

LOVERRO: Prince George's Valor owner absorbing hits, but still taking her best shots



After two years of game cancellations and postponements, struggling through COVID-19, LaDonna Smith is about to enter a new season as owner of the minor league basketball franchise Prince George's Valor. She has survived a pandemic, coaches and roster turnover ... more >

By Thom Loverro - - Wednesday, August 24, 2022

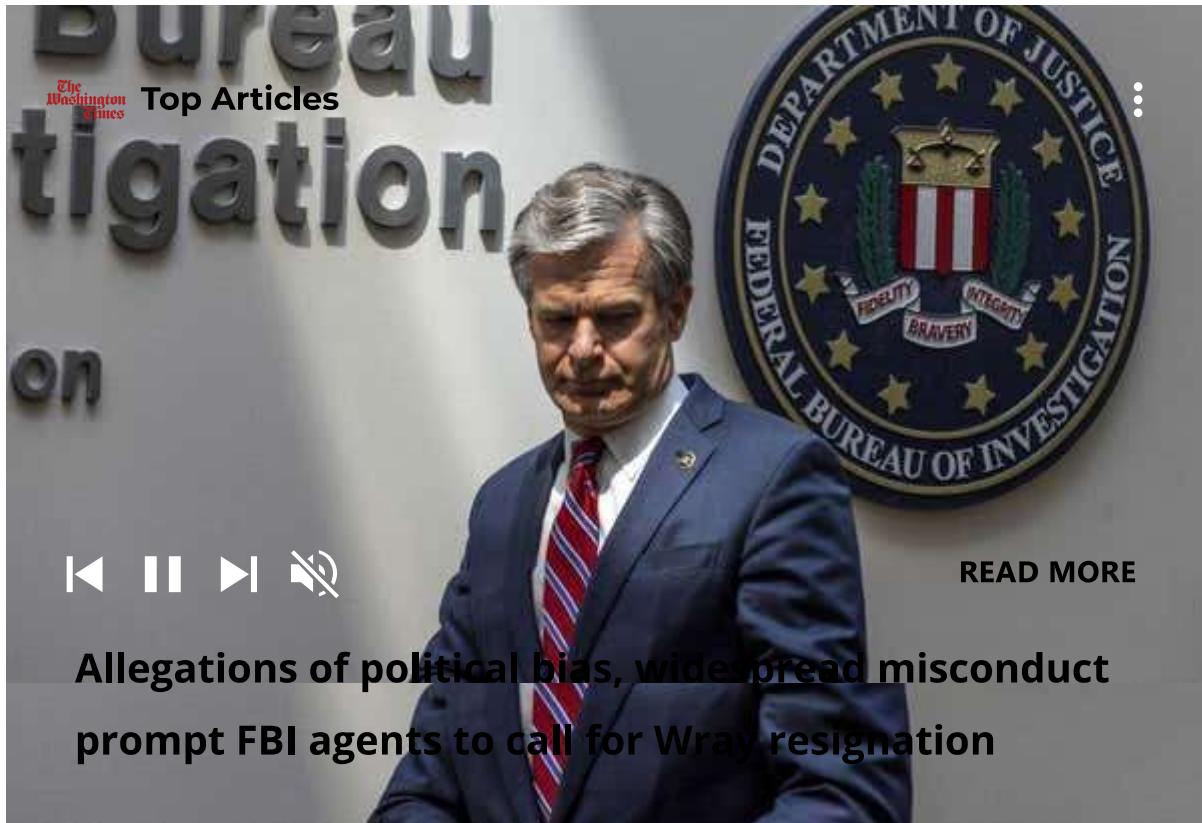
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Smith is still standing.



"They are gone and we are here," she said.



Yes, they are. The Prince George's Valor American Basketball Association franchise started before Ted Leonsis' Washington Valor Arena Football team and is still doing business here in 2022, three years after the Arena Football team folded up shop.

"They got their name from me," Smith said. "Their lawyers said why don't we do it together?"

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After all, who would have thought that a single 44-year-old woman from Fairmount Heights, Maryland, with no professional sports management experience would have lasted longer than Leonsis' Arena Football enterprise?

Smith has done just that. After two years of game cancellations and postponements, struggling through COVID-19, she is about to enter a new season as owner of the minor league basketball franchise. She has survived a pandemic, coaches and roster turnover and different venues — and outlasted a list of those she believes tried to put her out of business.

"People keep trying to take the organization from me," she said.

So far, they have failed.

"I purchased the market in 2015 and we played our first season in 2016," she said. "Since then we have played in six different venues. Everyone wants to get over instead of doing honest business. One day I hope to have our venue. The ABA was supposed to have a program for that but that hasn't happened. I'm looking at potential locations and designs before looking for funding. It will be something for the community."

That is awfully ambitious. But most people would have counted Smith out long before this.

Smith is building a schedule of ABA teams to face in the fall. The Valor had

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hope to start the season by the end of October, with home games at Prince

Community College



"We are going to keep making changes until we get all of the right pieces in place," Smith said in a statement on their Web site. "A lot of businesses have 'trial and error' periods and we aren't any different ... Whether it be with staff, players or coaches, we are going to keep going until we get it right.

"But in the end we are still here! We are the longest running Maryland-based professional organization. And if we must give a reminder —we are woman and minority owned!"

It's a remarkable achievement since minor league basketball is such a hit-and-miss business, often operated in high school gyms with players hanging onto their last hope for a pro basketball career.

"Every time I wanted to give up someone has given me a push, a player, someone," she said. "I pick myself up and keep going."

The American Basketball Association name — from the celebrated days of the Julius Erving ABA days — was revived by businessman Joe Newman in 1999. There are 160 teams in seven regions around the country. The Valor play in the Mid-Atlantic region.

"We have the money to have a season," Smith said. "We partnered with another company called ABA Owners Assist, this company works with ABA. I go out and personally solicit sponsors, and they've been coming on board. We allowed fundraisers at our events and do split of the revenue."

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move Smith made for this season was hiring former George



Washington University basketball star J.R. Pinnock as the Valor coach.

Pinnock was the Colonials' leading scorer in the 2005-2006 season and helped led them to two consecutive NCAA tournaments. He was drafted by the Dallas Mavericks in 2006 and later traded to the Los Angeles Lakers, where he was released after appearing in seven pre-season games. He went on to play in the NBA D-League for the Arkansas Rim Rockers and the Rio Grande Valley Vipers. He would also play in Germany and Puerto Rico.

"He has direct connections overseas," Smith said. "It will be great to have someone who has played on the pro level coaching the team."

Smith has a full-time job — she is a circulation assistant at a local library. She is also a published author and musician and a notary public. And, she is still the owner of the Prince George's Valor ABA basketball team — ready to take the court for a new season.

- *You can hear Thom Loverro on The Kevin Sheehan Show podcast.*
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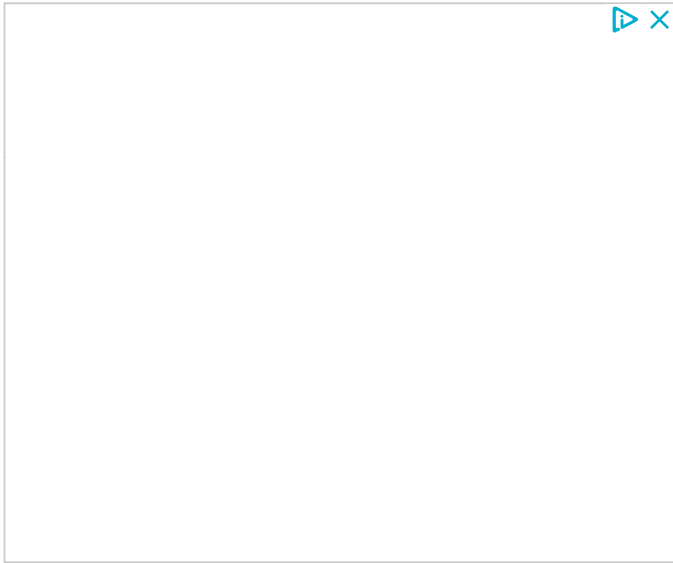
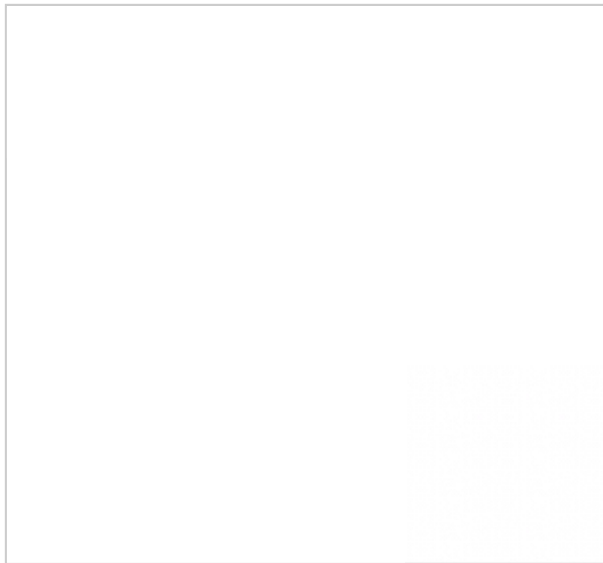


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