SPORTS

COLETTE'S COMMENTARY:

SWEEPS SEND TWO NEW CONTENDERS TO THE WNBA FINALS

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The WNBA playoffs have delivered yet another unexpected turn, as both the Golden State Valkyries and Atlanta Dream swept their semifinal opponents to advance to the Finals. With Golden State eliminating the defending champion Las Vegas Aces and Atlanta taking down 2024 champion New York Liberty, the championship matchup highlights how quickly the league's balance of power can shift. Now, with both franchises chasing their first WNBA title, the Final will offer a chance to see whether these two teams can turn their dominant postseason runs into a championship title.

The Liberty came into Game 3 facing elimination after falling to the Atlanta Dream in the first two games of the series. Despite a late push, the Liberty fell 85-83, ending their playoff run. The Dream were led by Defensive Player of the Year Angel Reese, who recorded 22 points and guard Rhyne Howard, who added 21 points. The physicality of the matchup was evident as Reese and Liberty forward Jonquel Jones were each assessed technical fouls following a heated exchange. In the final seconds, New York had a final chance to tie up the game, but guard Breanna Stewart missed a contested layup with nine seconds remaining. Atlanta held on for the win, completing the series sweep. Despite the loss, the Liberty had a memorable postseason run, knocking out No. 1-seeded Minnesota Lynx in the first round after a regular season marked by inconsistencies.

The Las Vegas Aces faced a similar situation, entering Game 3 with their season on the line. The Golden State Valkyries faced their largest deficit of the series, trailing 11 points early in the third quarter. However, the Valkyries responded with a 17-0 run to take a five-point lead. The Aces answered with a run of their own, reclaiming a five-point advantage. With less than two minutes remaining and Golden State trailing by 2, forward Gabby Williams came up with a crucial steal to help tie the game and force overtime. The Valkyries' depth proved critical in the extra period, as Williams, guard Tiffany Hayes and forward Kayla Thornton accounted for all Golden State's overtime points. Meanwhile, the Aces were led by five-time MVP, A'ja Wilson, who scored 21 points, while teammates Jackie Young and Chelsea Gray stepped up and contributed 17 and 18 points, respectively. Despite the Aces' multiple high-scoring players, they were outscored in overtime, ultimately falling to the Valkyries 87-77.



New York Liberty player Breanna Stewart dribbles the ball. Stewart, a UConn alum, has been in the WNBA for 10 seasons.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @BREANNASTEWART30 ON INSTAGRAM

The Valkyries' greatest strength lies in their depth, with contributions from their bench allowing them to remain competitive and make key runs when facing deficits. Their roster also features four former University of Connecticut players with championship experience, bringing a winning culture to a young franchise. However, Golden State's lack of collective experience could present a challenge against a more established opponent. The Valkyries have also struggled with slow starts, falling into double-digit deficits against both Dallas and Las Vegas. While their ability to rally demonstrates their resilience, they cannot consistently rely on second-half comebacks against elite competition.



Atlanta Dream player Angel Reese goes for a basket. Reese was chosen as the Defensive Player of the Year.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @ANGEL.REESE ON INSTAGRAM

The Dream, meanwhile, have built their success around defensive pressure and rebounding. Their ability to force turnovers creates additional scoring opportunities, while Reese's presence on the boards gives Atlanta a significant advantage in offensive rebounding and second-chance points. Howard and Allisha Gray add versatility to the offense, giving the Dream multiple scoring options. However, Gray's availability remains a concern as she deals with a left hand and finger injury. Atlanta has also struggled with shooting efficiency during the regular season and has faced challenges against top contenders, including the Minnesota Lynx, Las Vegas Aces and Golden State Valkyries. Against a deep Golden State roster, the Dream will need to maintain their defensive intensity while improving their offensive consistency.

The best-of-seven Finals series tips off on Saturday, Oct. 17, at the Chase Center, where the Valkyries will hold homecourt advantage as the higher-seeded team. Atlanta will host its home games at State Farm Arena to accommodate a larger crowd. As both teams pursue their first WNBA championships, the series will test whether Golden State's depth and resilience or Atlanta's defensive dominance will prevail. Will the Valkyries make history in just their second season, or will the Dream capture their first title?