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WNBA 'TRUTH' IN ADVERTISING?

By Tom Hoffarth

The voice belongs to Candace Parker, the newest member of the WNBA's Sparks.

"I'm sorry, but you couldn't pay me to watch women's basketball."

Uh, excuse me . . .

"Nothing exciting ever happens. Look at the WNBA. The league has stayed the same for 10 years. There's no new blood. What kind of future does that league have? None that I can see." Did someone lock her up in one of those confessional closets on a reality show and forget to let her out?

It's TV, all right, but only an attention-grabbing commercial for the women's pro league that the NBA's marketing department has helped push out to the networks starting with tonight's playoff games on ESPN.

After Parker recites the lines, the words that show up on the screen at the end: "She wouldn't say that. Would you?"

Two more spots that include Detroit's Cheryl Ford ("Let's be honest, your rec league team would smoke us chicks without working up a sweat") and Indiana's Tamika Catchings ("No offense, but women's basketball is a joke") are part of the "Expect Great" campaign, conceived and produced by the NBA's Goody, Silverstein & Partners firm, that could be a slam dunk in helping debunk some myths. Some of which may have started with a snappy campaign when the WNBA started that boasted "We got next."

"It comes out of research that tells us that, while there's great potential to grow females and children in our game, there were misconceptions about the level of play and athleticism among some men," said Hilary Shaev, the VP of marketing for the NBA.

"We also found out that men typically are the gatekeepers for sports conversation and consumption. So combine the fact that in most cases guys control the remote control, and some aren't convinced the level is as good as it is, the result was a strategy geared toward them."

In the end, this is supposed to get those hey-men to reconsider their attitude about the WNBA, which should then trickle down to their female family members.

But with the content sounding so anti-WNBA, could it backfire.

"There's always a possibility for various interpretations of anything," said Shaev, "but the way the spots are designed, when you hear those words and see the expressions on the players' faces, you're sticking around to see why she's saying it.

"The players were great about this, too. They completely understood the approach. Some of it is things they've heard said directly to them."