

KELSEY PLUM GOES 1ST IN WNBA DRAFT

NEW YORK: Kelsey Plum went first in the WNBA draft Thursday. Then, South Carolina took over. Plum was taken No 1 by the San Antonio Stars. The Washington guard finished her college career with an NCAA-record 3,527 points. The Stars had the worst record last season and held the top pick for the first time in franchise history. "I've been dreaming about it for so long," Plum said. "I'm really excited and grateful for the opportunity and will make the most of it."

It's the second straight year that the Stars have drafted a guard. They took Moriah Jefferson with the No 2 pick last season. Plum played with Jefferson on a USA Basketball Under-18 team and was excited for the chance to play with her again. Chicago drafted Alaina Coates with the second pick. The South Carolina star, the first of three Gamecocks selected in the first round, injured her right ankle in the SEC Tournament and didn't play in the team's run to the national championship.

She still isn't able to really fly because of the injury and risk of blood clots, so she made the nearly 11-hour drive up to New York from South Carolina. She got around the draft on a scooter she affectionately called "scoot, scoot." Coates said she had surgery on the ankle a few weeks ago and doesn't know how long she'll be out. She hopes to be able to play this season.

"For me to go number two with my situation, I'm really excited about that as well," Coates said. "I don't know when I'll be able to play. It's all up to what the doctors say." Dallas took Kentucky forward Evelyn Akhator with the third pick, and the Wings came back with South Carolina's Allisha Gray with the fourth choice. Gray decided to forego her senior year of eligibility and enter the draft a day after the Gamecocks won the title.

'I COULDN'T BE HAPPIER'

Kaela Davis was taken by the Wings at No. 10, meaning the two Gamecocks who had both transferred into South Carolina together and skipped their last year to play in college will be together in Dallas. "It's great to have the connection and familiarity in an unknown situation," said Davis of playing with Gray.

South Carolina coach Dawn Staley was at the draft and thrilled to see her three players get picked. The Gamecocks became just the third school to have three players taken in the opening round, joining Tennessee and UConn. The Huskies had the first three picks in last year's draft. They had no one taken in the first round this year for the first time since 2012. Saniya Chong, the lone senior on the team, was picked by Dallas in the third round. "It's so great to see those three young ladies get a chance to realize their dreams," Staley said. "I couldn't be happier for them."

Northwestern's Nia Coffey went fifth to San Antonio, with Maryland's Shatori Walker-Kimbrough picked sixth by Washington. Atlanta took Brittney Sykes of Syracuse seventh. Brianna Jones of Maryland went to Connecticut with the eighth pick. Chicago used its second pick in the first round to select Tori Jankoska at No. 9. That made for four Big Ten players drafted in the first nine picks.

Sydney Wiese of Oregon State went 11th to Los Angeles and Alexis Jones of Baylor closed out the first round heading to Minnesota. The draft was held in an event space in New York with WNBA President Lisa Borders announcing the picks from a deejay booth, creating a party-like atmosphere although there wasn't the traditional podium and stage for the players to walk up to and greet the president. The league will start its 21st season on May 13 with training camps opening on April 23. The WNBA unveiled a new "Watch me Work" 2017 video on Thursday during the draft. — AP



NEW YORK: Shatori Walker-Kimbrough, left, reacts after being selected as the No. 6 pick in the WNBA basketball draft by the Washington Mystics. — AP



SALT LAKE CITY: San Antonio Spurs center Pau Gasol, right, drives around Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert (27) during the first half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday, April 12, 2017. — AP

THERE WILL BE BIG INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN THE NBA PLAYOFFS

TORONTO: Milwaukee star Giannis Antetokounmpo returns to the playoffs in Toronto today afternoon. Except in Greece, where it'll already be very early Sunday morning. They won't mind staying up late in Athens to watch. Same goes for plenty of other places around the world at this time of year. All eight of the NBA first-round playoff series that start this weekend have international players involved, meaning the game's global reach will be on full display once again. And as NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said at the All-Star break, the league expects the international players to keep coming.

"I grew up in Athens not having much," Antetokounmpo said earlier this season. "And being in the situation and to keep pushing, keep pushing, it's a great feeling because all the hard work I did in my life, it paid off." Now the playoff stage again awaits Antetokounmpo, and plenty of other international players. By the NBA's count, there's 54 - including some with dual citizenship like Cleveland's Kyrie Irving - from 28 different countries set to appear in these playoffs. Here's some of the top international storylines for the postseason:

VAMOS, GASOL

We know a Spanish big man is headed to the second round. San Antonio's Pau Gasol and Memphis' Marc Gasol were on opposite sides in the 2015 All-Star Game, have gone head-to-head a slew of regular-season times - and now the brothers will face off in the playoffs for the first time. The Spurs and Grizzlies are a first-round series in the Western Conference. Once they actually take the floor, the Gasols will become the sixth set of brothers to meet in the postseason, joining the Mikans (George and Ed, 1949, 1950 and 1953), the Kings (Bernard and Albert, 1983), the Persons (Chuck and Wesley, 1996), the Grants (Horace and Harvey, 1999), and the Wrights (Dorell and Delon, 2016).

SIX SPURS

San Antonio has six international players on its roster this season. That's down a few from recent years. The Spurs had nine international players when they won their most recent NBA title in 2014. Some remain, like Manu Ginobili, Patty Mills and Tony Parker. Davis Bertans, Joel Anthony and Pau Gasol

are now in the silver and black as well. While the six Spurs are a lot, it's not the most in these playoffs. Utah and Toronto each have seven international players on their playoff rosters.

FINALS REPRESENTATION

If an international player appears in this year's NBA Finals - almost guaranteed to happen - it would be the 24th consecutive year that at least one player who doesn't hail from the United States got in the title series. There's seven active players in these playoffs with at least one All-Star appearance that the NBA define as being international: Giannis Antetokounmpo, Marc and Pau Gasol, Manu Ginobili, Al Horford, Kyrie Irving and Tony Parker.

VIVA LA FRANCE

Utah's Rudy Gobert and San Antonio's Tony Parker are two of the six French-born players in this postseason, and they'll be asked to carry big roles. Parker enters these playoffs 115 shy of 4,000 postseason points in his career. He'd be the second international player to reach that milestone - after only his longtime and now former San Antonio teammate Tim Duncan (5,172). Parker is also the NBA's all-time international playoff assist leader. And he's third in playoff steals by an international player, behind No. 2 Hakeem Olajuwon - and yet another Spur, No. 1 Manu Ginobili. Gobert is a Defensive Player of the Year candidate for the Jazz, and now gets to make his playoff debut.

THERE ARE OTHERS, TOO

Not all the best international players are in the playoffs. And that speaks to the depth of the foreign influence on the league today. Among players born outside the US, five of the top eight scorers this season didn't reach the postseason. Cleveland's Kyrie Irving was first, Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo was third and Memphis' Marc Gasol was sixth on that list - but No. 2 Andrew Wiggins of Minnesota, No. 4 Goran Dragic of Miami, No. 5 Joel Embiid of Philadelphia, No. 7 Danilo Gallinari of Denver and No. 8 Kristaps Porzingis of New York will all be watching the playoffs from afar. — AP