

McWilliams-Franklin Named Asst. Women's Coach at Rice

Written by Yolande Y. Lezine, Sports Editor
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Former Minnesota Lynx forward and WNBA star Taj McWilliams-Franklin will join the coaching staff at Rice University as an assistant women's basketball coach at the conclusion of the 2012 WNBA season.

McWilliams, who is currently a member of the Minnesota Lynx, is a 14-year veteran and a six-time WNBA All-Star. The Lynx opened its 2012 season on May 20th with a convincing 105-83 win over the Phoenix Mercury. The league playoffs are scheduled for September 27th.

"We are pleased and excited to add Taj McWilliams-Franklin to our staff," Rice head women's basketball coach Greg Williams stated. "Having coached vs. Taj in the WNBA, I have always respected her abilities, her competitiveness, leadership, and tremendous desire to win. She brings instant credibility to our players and her expertise in the post position will greatly benefit our young post players."

"Taj was an outstanding student-athlete at St. Edwards University who will be comfortable with our academic requirements and a positive role model for all of our players. She is an outstanding person who brings great energy and enthusiasm to Rice Women's Basketball," Williams said.

McWilliams-Franklin played on two WNBA championship teams, the Detroit Shock (2008) and the Minnesota Lynx (2011). She has played in the WNBA since 1999, for seven different teams (Orlando, Connecticut, Los Angeles, Washington, Detroit, New York, and Minnesota), and sports a career-scoring average of 11.6 points per game and 7.0 rebounds per game. While with the Connecticut Sun, she received the WNBA's 2005 Kim Perrot Sportsmanship Award.

"I am thrilled and excited to be chosen by coach Greg Williams and Rice University to participate in the successful growth and development of the women's basketball program," McWilliams-Franklin stated. "I have nothing but the highest regard for Coach Williams and I am looking forward to becoming a contributing member of his staff as well as part of the Rice community."

McWilliams-Franklin, who is from Augusta, Georgia, attended St. Edward's University in Austin,

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Texas. While there she was named the 1993 National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Player of the Year. The power forward was named to the 1992 Kodak NAIA All-America Second-Team and she earned Kodak All-America First-Team Honors in 1993.

McWilliams-Franklin, under head coach Dave McKey, set school records for career scoring (1,837 points), most points scored for single season (760), highest scoring average (24.5 ppg) and highest field goal percentage (.640). She had transferred to St. Edward's after one season at Georgia State in 1989-90.

McWilliams-Franklin began her professional basketball career playing in the former American Basketball League (ABL) in 1996. She was the 40th pick in the 1996 draft by the Richmond Rage and played three seasons with the franchise in Richmond and Philadelphia, where she led the ABL in blocks with 1.5 per game. She is ranked 5th in field goal percentage (.528), and was named to the 1997 All-ABL Second-Team. She concluded the 1996-97 campaign ranked first in the ABL in blocks (1.5), seconds in rebounds (8.5), third in field goal percentage (.540), and eighth in steals (2.1).

In addition to her career in the United States, McWilliams-Franklin has played professionally in Germany, Luxembourg, Israel, Italy, Spain, Czech Republic, South Korea, Russia, Turkey, and Poland. Taj and her husband, Reginald Franklin, met while she was playing basketball in Italy. They are the parents of three daughters, Michele (23), Schera (22), and MaiaSimone' (9).