

Portland Fire take Pride

Portland's new WNBA franchise chooses former Kansas standout Lynn Pride as the seventh pick overall but lose local star Katy Steding in the league's fourth draft

By Landon Hall
The Associated Press

PORTLAND — Draft day was a mixed blessing for the expansion Portland Fire, which got some players it wanted but also lost a valuable one.

Portland, which begins its first WNBA season May 31 against the three-time defending champion Houston Comets, chose Kansas forward Lynn Pride with its first-round selection Tuesday morning.

Pride, a versatile 6-foot-2 player who averaged 17.4 points per game last season, was the No. 7 overall choice in what was considered a weak draft.

"I feel very fortunate that we're going to be able to build this franchise over the long haul with a player the caliber of Lynn Pride," said Fire coach and general manager Linda Hargrove.

Hargrove was hoping that guard Katy Steding, who played high school ball in Lake Oswego and was a member of the Portland Power in the defunct American Basketball League, would be available in the sec-

ond round, when the Fire was due to pick 23rd.

However, Steding was picked by the Sacramento Monarchs late in the first round.

"Katy will do a great job in Sacramento," Hargrove said. "That's a really nice fit for her."

Steding, 32, went to work for the Fire as community liaison

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Linda Hargrove
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general manager

in August 1999, eight months after the ABL folded. She sat out the 1999 WNBA season.

With its second pick, the Fire chose Stacey Thomas, a 5-10 forward from Michigan who averaged 14.5 points last season.

In the third round, with the 39th pick, Portland selected Maxann Reese, a 5-9 guard from Michigan State who averaged 16 points and shot 86 percent from the free throw line.

Rhonda Smith, a 6-8 center, was the team's fourth round pick. She averaged 21.1 points and 7.4 rebounds at Long Beach State, and led the nation with 3.5 blocks per game.

Hargrove said Pride and Thomas will make the team and be asked to contribute immediately. The other two players will have to prove themselves in training camp, which begins May 3.

"I can look at Lynn Pride right now and know she's going to be a defensive star on this team," Hargrove said.

The nucleus of the Fire's roster really was formed during the Dec. 15 expansion draft. That's when the team picked up forward Alisa Burras from Cleveland and guard Sophia Witherpoon, a two-time WNBA All-Star with New York.

Portland still could acquire more players. The league's 16 teams will send their list of desired free agents to the WNBA on Sunday, and the league will assign some to each team. The Fire will also hold open tryouts Saturday and Sunday.

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