

WNBA

Expansion Valkyries build with draft, face steep climb

Scooby Axson

USA TODAY

NEW YORK – When the Golden State Valkyries were awarded a WNBA franchise on Oct. 3, 2023, the work began to try to correct the disadvantages that every other expansion team faces.

Not only with finding the right people to lead, but also the complex, arduous task of building a team once the framework of a front office is decided.

That task is now in the hands of general manager Ohemaa Nyanin and head coach Natalie Nakase, who spent the previous three seasons with the Las Vegas Aces, helping them win two WNBA championships.

Even before the draft, Nyanin clarified what kind of player they sought.

“We aren’t looking for the face of our franchise just yet,” Nyanin said last week. “We need to build our identity, and throughout the season, hopefully, the face of the franchise emerges. I want it to be an organic process. Who is going to earn it? I don’t want it to just be given to anybody. I genuinely believe that if you work really hard at (becoming the face of a franchise), then you don’t mismanage it once it’s been given to you.”

The future started at the 2025 WNBA Draft on April 14 when the Valkyries, the first expansion team to enter the league since the Atlanta Dream in 2008, selected Juste Jocyte from Lithuania at No. 5 overall with their first-ever pick.

The 19-year-old, at 6-foot, can defend multiple positions and is a combo guard, whose offensive game shows that she has range from beyond the arc.



Shyanne Sellers poses with Commissioner Cathy Engelbert after being taken with at No. 17 by the Valkyries.

VINCENT CARCHIETTA/IMAGN IMAGES

She no doubt will need to get tougher, however, especially against the physical inside players, once inside the paint.

Jocyte, who doesn’t turn 20 until Nov. 19, averaged 12.7 points, 2.7 assists and 1.8 steals per game for Lyon ASVEL of the Ligue Féminine de Basketball. She is expected to compete for her country in the FIBA Women’s EuroBasket 2025, so her availability is a question mark.

“The national team is always my priority,” Jocyte told Basketnews. “If the WNBA told me I couldn’t go and I had to choose, I would definitely choose the

national team. I know that there is a possibility to arrange when you can be released a few weeks in advance, and this is a negotiation with the clubs about the dates.”

The Valkyries added Maryland star Shyanne Sellers with their second-round pick (No. 17 overall). Sellers did it all during an impressive four-year career for the Terrapins, becoming the first player in program history to clear 1,500 points, 500 rebounds and 500 assists.

With their third selection, Golden State took Kaitlyn Chen in the third round (No. 30 overall). Chen teamed with No. 1 overall pick Paige Bueckers to lead the UConn Huskies to the 2024-25 season national championship.

Very few professional teams have made the playoffs in their first season, but the Valkyries have advantages, that few, especially in the WNBA, have. The team already has a state-of-the-art practice facility and was the first league team to sell 10,000 season tickets.

But Nyanin said she didn’t know what the Valkyries will look like once the season starts. In December’s expansion draft, Golden State selected 11 players, including guard Kate Martin from the Aces and forward Kayla Thornton of the New York Liberty. Seven of those expansion draft players are international.

“We’re taking our sweet time to define that because once you define it – coming from experience – it’s really hard to change it,” Nyanin said.

The time to find that out will be very short as the Valkyries’ first regular-season game will be against the Los Angeles Sparks on May 16.

2025 WNBA DRAFT SELECTIONS

First round

No. 1 Dallas Wings: Paige Bueckers, guard, UConn
No. 2 Seattle Storm: Dominique Malonga, forward/center, France
No. 3 Washington Mystics: Sonia Citron, guard, Notre Dame
No. 4 Washington Mystics: Kiki Iriafen, forward, Southern Cal
No. 5 Golden State Valkyries: Juste Jocyte, forward, Lithuania
No. 6 Washington Mystics: Georgia Amoore, guard, Kentucky
No. 7 Connecticut Sun: Aneesah Morrow, forward, LSU
No. 8 Connecticut Sun: Saniya Rivers, guard, NC State
No. 9 Los Angeles Sparks: Sarah Ashlee Barker, guard, Alabama
No. 10 Chicago Sky: Ajša Sivka, forward, Slovenia
No. 11 Chicago Sky: Hailey Van Lith, guard, TCU
No. 12 Dallas Wings: Aziaha James, guard, NC State

Second round

No. 13 Las Vegas Aces: Aaliyah Nye, guard/forward, Alabama
No. 14 Dallas Wings: Madison Scott, guard/forward, Ole Miss
No. 15 Minnesota Lynx: Anastasiya Olairi Kosu, forward, Russia
No. 16 Chicago Sky: Maddy Westbeld, forward, Notre Dame
No. 17 Golden State Valkyries: Shyanne Sellers, guard, Maryland
No. 18 Atlanta Dream: Te-Hina Paopao, guard, South Carolina
No. 19 Indiana Fever: Makayla Timpson, forward, Florida State
No. 20 Indiana Fever: Bree Hall, guard, South Carolina
No. 21 Los Angeles Sparks: Sania Feagin, forward, South Carolina
No. 22 Chicago Sky: Aicha Coulibaly, guard, Texas A&M
No. 23 Washington Mystics: Lucy Olsen, guard, Iowa
No. 24 Minnesota Lynx: Dalayah Daniels, forward, Washington
No. 25 Connecticut Sun: Rayah Marshall, center/forward, Southern Cal

Third round

No. 26 Seattle Storm: Serena Sundell, guard, Kansas State
No. 27 Dallas Wings: JJ Quinerly, guard, West Virginia
No. 28 Los Angeles Sparks: Liatu King, forward, Notre Dame
No. 29 Seattle Storm: Madison Conner, guard, TCU
No. 30 Golden State Valkyries: Kaitlyn Chen, guard, UConn
No. 31 Dallas Wings: Aaronette Vonleh, center, Baylor
No. 32 Washington Mystics: Zaay Green, guard, Alabama
No. 33 Indiana Fever: Yvonne Ejim, forward, Gonzaga
No. 34 Seattle Storm: Jordan Hobbs, guard, Michigan
No. 35 Las Vegas Aces: Harmoni Turner, guard, Harvard
No. 36 Atlanta Dream: Taylor Thierry, forward, Ohio State
No. 37 Minnesota Lynx: Aubrey Griffin, forward, UConn
No. 38 New York Liberty: Adja Kane, forward, France

Van Lith-Reese chemistry intensifies

Meghan L. Hall

For The Win | USA TODAY NETWORK

NEW YORK – Hailey Van Lith’s reunion with Angel Reese is seemingly a gift from the basketball gods.

When Van Lith left LSU after a tumultuous tenure, it was evident the Tigers weren’t a fit for her. She often appeared visibly lost on the court, and her production showed that the chemistry with the team left a lot to be desired. Still, when Van Lith transferred to TCU and her journey became one of the best stories in college basketball, she never lost contact with her former teammate.

Fittingly, Reese publicly supported Van Lith with multiple social media posts over the past several months, often with three simple letters: H-V-L. On April 14, after the Chicago Sky drafted Van Lith No. 10 overall, she couldn’t help but seemingly blush (and flash her megawatt smile) speaking about Reese.

“Angel has maintained contact with me this whole past year she’s been in the league, and I transferred,” Van Lith said. “I really appreciate her.”

She explained that the two have a very mature relationship with mutual

respect for both the character and the people they are off the court. Van Lith revealed that she and Reese are on the same page with what’s important to them, before flashing her signature smile again and saying what many in the league and the room knew:

“She’s a dawg, man.”

“She turns up the intensity of everyone around her,” Van Lith reflected. “So, I’m excited to be in that environment with her again where she can pull more out of me than I think I have.”

Van Lith likely has an uphill battle to make the Sky roster – they are loaded with guards – but having Reese in her corner gives her a significant foundation to work with.

Additionally, last season, the on-court chemistry between Chicago’s guards and its post players was painful to watch. Often, there was little synergy, and the paint production and pick-and-roll action suffered. Reese and Van Lith together again, at minimum, puts a band-aid on a visible eyesore. At its best, it opens up a world of possibilities.

Reese gets a reliable guard that she’s comfortable with and can work with to build their connection again. Van Lith gets a familiar face in a new environment and will also learn from one of the league’s best veteran point guards, Courtney Vandersloot.

Also, lost in the hoopla of Reese and Van Lith running the floor again is that Van Lith also will benefit from having head coach Tyler Marsh. Marsh is a developmental wizard, who found success while working with Las Vegas Aces guard Jackie Young. He improved her overall game as one of the top guards in the league, working on her 3-point shot, a main staple of her career.

Van Lith should thrive under Marsh, and with Reese in her corner, the sky – pun intended – is the limit. What happens now once she arrives in Chicago, is completely up to her. However, if her final season in college is any indication, Van Lith should settle into the Windy City. She exudes confidence and happiness despite every obstacle (including mental health struggles) in her path, and that has seemingly guided her to this moment.

“I feel so much joy,” she said shortly after being drafted. “When you persevere through the things that I’ve had to persevere from, you’re just glad to walk around every day.”

The message in that simple thought likely reaches far beyond what anyone likely knows. But for now, it’s Reese and Van Lith, back together again, for more joy and more smiles, and of course, more basketball – just the way the universe drew it up.

MARKETPLACE TODAY

For advertising information: 1.800.397.0070 www.russelljohns.com/usat

All classified ads are subject to the applicable rate card, copies of which are available from our Advertising Dept. All ads are subject to approval before publication. USA Today reserves the right to edit, refuse, reject, classify or cancel any ad at any time. Errors must be reported in the first day of publication. USA Today shall not be liable for any loss or expense that results from an error in or omission of an advertisement. No refunds for early cancellation of order.

NOTICES	NOTICES
PUBLIC NOTICE	PUBLIC NOTICE
<p>Request for Proposals (RFPs) Multiple Opportunities Available Proposal Deadline: Thursday, May 29, 2025, by 5:00 PM CT</p> <p>The Alliance for Innovation, acting as the Lead Contracting Agency and Cooperative on behalf of Edge Public and participating entities—including all, local and state government agencies, higher education institutions, K-12 schools and nonprofit organizations—is seeking proposals from qualified vendors for a range of RFPs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office Products – RFP 2025-100 • MRO – Maintenance, Repair and Operations RFP 2025-101 • Building and Facilities Supplies and Services – Store Front / Online Purchases RFP 2025-102 • Batteries, Power, Lighting and Solutions RFP 2025-103 • Janitorial, Sanitation, and Paper Supplies RFP 2025-104 <p>Contracts resulting from this solicitation may be awarded to multiple vendors on a National or Regional basis.</p> <p>Full specifications and proposal documents are available via the AFI Procurement Portal at https://indigo.bonfirehub.com. Only proposals submitted through this portal will be accepted.</p> <p>Deadline for submission: Thursday, May 29, 2025, by 5:00 PM CT.</p>	
<p>Place your advertisement in USA TODAY's Marketplace!</p> <p>To advertise, contact us at: 800-397-0070 sales@russelljohns.com</p>	

NOTICES	NOTICES
PUBLIC NOTICE	PUBLIC NOTICE
<p>The Region 4 Education Service Center, Houston, TX is requesting proposals from qualified and experienced firms to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Management System (RFP No.25-05) <p>In order to be considered, the Offeror must complete Ion Wave Technologies, Inc. registration and submit a proposal to Region 4 ESC in accordance with the solicitation link https://region4esc.ionwave.net/ this link is also available at www.esc4.net or https://www.omniapartners.com/publicsector/solicitations</p> <p>VIRTUAL PRE-PROPOSAL CONFERENCE: Wednesday, May 1, 2025 at 11:00 AM Central Time</p> <p>PROPOSAL DUE DATE: May 29, 2025, Before 2:00 PM Central Time.</p>	
<p>The Region 4 Education Service Center, Houston, TX is requesting proposals from qualified and experienced firms to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio Visual Solutions and Services (RFP No.25-04) <p>In order to be considered, the Offeror must complete Ion Wave Technologies, Inc. registration and submit a proposal to Region 4 ESC in accordance with the solicitation link https://region4esc.ionwave.net/ this link is also available at www.esc4.net or https://www.omniapartners.com/publicsector/solicitations</p> <p>VIRTUAL PRE-PROPOSAL CONFERENCE: Wednesday, May 1, 2025 at 10:00 AM Central Time.</p> <p>PROPOSAL DUE DATE: May 29, 2025, Before 2:00 PM Central Time.</p>	

To view more Classified listings, visit: classifieds.usatoday.com

Place Your Ad in USA TODAY's Marketplace Using Our Easy-To-Use Self-Service Ad Portal

Scan QR Code. Sign Up Today!



WANT TO ADVERTISE? ASK US... WE CAN HELP!