

Playing a Pivotal Role
BY JEFF FARR
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Rebecca Lobo has always wondered about her future. Until recently, there weren't many opportunities in America for a woman who wants to play professional basketball. She even thought of relocating to Europe.

But then the New York franchise of the WNBA — the Women's National Basketball Association — made her an offer she couldn't refuse. She'll be playing professional basketball in New York City, in Madison Square Garden no less, beginning this summer. To a 23-year-old who loves inspiring other young people through her sport, and who loves the Big Apple, it's a dream come true.

"She's a great ballplayer, a great person, she relates well to young people," New York franchise Vice President and General Manager Carol Blazejowski recently told *Newsday*. "She's a terrific role model and she's very inspirational and she enjoys it. Kids are our future and she'll be pivotal in that role."

The WNBA, which debuts in June, is targeting girls 7 to 17, according to Val Ackerman, the former University of Virginia forward who is now the WNBA's president. Rebecca Lobo, a role model for that age group, will indeed play a pivotal role in the new league's success or failure.

Her career at the University of Connecticut and her performance at the 1996 Olympics are already the stuff of legends — but can she take women's basketball to the next level? Women's basketball leagues have folded before; only time will tell if the Age of Women has come to professional basketball. Rebecca Lobo thinks it has.

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