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Seattle wins final exhibition 75-64, but final roster not yet done

By Jayda Evans

It was supposed to be an exhibition finale.

But the Storm looked like a team still fine-tuning for its May 17 season opener when it played host to Indiana at KeyArena on Saturday night.

Slowly collecting the final pieces of its roster with players returning from overseas play, Seattle was disjointed on offense and shaky on defense until the fourth quarter when it pulled together for a 75-64 victory.

Center Yolanda Griffith had 14 points and nine rebounds. Yet, the game was more about the push for who will fill the final two roster slots.

"It might be more difficult right now [than before the game]," first-year Storm coach Brian Agler said of the final roster moves. "All of those people that are in that mix played well. We'll go [practice] again today and keep talking and see how it plays out. I'm not going to put a timetable [on the final cuts] because I want to make sure."

Teams do not have to submit their final rosters until Friday afternoon. Agler expects to have a 12-player roster — one on the inactive list — because the loss of veteran center Janell Burse freed some salary cap space for the team.

Players on the bubble are rookie guards Kimberly Beck and Daphanie Kennedy, twins Doneeka Lewis and Roneeka Hodges, and former Washington standout Kristen O'Neill.

Brazilian post Kelly Santos appears to have secured a roster position due to Burse's foot injury, which will cause her to miss the entire 2008 season.

"All I can do is hope for the best," said Kennedy, who played eight minutes against the Fever. "I have some of the least experience, so I'm a little nervous. I'm not going to lie about that. But sometimes it's good to be nervous."

Utilizing a lineup sprinkled by players fighting to make the final roster, the Storm went on 13-4 run with 9:20 remaining in the game to take a 63-54 lead. Second-year wing Katie Gearlds led with two three-pointers and a dump pass to Ashley Robinson for a layin. Kennedy had a layin and made a free throw while Robinson had a turnaround jumper to finish the scoring during the run.

Beck and trade pickup Hodges played solid defense during the stretch.

"The best part of what happened here is that we've all improved," said Beck, who played 25 minutes. "I'm crossing my fingers and hoping for the best."

The Storm (2-1) was missing co-captains Sue Bird and Lauren Jackson because of overseas commitments. The Fever was without starters Tully Bevilacqua (resting) and Tamika Catchings (injury). Veterans Katie Douglas, Ebony Hoffman, and Tammy Sutton-Brown are all playing overseas.

"I don't see any starters," said first-year Indiana coach Lin Dunn, who began her WNBA career coaching the Storm from 2000-02.

"By the time we get everyone back, we're going to have 72 hours to get ready for the season."

Veteran Sheryl Swoopes started but only played 17 minutes, missing both shot attempts.

She sprained her left ankle during the final drill of Thursday's practice and missed Friday's session. She said she was fine to play, but appeared to favor the foot.

The injury is Swoopes' second during training camp. Returning from offseason back surgery, Swoopes also strained her neck in the opening quarter of the Storm's exhibition game against Sacramento.

"It's sore but I'm good," Swoopes said before the game.

Seattle will have a shared practice with Indiana today and take Monday off.