

## SUN SHINE VS LIBERTY

Contributed by Bob Phillips  
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{mosimage images/stories/201204/renee v liberty (home)380.jpg}Asjha, Kalena lead Connecticut over New York, 96-81, in preseason opener.

Bill Harper

UNCASVILLE &ndash; OK, it&rsquo;s way too early to be jumping through hoops (pun intended). The first exhibition game of the preseason isn&rsquo;t about winning or losing, it&rsquo;s about looking at all the pieces&mdash;seeing what fits, what may fit, and what doesn&rsquo;t fit. It&rsquo;s about reacquainting the veterans with the playbook, and about casting a discerning eye on the rookies and free agents.

But if anyone tries to tell you that WNBA teams don&rsquo;t go out and leave it all on the court every single time they take the court, well, they couldn&rsquo;t have been at the Mohegan Sun Arena last night. There, former UConn stars Kalana Greene and Asjha Jones each poured in a team-high 12 points, and four other members of the team scored in double figures, as the Sun stopped the Washington Mystics, 96-81, before 4,287 fans on Monday night. Sydney Spencer, the five-year pro from Tennessee who played with the Liberty for three seasons, came off the bench to score 10 points and haul down 4 boards in her first game with the Sun.

It was the preseason opener for both clubs.

Shooting 60 percent early, New York raced out to a 25-16 lead at the first turn thanks largely to eight points from Rutgers legend Cappie Pondexter, who knocked down 16 points for the game. But the Sun defense kicked in during the second period, holding the Liberty to 12 points while knocking down 30 themselves to take a 46-37 lead into the locker room at intermission.

But the game wasn&rsquo;t quite over yet. These two teams have a history, after all.

The Liberty came roaring back to knot the game twice in the third period. But after a transition layup by Kara Braxton on a gorgeous feed from Pondexter tied the game at 51-51, the Sun ended the third quarter on a 20-12 run and never looked back.

Braxton led all scorers with 18 points and hauled down 11 boards for the Liberty, while Katelan Redmon and former Sun favorite DeMaya Walker added 10 points for New York. Renee Montgomery (11 points) and Kara Lawson, Danielle McCray and Spencer (10 apiece) all broke into double-digits for Connecticut.

The real star of the game, however, was the Sun defense, which forced 27 New York turnovers&mdash;including 18 steals&mdash;that were parlayed into 38 Connecticut points.

And, at times, the physical play on the floor often resembled two teams deep in the playoffs rather than a meaningless preseason opener. For example, after a collision with Sun rookie Dawn Evans near midcourt, Walker lay motionless and needed to be taken away on a stretcher and was treated for injuries to her mouth and neck at the Backus Hospital.

Fans came to see a basketball game, and &ldquo;a hockey/rugby game broke out,&rdquo; said Sun head coach Mike Thibault after the game.

&ldquo;[Walker] set a screen at half-court and got run into,&rdquo; added Jones. &ldquo;She got hit right in the mouth. It was just one of those things that can happen.&rdquo;

Liberty coach John Whisenant heaped praise on his opponents.

&ldquo;We turned it over way too much,&rdquo; said Whisenant, now in his second season as head coach and general manager for the Liberty. Whisenant formerly coached and was GM with the Sacramento Monarchs, where Kara Lawson was among his shining stars. &ldquo;[The Sun] ran very well. They exploded on us when our transition defense was bad and we didn&rsquo;t rebound. They got down in their offense and attacked us, and that&rsquo;s where they scored a bundle of points in a hurry.&rdquo;

The Sun will now prepare for their second and final preseason game on Mon., May 14, when they travel to D.C. to take on the Washington Mystics. Tip-off at the Verizon Center is slated for 7 p.m. The regular season opener will be on Sat., May 19, when the Sun travel to Newark, N.J., where they will take on the Liberty. Tip-off is slated for 4 p.m., and the game will be televised live on NBA-TV.

The home opener is the following day, Sun., May 15, when Connecticut entertains New York in the second part of the season-opening home-and-home season. Tip-off is at 5 p.m. Tickets are available at the Mohegan Sun Arena box office or at Ticketmaster.

&mdash;Cover photo courtesy Jesse D. Garrabrant/NBAE/Getty Images