

SPORTS

Houston Comets WNBA Most Valuable Player

The WNBA's successful first season ended with the coronation of its first great player.

Cynthia Cooper completed an MVP double, scoring 25 points Saturday as the Houston Comets captured the fledgling league's first championship with a 65-51 victory over the New York Liberty.

Earlier this week, Cooper was named Most Valuable Player after leading the league in scoring. Today, she earned MVP honors in the championship game, establishing herself as the best player in the WNBA.

"This is what it's all about," said Cooper, who scored 14 points in the pivotal second half. "This is the payoff, all of the hard work, the sacrifices that we made all summer. If I could be MVP it was because of the supporting cast I had."

Cooper got some help from Tina Thompson, who scored 18 points and helped hold New York forward Rebecca Lobo to nine on 3-of-8 shooting. The Comets had their best defensive game of the year while holding the Liberty to their second-lowest output.

It was a crowning moment for Cooper, who added a WNBA title to her NCAA championship and Olympic gold medal. She spent more than 10 years playing overseas and has spent the entire season helping her mother battle breast cancer.

"I have been tucked away in Europe for 11 years and my mom hasn't been able to share any special mo-

ment with me," Cooper said. "So the fact that I won two MVP awards, the All-WNBA First Team and win the championship in the inaugural season has been a dream come true. I cannot have imagined that we would have been so successful and it would be such a special moment for me and my mom."

During the season, the Comets lost three of their first seven games to the Liberty, including a pair at home. But they came on strong down the stretch and won the Eastern Conference with an 18-10 record. Houston routed Charlotte in the semifinals.

"When we lost those three games to New York, we went back to the drawing board, we defined roles," Cooper said. "We stayed focused on our goals — make the playoffs, win the Eastern Conference championship and then the eventual WNBA championship. We are not the same team that New York beat at the beginning of the season. We have matured and jelled together and that showed out there on the court."

A 10-0 run early in the second half, during which the Comets held the Liberty scoreless for nearly 6 1/2 minutes, broke open a close game. Thompson had the final four points in the burst, which gave Houston a 40-28 lead with 13:36 remaining.

Lobo's two free throws made it 50-43 with 3:05 remaining, but Janeth Arcain made a 10-footer and Cooper sank two foul shots, rebuilding the advantage to 11 points with 2:16 left.

Cooper made her final eight free throws.

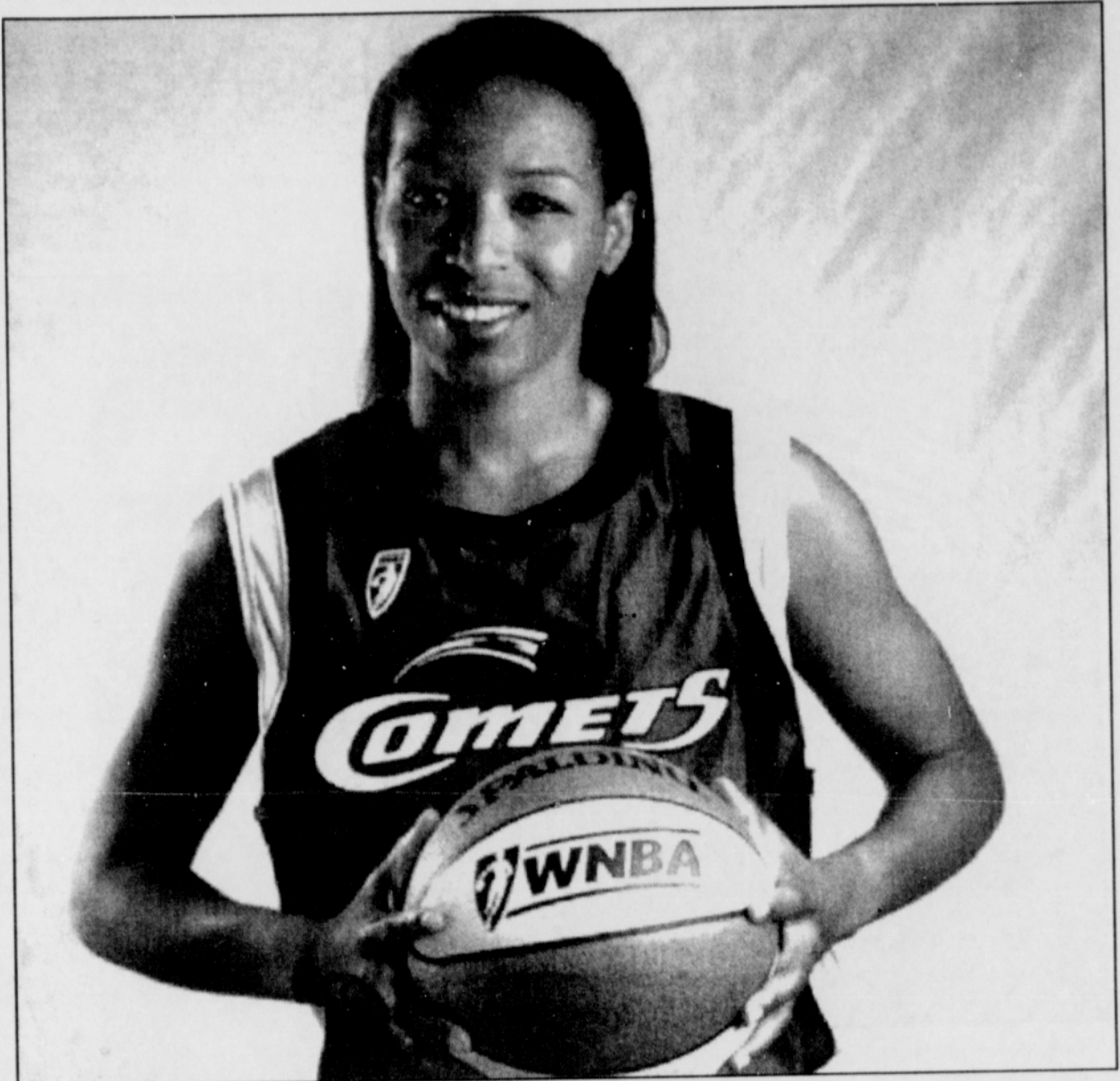
Tammy Jackson had 11 rebounds for the Comets, who turned Houston into "Clutch City" again. The city adopted that nickname during the two-year championship reign of the NBA's Houston Rockets.

"When I moved to Houston, Texas, I never spent a day that I didn't dream about winning the WNBA championship and about how nice it would be," Comets coach Van Chancellor said. "After getting here, it's sweeter than I'd ever dreamed it would be from a personal point of view. I'm so proud for our players."

Kym Hampton had 13 points and 13 rebounds and Vickie Johnson added 12 points for the Liberty, who finished 18-12. They made the playoffs despite losing seven of their last nine games, then regrouped to win their semifinal at Phoenix.

"It's painful," Liberty guard Teresa Weatherspoon said. "It's a very painful loss for us, but at the same time, we really have to be positive about a lot of things that we've done that were so successful, not only for the Liberty organization but for the WNBA itself."

Financed by NBA money and marketed through former college stars and 1996 Olympians Lobo, Sheryl Swoopes and Lisa Leslie, the WNBA exceeded expectations in both attendance and television ratings. The title game drew a sellout crowd of 16,285 to The Summit.



Cynthia Cooper

Cat-quick Swoopes graces new Nike shoe

Sheryl Swoopes has been described as a cat-quick player, panther-like in her ability to lie in wait, then attack with devastating quickness.

Her third signature shoe, the Air Swoopes Zoom, is designed for Swoopes and players like her who are quick and aggressive. (Her first

signature shoe, the first named for a woman, was released in October 1995.)

The Nike Air Swoopes Zoom is fast and low, like a panther making a sudden attack. Zoom Air cushioning in both heel and forefoot acts like the pads on the panther's paw, protecting the foot. And to keep cool when

the action gets hot, designer Aaron Cooper cut away chunks of the upper.

Attacking on the court also takes optimal movement and the Air Swoopes Zoom offers just that.

Now that Sheryl's back on the court with the Houston Comets after having son Jordan in June.

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- ◆ enjoy a challenge;
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Our first class of corps members will serve September through August 1998.

In return for 11 months of service, Corpsmembers receive a stipend of \$9,175, health care insurance, child care allowance, and an educational award of \$4,725 upon service completion.

To be eligible for the 1997-98 service year, applications are due by September 10, 1997. For more information, or to request an application, call us at Portland CLEARCorps 248-5240. Applications may also be picked up at Multnomah County's Northeast Health Center, 5329 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard or The Portland Observer Office, 4747 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.