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Douglas Returns, Helps Rout Sun

By John Altavilla

UNCASVILLE— The past and present of the Connecticut Sun intersected sentimentally Tuesday at Mohegan Sun Arena, the sidebar to their first meeting of the season with their conference rivals, the Indiana Fever.

Just moments after forward Katie Douglas, a linchpin of two Sun conference championships, was kindly welcomed back for the first time since her trade to Indiana, rookie center Sandrine Gruda got a nice reception before her first game for the Sun following her arrival from Europe.

You couldn't blame those who yearned for how things once were.

Douglas (game-high 23 points) and teammate Tan White (15) were the dominant forces behind Indiana's breezy 75-46 win. It was the most lopsided loss in Sun history.

"Once the ball was tipped, my thoughts and emotions [about coming back] kind of went by the wayside," Douglas said.

Douglas scored 14 in the first half. And it wasn't long before the one-time fan favorite, wearing her trademark confident smirk as she exhorted on her team, morphed into a Kara Lawson-like character, booed at every turn. Lindsay Whalen led the Sun (3-1) with 11 points.

"As a competitor and a player that kind of stuff just gets me more amped to prove my game to myself," Douglas said. "These fans were incredible to be when I was here. I've said over and over how great a fan base it is. They love their Sun. They received me well during introductions. I'm thankful for that. But when things didn't start to go their way, I can't say I blame them. It was something I'd expect. I wouldn't want them cheering for me."

So much for the Sun's undefeated season. They were off to their best-ever start by winning their first three games. But after the fun finally came the frustration. They scored fewer than 50 points for the first time since Aug. 1, 2003, when they had 45 against Washington. And their seven in the fourth quarter was a franchise low.

The Sun shot 29.0 percent (18-for-62) while the Fever shot 43.8 percent (32-for-73).

"We were bad at both ends," coach Mike Thibault said. "We were as bad offensively as we were defensively. Their experienced backcourt took us out of a lot of things very quickly. We became very impatient, settled for long jumpers and didn't chase down our misses. We weren't very good."

This was a swift and assertive knockout. The Sun never led and never really seemed into it against the Fever (2-1), who have been without their best player, Tamika Catchings, all season because of a sore Achilles' tendon.

"I'm glad they are jelling without Catch," said Sun forward Tamika Whitmore, who was acquired for Douglas. "But like I told them, look out for us when we come to Indiana."

Perhaps Gruda, 6 feet 4, will control games someday the way Douglas seemed to Tuesday. Gruda's debut was limited to 14

minutes, but she looked as fluid and capable as advertised and had six rebounds.

Gruda made her debut midway through the second quarter and made her first shot 1:26 after entering, a 17-foot jumper which cut the Fever lead to 38-16. But it was one of only eight field goals in the first half for the Sun — they shot 8-for-32 — who had just five offensive rebounds in the half and were outrebounded for the first time this season, 45-34.

Whalen Shares Honor

Whalen and Sophia Young of the San Antonio Silver Stars were named Eastern and Western Conference players of the week. It's the third time Whalen has won the award in her career. Whalen averaged 16.0 points, 4.3 rebounds and 7.0 assists in two games. She scored 21 in Saturday's win over Sacramento.