

# New Faces, Slumping Aces

## The Decline of the 2022 & 2023 WNBA Champs

Josh LaFronz

August 7, 2025

### Introduction

We are nearly two-thirds through the WNBA season, and the former two-time champion Las Vegas Aces are struggling to find their footing. They are currently seventh in the WNBA with a 16-14 record. They were two games above .500 early in the season (4-2) and have oscillated between that mark since then. They're currently fighting with the Valkyries, Sparks and Mystics just to make the playoffs.

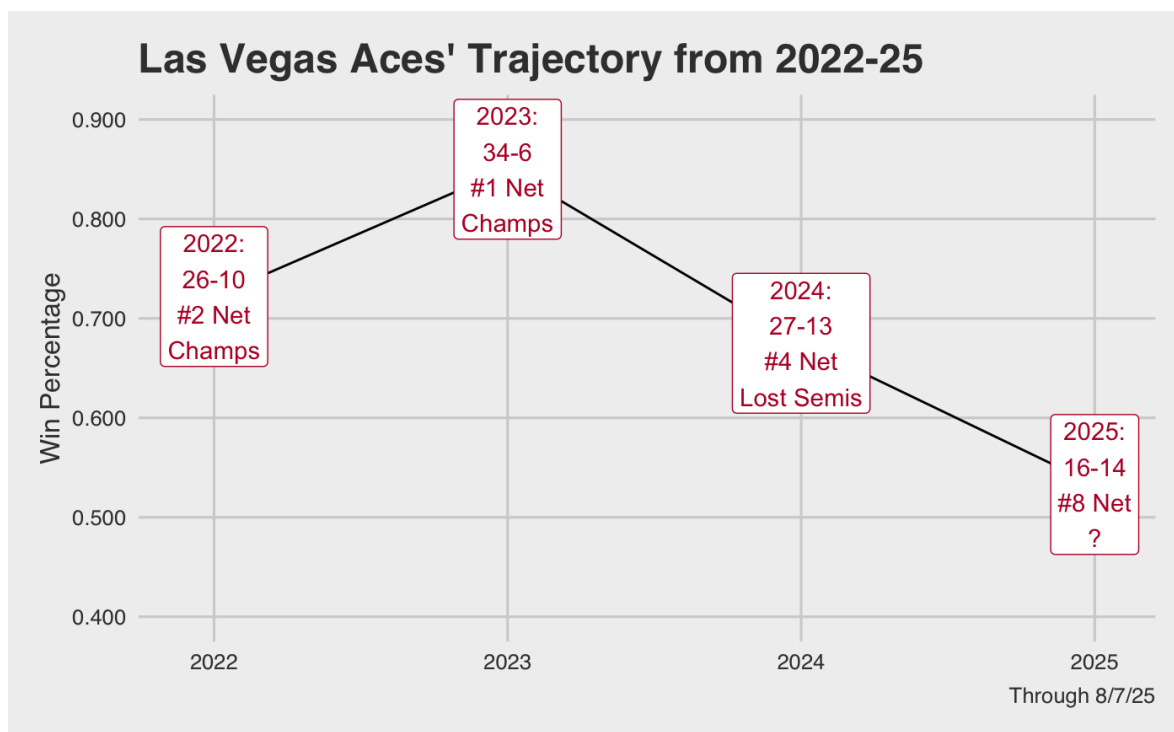


Figure 1: How's it going for the Aces?

<sup>1</sup>This team still has Jackie Young, Chelsea Gray, and reigning MVP A'ja Wilson, who is the best player on the planet. How is it possible that the team's situation has become nearly untenable? Due to key pieces departing, a weakening core, and unreliable role players, the Las Vegas Aces are no longer the force they were in years past.

<sup>1</sup>The 2023 Aces' 34-6 record is the fifth-best winning percentage in WNBA history. Only the 1998 Comets, 2000 and 2001 Sparks, and 2014 Mercury had better winning percentages.

## Part I: Cracks in the Armor

After winning a championship, one of the more challenging components is how to proceed with that core. Many players have inflated value (called the “championship tax”), while others seek a larger role; whether it is due to egos or financial limitations, it is difficult to keep championship-winning teams together. The Aces have certainly tried to keep the core together; they signed Young, Gray, and Wilson to huge deals to keep them around until the end of this season. However, they have only retained five players from the 2022-23 championship squads:

Season	Players Returning	% of Minutes Returning	% of Points Scored Returning
2022	5	53.2%	56.0%
2023	5	62.4%	65.8%
2024	6	54.6% <sup>2</sup>	59.3%

Table 1: Continuity from the 2022-24 Aces

The five players left of the 2022-23 Aces are the aforementioned Young, Gray, and Wilson plus Kierstan Bell and Kiah Stokes. The sixth player returning from the 2024 team is Megan Gustafson. Bell was a nonfactor for the Aces in both the regular season and the postseason. Gustafson played well in the 2024 regular season, but not in the playoffs. Stokes was the Aces’ starting center in both championship runs. The Aces managed to keep four-fifths of their starting championship core, but that means the other teammates are completely different. Who all did the Aces lose?

### Dearica Hamby

Hamby was the “fifth option” on the 2022 Aces, a team swimming in riches of talent. In 2022, Hamby made her second consecutive All-Star team, adding to a resumé that included a two-time Sixth Woman of the Year award<sup>3</sup>. It might have raised an eyebrow wondering how Kiah Stokes would start for the 2022 title-winning Aces with Hamby on the roster? Unfortunately, Hamby injured her right knee around the end of the season and missed a month with a knee bruise [5]. She returned in the second round against the Storm, but was only able to play 51 minutes total in six playoff games. In the finals, she contributed off the bench as much as she could. Not a strong way to end the season of a contract year.

The timeline that followed was extremely bizarre and confusing.

- 7/29/22 - Aces sign Dearica Hamby to a two-year contract extension [1].
- 01/21/23 - Aces trade Dearica Hamby and a 2024 1st to the Sparks in exchange for Amanda Zahui B. and a 2024 2nd.
- The same day - Hamby files a sex discrimination and retaliation lawsuit claiming the Aces traded her due to her pregnancy and criticized her work ethic [6].
- 05/16/23 - Aces’ coach Becky Hammon is suspended two games, and the Aces are stripped of their 2025 first-round pick [10].

<sup>2</sup>Kierstan Bell played nearly 10x more minutes in 2023 compared to 2024 (43 vs. 424), hence the odd disparity in minutes returning between the two seasons.

<sup>3</sup>She finished second in 2021, narrowly preventing her from winning the award in three straight seasons.

The lawsuit is still ongoing as of August 2025. Judge Andrew P. Gordon dismissed Hamby's claims against the WNBA, but not the claims against the Aces [2]. He found truth in Hamby's assertion of retaliation in how a core member of a championship team was dumped to an inferior Sparks team. The Aces' loss of a draft pick was the first such instance in WNBA history. They had the first pick of the second round in the 2025 draft, but that's besides the point. The lawsuit has certainly affected the luster of the 2022 championship, but even that aside, this trade was a disaster for Las Vegas.

As previously described, Hamby was a two-time All-Star and Sixth Woman of the Year winner. This is a player who would thrive on a different team if given a bigger role. And she was under contract for two additional years when she was traded. Her performance in the 2022 playoffs should not have affected her value. How in the world did the Aces also have to give up a 2024 1st in this trade? Their return was disgraceful at the time and has become tragic now.

In exchange for Hamby, the Aces received Amanda Zahui B. and a 2024 second-round pick. Zahui B. did not play in the 2022 season due to international basketball obligations and was traded again to the Mystics for two second-round picks (2024, 2025). The two 2024 second-round picks turned into Dyaisha Fair and Kate Martin. Fair, the third all-time leading scorer in NCAAW history, played one game for the Aces in 2024 and was waived after the season ended. She is now playing professionally in Israel. Martin, a former standout Iowa Hawkeye known for her shooting, played sparingly for the Aces in 2024 before being selected by the expansion Valkyries in their expansion draft. The 2025 second-round pick was traded along with another 2025 2nd to the Chicago Sky for Dana Evans, more about her later.

In the end, the Aces traded Hamby, a 2024 1st, and a 2025 2nd for Dana Evans. This is slightly misleading, as the Aces moved Hamby and Zahui B. with the goal of clearing cap space. They cleared the cap room to sign WNBA legend Candace Parker. Suddenly, it makes sense; Parker was about to turn 37, but she was an All-Star in 2023 and one of the greatest players in league history. Hindsight does not look kindly upon this move. Parker played great for the Aces, but suffered a season-ending foot injury halfway through the season. She signed a new contract with the Aces for 2024, but retired before the new season began. They won a championship in 2023 with Parker in and Hamby out, but it doesn't change the fact that they lost a very good player in Hamby for pennies on the dollar. Hamby has since gone on to become an All-Star for the Sparks, averaging 17+ points per game in 2024 and 2025. Clearing salary room is an extremely common move, but valuable assets demand equally valuable assets in return, and the Aces simply did not do that.

## **Kelsey Plum**

As starting guard on both 2022 and 2023 teams, Kelsey Plum is the biggest departure in the Aces' current iteration. She had the second-highest usage rate on the team, led the Aces in scoring in 2022, and was the second-leading scorer in both 2023 and 2024. After missing the entire 2020 season with an Achilles injury and winning Sixth Woman of the Year in 2021, Plum blossomed into a star after becoming a starter in 2022. She earned three consecutive All-Star appearances in 2022-24. After a 2024 season where the Aces lost in the semifinals, Plum and the team faced a crossroads in the offseason. She was a pending free agent and the Aces decided to deal once again.

In a three-team sign-and-trade deal, the Aces sent Plum to the LA Sparks and a 2026 1st to the Seattle Storm, receiving guard Jewell Loyd from Seattle and a 2025 2nd

from Los Angeles, which turned into Aaliyah Nye, a sweet shooter from Alabama. This trade was a blockbuster, seeing the swap of two multi-time All-Stars and multi-time champions. Plum then signed a one-year deal with the Sparks. This trade has become very consequential beyond the loss of Plum.

With the Aces struggling in 2025 as much as they have, they face the nightmare scenario of missing the playoffs, not having their 2026 first round pick, and the Big 3 core hitting free agency in 2026. Even new acquisition Loyd is a free agent after this season. The core of Young, Gray, and Wilson will very likely push the team to at least a playoff appearance, but it's unlikely they'll go far with how they have played this season.

This type of move is standard practice for the Aces; they have traded their first-round pick four years in a row. They've made three first-round selections since 2020: Iliana Rupert, Mya Hollingshed, and Kierstan Bell. Rupert played 17 games for Vegas before being waived; she is now playing well for the Valkyries. Hollingshed never played a WNBA game, and Bell has not exactly panned out. The last good first-round pick made by the Aces was Jackie Young in 2019. It's ironic that a team who acquired its premier players (Wilson, Young, Plum, Hamby) through the draft has chosen to almost completely abandon it. 2026 will mark the fourth straight year that the Aces have not made a first-round pick barring a trade in the offseason.

The Plum trade marks the second time in two years that the Aces traded a core player and a first-round pick to the Sparks. The two key differences are one, they got an actual contributor in return, and two, the loss of that first-round pick might actually hurt the Aces this time. The acquisition of Loyd was a puzzling move at the time. Loyd was a six-time All-Star, but she morphed into a huge volume scorer. Her 2023 season set the WNBA record for field goals attempted and field goals missed, and her 2024 season was not far off (8th and 4th, respectively). How would someone like this fit alongside A'ja Wilson<sup>4</sup>? Again, more on that later.

## Key Role Players

Championship teams struggle to retain role players, and the Aces have been no different. Losing those impactful role players can alter what once was a perfect winning formula. None of these players are on the level of Hamby, Parker, or Plum, but still valuable nonetheless.

### Riquna Williams

Williams was a reliable veteran who came off the bench for the 2022 championship team. She shot 37% from three in the regular season and 36% in the postseason. She had a couple of big games in the playoffs. In Game 3 of Round 2, she scored 14 points while shooting 4-8 from three against the Storm to give the Aces a 2-1 series lead. In the finals, the Aces were blown out in Game 3 in Connecticut. In response, Williams scored 17 points on 5-9 from downtown to help Vegas clinch their first ring on the road. She was instrumental in a game where Wilson shot 4-13, Young shot 4-14 and Hamby had 0 points in 3 minutes. Her and Chelsea Gray (20 points on 9-13 FG) elevated the Aces to a championship. That's where all the compliments end.

---

<sup>4</sup>Wilson's 2024 season ranks third all-time in field goal attempts

Williams missed the 2023 season with a back injury and was charged with domestic violence before charges were dropped [8]. She hoped to rejoin the Aces for the 2023 playoff run, but has not played another game in the WNBA since 2022.

### **Alysha Clark**

The 2023 Aces replaced Williams and 6POY Hamby with another contributor off the bench, Alysha Clark. Clark played for the Aces in 2023 and 2024, winning the Sixth Woman of the Year in 2023<sup>5</sup>. She shot 38% from three in those two seasons. She was a two-time All-Defense selection and a two-time champion prior to arriving in Las Vegas. Also, she's top five all time in effective field goal percentage and top ten in true shooting percentage [9]. In the 2023 Finals, she played a huge role in Game 4 to clinch the Aces' second title in as many years. She scored 10 points, including six points in forty seconds to close the third quarter, helping the Aces take the lead after an early deficit. They were missing Parker, Gray, and Kiah Stokes due to foot injuries; the latter two were injured in Game 3 of the Finals.

Clark signed with Seattle in the offseason and, at age 37, she is not at the level she once was. She's below 50 eFG% for the first time in her career.

### **Tiffany Hayes**

In 2024 free agency, the Aces poached sharpshooter Tiffany Hayes from one of their 2022 Finals opponents, the Connecticut Sun<sup>6</sup>. Hayes shot 40% from three in 2024 and took home the Sixth Woman of the Year award. The Aces came up short of a championship in 2024, but Tiffany Hayes certainly can't be blamed. She averaged 10.5 points on 50% shooting from the field and 50% shooting from deep. Her finest performance in the playoffs was a 20-point 5-steal performance against Seattle in Game 1 of the first round two days after turning 35.

Hayes departed in the offseason after signing a contract with the expansion Valkyries. She's back to starting and is averaging 12 points and 44% from three.

## **Part II: The 2025 Supporting Cast**

In six seasons from 2019-24, the Aces rostered the 6POY five times (Hamby 2x, Plum, Clark, Hayes). That speaks to the level of reliable depth the Aces had; they had a sixth player on whom they could consistently count on to deliver. The 2025 Aces are missing that reliable depth. The Aces have never been a team that runs deep; their strategy was to be loaded and have a group of five to six players so talented that no one else could compete.

---

<sup>5</sup>Current Las Vegas Aces guard Dana Evans finished third in the 6POY vote in 2023.

<sup>6</sup>Hayes wasn't on the 2022 Sun, but she played there in 2023; the 2023 Sun lost in the semifinals to the Liberty who faced the Aces in the finals.

	Bench		Starters	
Season	Net Rating	Rank	Net Rating	Rank
2022	-2.6	10	+9.3	1
2023	+1.2	1	+14.6	1
2024	+1.7	3	+5.4	5
2025	-3.5	10	+1.1	7

Table 2: Superteam No Longer

In 2022, the Aces’ bench was ranked tenth in net rating. They’re in the same boat in 2025. However, the 2025 Aces’ starters are ranked only seventh in net rating, unlike 2022 where they ranked first in the WNBA. The 2022 Aces’ bench was weak because that team featured a starting five of Plum, Gray, Young, Hamby, and Wilson. That lineup is similar to the 2017-18 Warriors. Who needs a bench? Simply stagger the minutes of these five players, and success will follow. In 2025, they don’t have that “All-Star” lineup anymore. They still have the reigning MVP, Jackie Young and Chelsea Gray, and those three are still a strong net positive together (Big 3 are a +9.5 together). However, the starters aren’t supremely dominant like how they were in 2022. The lack of bench production is no longer compensated for by the power of the starters. The Aces don’t have any front-runners for Sixth Woman of the Year this season.

## Jewell Loyd

The big acquisition of the offseason. It was a stunner when it happened. Loyd had an ugly 2024 shooting the ball. She shot 36% from the field and 27.4% from deep, good for 40.8 eFG%. Using the league averages, we can design a “+” statistic comparing Loyd’s shooting splits to the rest of the league like what the NBA uses. In 2024, Loyd had a 81 3P+ and a 82 eFG+, meaning she was nearly twenty percent below average in both three-point shooting and weighted (effective) field goal percentage. That sounds dreadful, but on the other hand, she drew a lot of fouls. She was second in the W in free throw attempts (153 FTr+) and converted at a 88.1 FT% clip. I struggle to understand how Loyd shot so poorly alongside Skylar Diggins and Nneka Ogumike, but nonetheless. Despite the ghastly shooting in such high volume, she had a positive net rating (+7.8 per WNBA.com and +7.2 per Women’s Basketball Reference).

Plum was a better fit for the Aces than Loyd currently is. Plum is a more willing passer and a superior three-point shooter with higher volume.

Player	AST%	3P%	3PAr	3PA/100
Kelsey Plum	22.7	.390	.471	9.2
Jewell Loyd	19.0	.348	.356	8.4

Table 3: Career Marks Entering the 2025 Season

I think Loyd has adjusted to this extreme role change as well as she could have. A volume shooter in 2024, she’s now sporting a career-low usage rate and field goal attempt rate. As a result, Loyd’s shooting percentages are vastly improved in 2025. Her 3P% and eFG% have jumped to 37.3% and 49.4% respectively. Those figures equate to a 111 3P+ and a 99 eFG+. Those are huge strides! But her true shooting percentage is still below league average, as it was last season. Obviously, her free throw

rate has cratered since she's no longer a primary ball handler (down to 66 FTr+), and compositely, she's taking threes and corner threes at a career high rate.

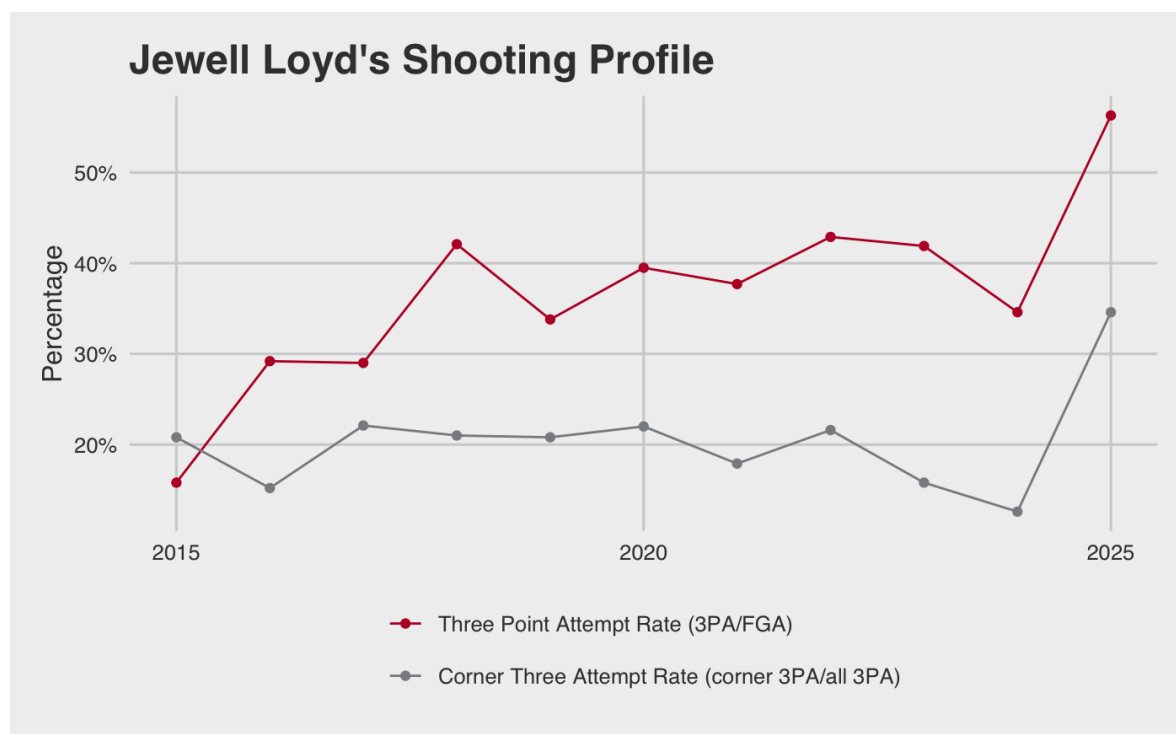


Figure 2: Loyd Trying to Fit In

She's certainly changed her play style to better suit the team. As expected, Loyd is not having the scoring explosions she was last season. She has only scored 20 or more points five times this season. Her role changed even further on July 25. Loyd played 21 minutes and missed all ten of her field goal attempts in a demolition at the hands of the Lynx. 0 points, 5 fouls, and a -5.2 Game Score. After that game, the Aces made another change: Bringing Jewell Loyd off the bench. At first glance, the move might have seemed like a panic move not dissimilar from the Suns benching Bradley Beal this past year; a move to try and save a poor fitting offseason acquisition. Loyd has only come off the bench six times since 2016. However, through five games, the move appears to be just what Loyd and the Aces needed! The Aces are 4-1 in their last 4 and Loyd has scored twenty points in two of those five games, including a season high 27 points and 7 threes against the Valkyries. She's also posted her two highest Game Scores of the season in these games played off the bench. The Aces still got destroyed by the Lynx to the tune of 53 points on 8/2, so it's not as if they are an elite team now. The Aces are 4 games back of second place, so their best hope is to slot somewhere within the middle of the playoff seeding. Moving Loyd to the bench adds scoring punch and allows Loyd to play more like herself, which could propel the Aces to a more positive record.

It must be noted that lineups with Loyd and her three star counterparts are not negatives on the court together. Loyd, Young, Gray, and Wilson are a +12.4 (per 100 possessions) when they're on the court together. The Aces can be comfortable with these four players on the floor when it's time to finish close games; the issue is finding that fifth reliable player.

## Kiah Stokes

The easy in-house choice for a fifth player has not played well. The most disheartening personnel development has been the fall off of Center Kiah Stokes. Stokes, as previously mentioned, was a starter throughout the playoffs for two championship-winning teams in 2022 and 2023. She was always a positive presence on the court, but this season, she's playing herself out of a rotation spot.

Period	G	GS	Min/G	FGA
Before 7/12	20	18	19.6	46
Since	9	0	6.2	1

Table 4: Broken Stokes

Part of Stokes's fade into benchwarmer status is due to the acquisition of NaLyssa Smith. However, according to net rating, her play has taken an extreme nosedive this season:

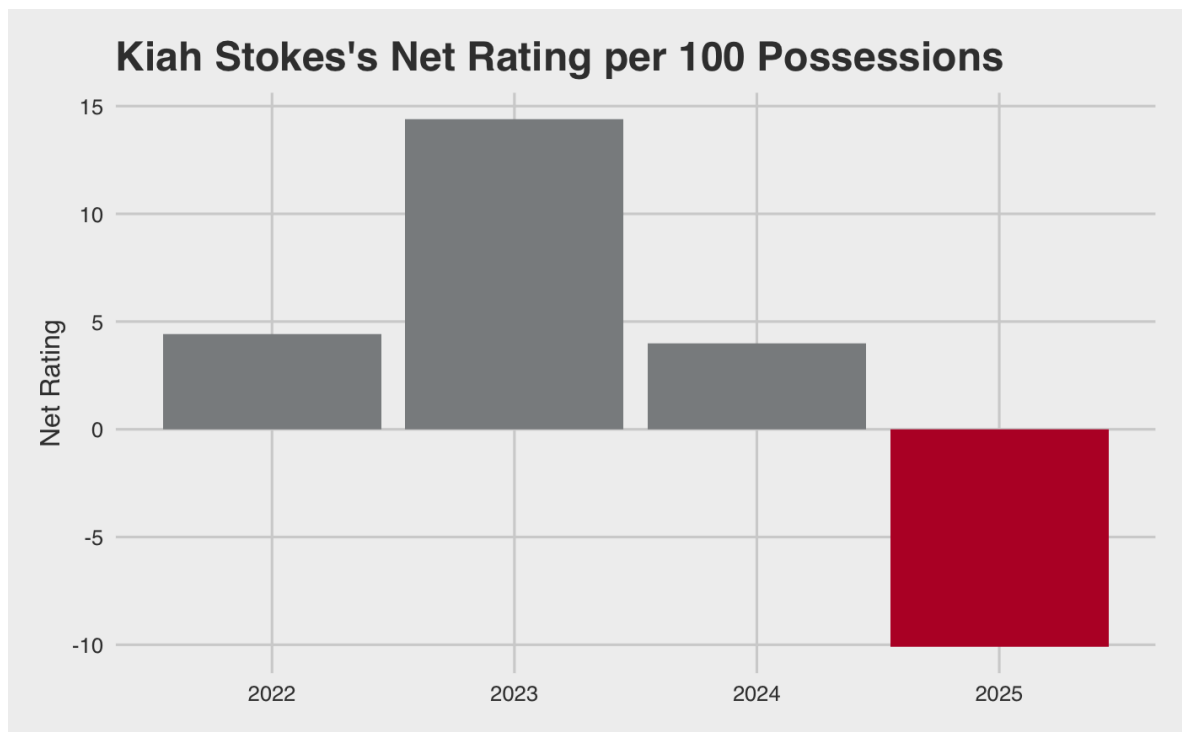


Figure 3: Stokes's Bad Season

A huge component of the Aces's championship team has become unplayable; that's a huge blow for a team hurting for reliable depth pieces, especially post players. The lineup with Stokes, Loyd, and the Big Three is a net negative (-0.9 in 171 minutes) and that was likely the lineup they envisioned when the season began. The acquisition of Smith became a must with the way Stokes was performing. Unfortunately, the Aces had no choice to give Stokes minutes because of their dire need for rebounding; she has the second best REB% on the team, and they are constantly getting killed on the glass.



Season	OREB% Rank	DREB% Rank
2022	12	1
2023	12	1
2024	12	2
2025	11	<b>12</b>

Table 5: Aces' Team Rebounding Ranks

The Aces have never been focused on attacking the offensive glass, but now they're frequently losing the rebounding battle on the other end. The rebound margin has an ability to greatly impact and swing games, and over extended periods of time, a team simply can't handle always losing the rebound battle. With these alarming rebounding issues in mind, the Aces are forced to play Kiah Stokes. She has the lowest net rating on the Aces among players with 200+ minutes, and she's a center who is currently rocking an effective field goal percentage below 40%.

### **Cheyenne Parker-Tyus**

The easy outside choice for the fifth player would be veteran and 2023 All-Star Cheyenne Parker-Tyus. However, she has missed the entire season after having a baby. Her most recent update was in late July, where she stated that she hopes to return to the Aces in the playoffs [3].

### **NaLyssa Smith**

The Aces could not help themselves. Yes, they needed a boost in their post play. However, the Aces once again traded an asset that puts their future in an extreme bind. Smith, who was not playing very well in Dallas, we acquired by the Aces in exchange for a 2027 first round pick. The Aces mortgaged another pick; this is the pick they would have after next season. Recall that this upcoming offseason sees Loyd, Wilson, Gray, and Young become unrestricted free agents; Smith herself is a restricted free agent this offseason, too. They exchanged a first for a struggling, underperforming upcoming free agent. This move was an unbelievable gamble and likely will not move the needle in the postseason.

As strange as the trade was, it should not affect the evaluation of how Smith has performed as an Ace. She's started 13 of 14 games since arriving in Las Vegas. She's currently averaging 7.7 points and 5.7 rebounds (2.3 offensive). She's scoring at the most efficient level of her career, setting new high marks in eFG% and true shooting percentage (TS%). She also alleviates the Aces' rebounding woes. She's one of the better rebounders in the W; she was top 10 in REB% in 2023 and 2024. Before acquiring Smith, the Aces were outrebounded in 12 of 16 games, since her arrival, they've only been outrebounded 6 times in the following 14 game; the rate fell from 75% to under 50%.

The good news for the Aces is that the lineup of Loyd, Smith and the Vegas Big Three has a positive net rating (+9.7 in 110 minutes together). However, A'ja's greatness might be doing a great deal of heavy lifting; the combination of Loyd, Smith, Young, and Gray is a +1.0 in 140 minutes. That will certainly be an issue in the regular season, where teams need good minutes from other players to get through the year. Rotations shorten in the postseason, so it's more acceptable to rely on a star player then. The

Aces will need productive minutes without A’ja on the court if they want any chance of making a playoff run, and that means hoping Loyd and Smith can be counted on.

## The Rest

Before moving Loyd out of the starting lineup, the Aces’ bench did not have much to show for itself. Their bench ranks last in the W in AST% and assist-to-turnover ratio. And they’re bottom three in both eFG% and TS%. The Aces once had a reign of Sixth Women of the Year, but that is no longer the case. Here are the mainstays of the Aces’ bench with Jewell Loyd and Kiah Stokes included.

Player	G	MIN	eFG%	TS%	PTS/g	Net Rating <sup>7</sup>
Jewell Loyd	30	857	.494	.530	11.4	+4.6
Dana Evans	30	531	.413	.455	6.4	-9.5
Aalyiah Nye	30	530	.493	.512	4.9	-7.3
Kiah Stokes	29	449	.394	.416	1.4	-10.7
Kierstan Bell	23	248	.417	.450	4.2	-10.0
Megan Gustafson	11	155	.438	.451	3.8	-13.9
<i>League Average</i>			.495	.539		

Table 6: The Aces Bench

For reference on that net rating column, here’s a visual of the entire Aces roster:

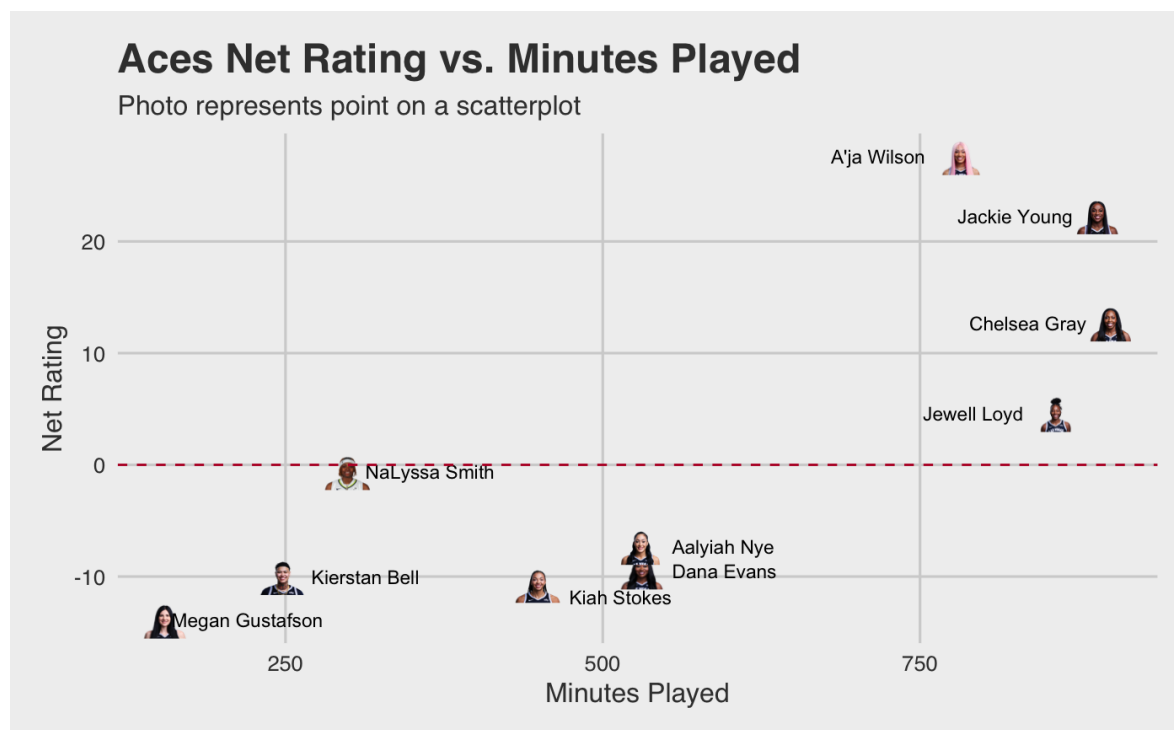


Figure 4: The Aces are very top-heavy

With such a wide disparity in production between the bench and the stars/starters, I was curious about the strengths of these bench players.

<sup>7</sup>From *Basketball-Reference*

As previously mentioned, Stokes was a starter but is now buried in the bench. Her strengths are her defense, size, and rebounding; any offense she provides is gravy.

Kierstan Bell was a bench player, but with Loyd's move to bench, Bell is now starting. Her offense is very spotty, which is surprising considering how lethal she was in college. In two years playing at Florida Gulf Coast, Bell averaged 23.6 points on 50/32/73 shooting splits. Since being drafted 11th overall in 2022, she's averaged 3.2 points on 33.8 FG% and 25% from three (on 2.1 attempts a game). The Aces don't need her to score, but it would be very beneficial if she could hit her threes; she wasn't an adept shooter in college, making her an awkward fit. In Bell's first start, she scored a career-high 19 points and hit three times from downtown. In her last four starts, she's averaging 3 points on 18.5% shooting from the field, including 2-18 from deep. Although Bell starts, she plays less minutes than Loyd and sometimes Aaliyah Nye, too.

Nye was part of the Jewell Loyd trade and was taken with the first pick of round two in the most recent WNBA draft. At Alabama, Nye was a sniper, shooting 45% from three on more than seven attempts per game. With Jackie Young and Chelsea Gray both having down years shooting the three ball, Nye has been Las Vegas's second-most accurate long distance bomber behind Loyd (35.6% on 3 attempts/game). Her net rating is negative, but the combination of Nye and The Big Three has a positive net rating (+15.9 in 125 minutes). Her ability to space the floor is a valuable role to fill on a team loaded with stars.

Backup point guard Dana Evans arrived after a trade with the Chicago Sky. Evans was drafted in 2021 and was also picked first in round two. She finished third on the 6POY ballot in 2023 and the hope was that she could provide the Aces with a boost of shooting and playmaking off the bench. Evans shot 37.6% from three last season, but shot 32.3% in her previous three seasons. This season, Evans is shooting 30.3% from deep; it does not help that she also shoots below 40% from inside the arc, too. Aside from threes, Dana Evans's most common shot attempt is between 3-10 feet. Unfortunately, she's not good at that shot; she shoots 33.9% from 3-10 feet when the league average is 43.4%. Evans shoots 66% of her shots from deep and 3-10 feet. Here's how her proficiency compares to the league average.

	3-10 Feet		Three-Pointers		eFG%
	FG%	FGA%	FG%	FGA%	
Dana Evans	.339	.312	.303	.349	.400
<i>League Average</i>	.434	.270	.334	.360	.472

Table 7: Dana Evans's two most frequent shot areas compared to league average

The strongest boast of Evans's game is her ability to take care of the ball. Her turnover percentage (10.6 TOV%) is the seventh lowest in the WNBA among qualified players. She also has the highest AST% on the Aces among players not in the Big Three. Her playmaking is a strong spot, but her shooting for an Aces team searching for answers off the bench.

Megan Gustafson was a good rotation player in 2024 (.386 3P% of the bench in 13 minutes per game), but she has struggled to regain her form after missing the beginning of the season with a lower leg injury. She returned in July and since then, her shot has not fallen. Her shooting splits this season (.325/.321/.467) are not suggestive of the contributor she was entering this season (.518/.362/.791). Perhaps the Aces will give

her more minutes as she works her way back from the injury, especially with Stokes falling out of the rotation.

### Part III: The Big Three?

Are A’ja Wilson, Chelsea Gray, and/or Jackie Young underperforming? The short answer is no, but it’s still worth talking about.

A’ja Wilson is the reigning MVP, and the only reason she isn’t the frontrunner again is because the Aces are where they are and Napheesa Collier and the Lynx are having an incredible season. She’s number one in the WNBA in PER, second in points per game and top-five in several other stats.

Stat	PTS/g	REB/g	STL/g	BLK/g	FTM	FTA	PER	WS	WS/48
Rank	2	2	5	1	1	1	1	4	2

Table 8: Some of A’ja Wilson’s 2025 statistical ranks

I don’t know how much one more player can do. She doesn’t shoot the three well, but she has a 57.9 TS% thanks to her high free throw attempts and percentage (83.9 FT%).

Jackie Young is also having a strong season, averaging 16.6 points, 4.5 assists, 4.1 rebounds, and 1.4 steals on 57.6 TS%. She made her fourth consecutive All-Star team. She’s eighth in offensive win shares, ninth in AST%, tenth in PER, and top 30 in Win Shares/40 minutes, but she is not having a strong year from beyond the arc (31.5% on 5 3PA/g).

Chelsea Gray is having a solid year (11 pts, 4.5 ast, 4.1 reb, 1.2 stl, 55.6 TS%). Her biggest issue has been turnovers. She leads the league in total turnovers and is fifth in turnovers per game. With Kelsey Plum gone, Gray (and Young) have more playmaking responsibility. Her WS/48 have hit a career low (.067, league average is .100) for the second season in a row.

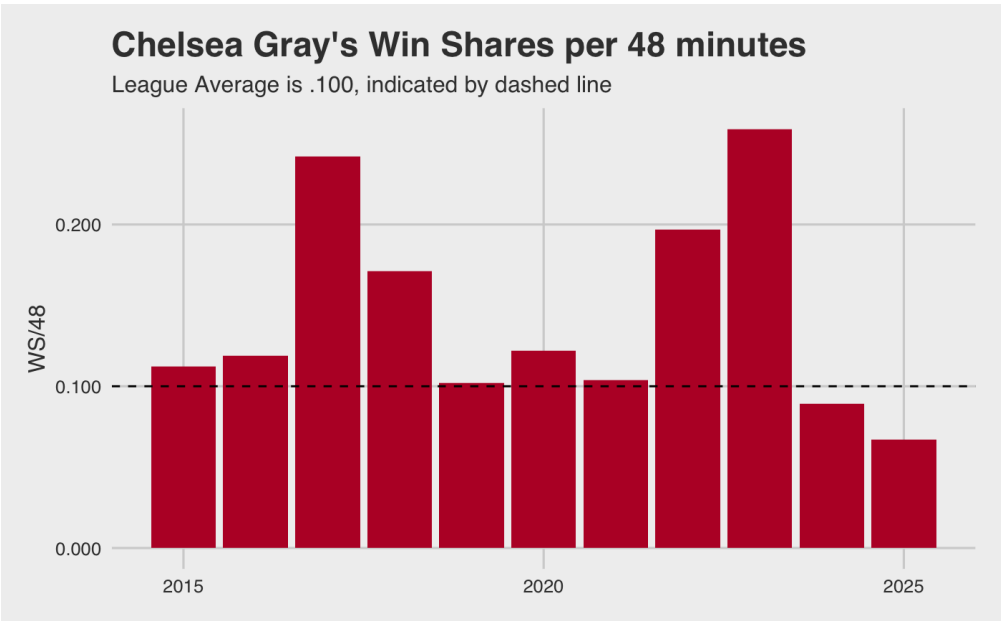


Figure 5: Chelsea Gray’s career Win Shares/48

Win shares are a flawed statistic, but I feel that they're better used in comparing the different seasons of one player rather than pushing agendas. This suggests Gray isn't producing as much as she has in previous seasons. Gray turns 33 in two months and has played more than 500 career games. The Aces have made deep playoff runs in four consecutive years; that definitely takes its toll. However, Gray is still a very positive presence on the court, and perhaps her production is down as she takes a back seat with the introduction of Jewell Loyd. Gray has the fifth highest usage rate on the team, and Loyd is directly behind her; Loyd's USG% is likely to grow considering she'll now command the Aces' second unit.

## **Concluding Remarks**

I think I've stretched this question enough. I don't believe the Big Three is at fault for the Aces' difficult season; I believe the Aces' top heavy team construction, poor draft pick management, and personnel tunnel vision have led to this season riddled with inconsistency. Considering the offseason ahead of Las Vegas, it will be a long couple of years and beyond if the Big Three depart in free agency. Loyd and Smith (RFA) will also become free agents. The Aces must resign at least some of these players or find a way to regain the lost draft picks. All the draft capital they mortgaged will bite the Aces if they become a noncompetitive team. The expiration of the current CBA creates additional uncertainty for the upcoming offseason.

## References

- [1] Aces Press Release, “Aces Sign Dearica Hamby To Contract Extension,” *Las Vegas Aces*, 29 June 2022, [link](#).
- [2] Associated Press, “Dearica Hamby’s suit vs. WNBA tossed; can pursue case vs. Aces,” *ESPN.com*, ESPN, 15 May 2025, [link](#).
- [3] @CallieJLaw “New: I caught up with Cheyenne Parker-Tyus! Just 3 weeks after giving birth, the veteran forward still hopes to join the Aces for WNBA playoffs. On the competition vs. her husband that’ll decide if she’s ready and more for @reviewjournal.” *Twitter*, 24 July 2025, 11:27 a.m., [link](#).
- [4] ”Kierstan Bell - 2022 Draft Prospect,” *WNBA*, [link](#).
- [5] Negley, Cassandra, “WNBA Finals 2022: Dearica Hamby’s ‘heart, effort’ after long injury layoff give Aces ultimate intangible,” *yahoo!sports*, yahoo!, 11 September 2022, [link](#).
- [6] Philippou, Alexa, “Dearica Hamby claims Aces ‘unethical’ after trade to Sparks,” *ESPN.com*, ESPN, 21 January 2023, [link](#).
- [7] Philippou, Alexa, “Aces sign veteran forward Cheyenne Parker-Tyus to 1-year deal,” *ESPN.com*, ESPN, 6 February 2025, [link](#).
- [8] Ritter, Ken, “Charges dropped, Riquana Williams wants to rejoin Las Vegas Aces after domestic violence arrest,” *KPLCTV*, Channel 7 KPLC, 7 September 2023, [link](#).
- [9] Storm Press Release, “Three-Time WNBA Champion Alysha Clark Signs with Seattle,” *Seattle Storm*, 9 February 2025, [link](#).
- [10] Voepel, M.A., “WNBA suspends Hammon, strips draft pick: What’s next for Las Vegas Aces, Dearica Hamby?”, *ESPN.com*, ESPN, 16 May 2023, [link](#).
- [11] Player contract and transaction information taken from *spotrac.com* and *Basketball-Reference*.
- [12] Visualization with player headshots was inspired by NBA University (@NBA\_University on X).
- [13] Statistics referenced are from *Basketball-Reference* and the *WNBA.com* Stats home.
- [14] Data manipulation and visualization was done with R and Excel.