 'Let her do it.' She came down later in the game and took what must have been a 40-footer and we said, 'Go ahead. Take another one.'"

That sounds familiar to UConn fans - except maybe for the "take another one" part.

Over the last five games, Taurasi has averaged 22.6 points. She is averaging 18.9 points, fourth in the league.

## **Willingham Can't Live This Down**

LeCoe Willingham didn't really want to talk about the fender-bender she was involved in with Nykesha Sales' car Thursday night. Apparently, she has been taking some good-natured jabs from her teammates about the accident, which occurred on an I-95 North exit ramp. No one was injured and Willingham, who was given a ticket for following too closely, described the accident as minor. Katie Douglas and her husband were passengers in Sales' car. "We're fine. My car's fine," Willingham said Saturday night. "They just won't let me forget it." ... MVP candidate and Storm forward-center Lauren Jackson had a left groin strain and left the game in the second quarter Friday night in Seattle's 82-76 loss to Sacramento. Jackson told the Seattle Times after the game that the injury was "probably day -to-day" and "I think it'll be OK."