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‘Seattle Storm’ Storm Through Competition

Ben Wiley, Author

After a unique season, Seattle's Women's National Basketball (WNBA) team, the Seattle Storm, are the 2020 Women's National Basketball (WNBA) champions after sweeping the Las Vegas Aces in the best of five finals series.

With a short regular season due to COVID-19, the WNBA playoffs began on Sep. 15. After three postseason rounds, the last two teams that remained were the Storm and the Aces, the finals matchup was not surprising given that these teams both went 18-4 in the regular season, tying for first place in the regular season standings.

The Aces came out on top, earning the number one seed in the playoffs after beating the Storm twice during the regular season. The team was led by forward Aja Wilson, the 2020 WNBA Most Valuable Player (MVP), and former number one overall draft pick out of the University of South Carolina in 2018.

According to ESPN and EspnW Women's Basketball and College Sports writer, Mechelle Voepel, Wilson averaged 20.5 points, 8.5 rebounds, 2 assists and 2 blocks per game this season. The Storm was led by the superstar trio of 2018 WNBA MVP forward Breanna Stewart, guard Jewell Lloyd and veteran point guard Sue Bird.

The Storm won game one 93-80 on Friday, putting their offensive skills on full display in the final minutes of the game. Stewart finished the game with 37 points and 15 rebounds, becoming the first player in WNBA finals history to put up a stat line of this caliber in a finals game. Sue Bird finished with 16 assists, a career high for Bird and a WNBA playoff record. Jewell Lloyd chipped in with 28 points.

"Stewie and Jewell were pretty much on fire. I think the way that our team plays, and the way that our offense is constructed, which actually dates back to when Jenny Boucek was our coach, it was always about just finding the open player and moving in a way where we create opportunities. For me as a point guard, I'm just out there trying to find the open player" Bird told Voepel.

The Storm continued rolling along in the finals series, winning game two on Sunday afternoon, 104-91. They won on the backs of a historically unselfish offensive display. Stewart led the team in scoring with 22 points. The Storm set the record for assists in a WNBA championship game, with 33 assists in game two.

On Tuesday, the Storm completed the series sweep, winning game three 92-59. Breanna Stewart led the way once again for the Storm, scoring 26 points. She set a league record, scoring 20 or more points for the sixth straight finals game. As a result of her stellar play, Stewart was unanimously named WNBA finals MVP—the second time in her career that she has won this award.

The Storm won their second championship in three years and fourth WNBA championship in franchise history, joining Minnesota and Houston as the only WNBA teams with four titles. Their blowout win in game three also marked the biggest margin of victory in WNBA finals history. The Storm have now won a record 11 games in a row in the WNBA finals, dating back to their first championship in 2004.

COVID-19 forced the WNBA to adjust their season in many ways. All teams were forced to travel to IMG Academy, a sports prep school in Brandenton, Florida. The whole season was played on this campus to limit travel, creating a "bubble" scenario.

Despite the many obstacles, this season was impactful because of the way WNBA players used their platform to advocate for racial justice in the wake of the police brutality involving James Blake, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Players wore warm up shirts that said "Black Lives Matter," advocating for justice and equality on their social media platforms and, similarly to other American sports leagues, WNBA games were postponed after the shooting of James Blake. While the Seattle Storm were crowned the 2020 WNBA champions, there is still a fight that is not over as players continue to use their platforms to advocate for racial justice.

