

◆ The Houston Roundball Review ◆

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BASKETBALL FOR THOUGHT by Kris Gardner, e-mail: KGardner@TheHRR.com

A Losing Battle?

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he Houston Roundball Review will reach a milestone in

October of 2004. The HRR will be 10 years old!

Keeping the business going is still quite a struggle; however, as I've shifted focus from the NBA Draft towards more women's hoops coverage, I'm really beginning to wonder if I should continue covering women's hoops. Interest in women's college basketball is growing across America; however, the city of Houston has been very slow to "catch the wave". Basically, the question I'm asking is "Am I fighting a losing battle?"

As of March 2, the combined records for the University of Houston Lady Cougars and the Rice University Lady Owls 41 - 10 overall and a spectacular 28 - 2 in conference! Unfortunately, barely anyone has noticed. The amount of respect and marketing generated by each team's administration has been very limited. To paraphrase one of my friends and colleagues), *UH and Rice are not in the basketball business*. In truth, the men's teams are not promoted much better; however, the men's teams are pumped up much, much

more than their "sisters in hoops" despite the tremendous success of the women's teams this season. What is the reason for such

fans in the city of Houston as well. The Houston

Comets have a solid season ticket holder fan base; and, for the first seven seasons of the WNBA, the Comets



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sparse promotions?

First, and foremost, I blame the administrators for their lack of promotions and poor marketing efforts. However, I do acknowledge the thought that women's hoops is not a huge revenue producer. Unfortunately, how can women's teams be expected to produce solid revenue if no money is spent in promotions in marketing. The bottom line is the schools have to realize you have to "spend money to make money".

I believe women's basketball is still in its infancy in Houston; however, if nothing is done to promote the product, the success of the teams will be similar to the proverbial "tree falling in the woods".

Next, I must lay blame on the women's basketball

averaged about 9,000 fans per game. Last season, attendance slacked off slightly for a number of reasons: the labor dispute between the league and the players; late start to marketing by the Comets' organization; an injured **Cynthia Cooper**; fans' frustration with the offense and the style of coaching, etc.

However, let's compare the average attendance for a Houston Comets game to the average game attendance for the Lady Owls and the Lady Cougars. The Lady Owls played 14 home games this season. The **total attendance** was **8,279** for an average attendance of **579**. The Lady Cougars played 11 regular season home games

this season. The **total attendance** was **15,656** for an average attendance of **1,423**. Those numbers pale in comparison to the attendance figures for the Comets. Why? I can only assume Comets' fan are either not fans of women's college basketball; do not know about the women's college teams in town; or quite simply, they want to save their hard-earned money for Comets' tickets. The Comets' basketball season ends around September. The college hoops season is from November to early April. Therefore, their is not a scheduling conflict.

Since I am a Houstonian, I know all too well, Houston is a city filled with fair weather fans and people who love to hop on the winner's bandwagon. Sadly, Rice and Houston have concluded their home schedule for this season; so, fans of women's hoops can choose to wait until next year or travel to Fort Worth, TX, this weekend to see the Lady Cougars in the Conference USA Tournament; or, head to Ruston, La, and Dallas, TX to watch the Lady Owls face top ten Louisiana Tech on Thursday and in-state rival Southern Methodist on Saturday.

A women's basketball market exists in Houston; however, without better marketing efforts, I fear the battle will be lost.