

Chicago Force gears up for next season

BY ROSS FORMAN

New league, same goal ... welcome to the 2011 Chicago Force season, which kicks off Saturday, April 9, with the season- and home-opener against the Minnesota Machine.

The Force, in its eighth season, is now part of the Women's Football Alliance (WFA), which includes such teams as the Bay Area Bandits, Boston Militia, Dallas Diamonds, DC Divas, Kansas City Tribe, New York Sharks, Pittsburgh Passion and the San Diego Surge—teams that previously played in the Independent Women's Football League (IWFL). They will align with such top WFA teams such as the Philadelphia Liberty Belles, Lone Star Mustangs, the St. Louis Slam and the West Michigan Mayhem.

The WFA is a full-contact football league with 62 teams across the United States and Mexico.

"I'm excited about this year's group of players," said Chicago Force owner/general manager Linda Bache. "We have a number of rookies who will contribute and several have the opportunity to be game-breakers. I feel good about the level of talent that we have returning, but I'm waiting to see if they'll make the commitment and sacrifices that are necessary to become a great team that wins tough games."

John Konecki returns to the sidelines as the team's head coach, "and I believe he is the best coach in women's football—we're very fortunate to have him," Bache said. "John has assembled a great staff, so I couldn't be happier with the level of coaching."

The Force play eight regular-season games, ending June 18 with a match up against the Indianapolis Crash. The Force's home games take place April 30 (Slam), May 7 (Tribe) and May 14 (Mayhem).

"I think the overall team roster is pretty balanced and we have a lot of solid players," Bache said. "We don't have a lot of superstars, but we have a lot of different players who will step up and make a difference. Superstars tend to be divas, so I'd prefer a group of hungry, committed players who play well together."

"My biggest concern this year is injuries. If we

can stay healthy, we have an opportunity for a very special season. [Injuries are] the variable that you can't predict. Injuries will happen—you just hope that they're not season-ending injuries and that they don't all happen to key personnel at the same time."

Sami Grisafe is back at quarterback this season. Albi Zhubi also is back on the Force offensive attack. Zhubi saw action last season at wide receiver and quarterback.

"Albi is quick and expands our offensive playbook with her mobility," Bache said. "Starting wide receiver Jeanette Gray is also taking snaps at quarterback this season, so we have more depth at this position than ever before."

As for the Force running game, Bache said, "We're very excited about our ability to run the ball. We have an experienced and powerful running back in Jessica Springer. We also have two newer running backs who have been impressive in pre-season practices: Brandy Hatcher, a second-year player, and rookie Leslie Johnson."

And the running game this season will set up the Force aerial strike.

"We need our quarterbacks to make the correct reads and not force the ball into coverage," Bache said. "We expect our returning receivers to improve their skills as well, and we've also added some rookie talent at that position."

Darcy Leslie, the team's defensive MVP in 2010, is returning, "and it's obvious that Darcy worked hard in the off-season to get ready for this year," Bache said. "We expect her to be very active and make a lot of plays."

"We have a lot of new faces on defense. And some familiar faces are in new positions. I think our defense is improving and will develop over the course of the season to ultimately become a [team] strength."

Key newcomers this season include wide receiver Angel Mason, running back/defensive lineman Leslie Johnson, and Ashley Berggren at wide receiver/defensive line. "These are three high-level athletes who are new to football, but are showing great potential," Bache said.

Veteran center Stacey Baker retired, but she's joined the team's coaching staff. Plus, the team

lost two promising second-year players to season-ending injuries: wide receiver Taylor Malloy (knee) and linebacker Jessica Kirincich.

"The Women's Football Alliance has [more than] 60 teams and boasts the top teams in women's football," Bache said. "We'll have some new opponents this year, but I'm happy that we will still play our old rival, the KC Tribe."

"This will be the most competitive schedule we've ever played."

The Force will play its home games at Win-

nemac Stadium, with kickoffs set for 4 p.m.

"I think 2011 will be a great season for the Force," Bache said. "I hope our existing fans continue to support us and that the rest of the community wakes up and comes out to watch the best football team in Chicago. I guarantee that you will see us in the playoffs this year—get on the bandwagon now."

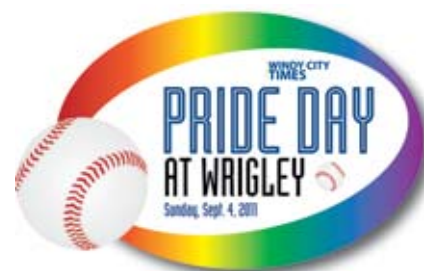
For more information on the Chicago Force, go to <http://www.chicagoforcefootball.com>.



Sami Grisafe returns at quarterback. Photo by Ross Forman



The Chicago Force after a game last year. Photo by Ross Forman



Pride Day at Wrigley to benefit Chicago charities

CHICAGO—Windy City Times will present Pride Day at Wrigley Field Sunday, Sept. 4, at 1:20 p.m., when the Chicago Cubs take on the Pittsburgh Pirates. The sales of tickets for the Labor Day weekend game will benefit six local LGBT and AIDS charities.

Pride Day is presented in partnership with the national gay softball world series taking place through Sept. 3 in the Windy City. Thousands of athletes will be in Chicago as part of the annual North American Gay Amateur Athletic Association (NAGAAA) world series tournament.

The organizations that will receive a portion of the proceeds are: AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Center on Halsted, Equality Illinois, Howard Brown Health Center/Lesbian Community Care Project, GLAAD Chicago Leadership Council and Lambda Legal.

The media partners for Pride Day at Wrigley are Windy City Times, Nightspots, GoPride.com and Grab Magazine.

The winner of the Windy City Gay Idol contest will be given the chance to sing at Pride Day, and the NAGAAA world series Chicago host committee will select a person to throw out the ceremonial pitch for the Sept. 4 game.

Tickets are \$50, and they are all for bleacher seats. The price includes tax, shipping and a portion donated to charity. Deadline for ticket purchase is Aug. 15.

Purchase tickets at www.WindyCityMediaGroup.com/WrigleyPride.

Windy City Media Group (WCMG) produces Windy City Times, Nightspots, OUT! Resource Guide, WindyCityQueercast.com and QueerTV-Network.com. WCMG is also the producer of these annual events: Windy City Gay Idol, Gays Got Talent, 30 Under 30 and the Windy City Times Theater Series. To download all of our products visit www.windycitymediagroup.com. Send questions to publisher@windycitymediagroup.com or call 773-871-7610.

Chicago Marathon filled in 31 days

Registration for the 2011 Chicago Marathon—which won't take place until Oct. 9—has already hit 45,000 participants and has closed after 31 days, according to the Chicago Sun-Times.

This is the fastest the marathon has hit the registration maximum.

The Bank of America Chicago Marathon has also announced that, for the 2010 event, participants collected a record \$12 million in charitable donations.

Renée Richards film part of ESPN movie fest

The fifth annual Tribeca/ESPN Sports Film Festival will include the world premiere of Renée, a documentary exploring the story of Renée Richards, the first transgender tennis player to compete in the women's U.S. Open, according to a press release.

Directed by Eric Drath, Renée is full of rare archival footage and interviews with close friends and family members as well as tennis legends Martina Navratilova, John McEnroe and Billie Jean King.

The Tribeca/ESPN Sports Film Festival runs during the Tribeca Film Festival (April 20-May 1) in lower Manhattan.