

Golden State Valkyries break WNBA attendance records



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In a season of firsts, the Golden State Valkyries set record after record.

The WNBA's newest franchise may have fallen in the first round of the playoffs, losing to the Minnesota Lynx last week, but across nearly every other metric 2025 was historic.

"We've been on a roller coaster ride," said coach Natalie Nakase at a postseason press conference. "But we've already started talking about what we can do better next year."

The Valkyries are the first expansion team to make the playoffs in their inaugural season. They are also the first WNBA team to sell out every home game, setting a new league attendance record of just under 400,000 in the process.

They won more games, 23, than any previous incoming expansion team while setting league-leading figures in points allowed per game (76.3) and opponent field goal percentage (40.5).

Before the 2025 season began general manager Ohemaa Nyanin told the Business Times that the Valkyries were embracing a startup mentality. The team has been characterized by hard work, defense and a willingness to take open shots.

"Startups can fail. Startups can fail forward. If we can approach every day with an underlying sense of joy, like you're happy to come and change the world, then we'll be able to do whatever we set our minds," Nyanin said.

Golden State Warriors owners Joe Lacob and Peter Guber paid \$50 million to make the Valkyries the 13th WNBA franchise in September 2023.

The WNBA closed an approximately \$2.2 billion, 11-year media rights deal with Amazon, Disney and NBCUniversal in July 2024.

The league has exploded in popularity since then with the 13 WNBA franchises now valued at \$3.5 billion, a 180% increase from 2024 according to Sportico.

A June 2025 report from Sportico valued the Valkyries at \$500 million, making them the most valuable franchise in not only the WNBA but across the world of professional women's sports.

"We knew the amount of work and heart we were going to put behind it. We knew that was going to transform somewhere," said Nakase, who was named the WNBA coach of the year in her first year as a head coach in the league.

More than 15,000 fans placed season ticket deposits before the Valkyries had drafted a player, let alone played a game.

In terms of recruitment Nyanin and her staff focused on experience and character when putting together the Valkyries roster. They selected players who had played in the WNBA but were perhaps sixth or seventh on their existing teams while also adding players with international experience. The result was a deeper roster than previous expansion teams that tended to favor youth and promise.

"It was important to establish a culture," said Nyanin.

A major factor in building that culture was the leadership of coach Nakase. In her first WNBA head coach posting she emerged as a real leader, creating a team culture where players felt valued while mirroring the grit and determination they saw in their coach. The Valkyries prioritized defense and effort – a nod to that startup mentality.

"Everybody had their own unique fingerprint on this experience and this journey, and I think that now we have a little bit more of an understanding as to what Valkyries basketball is — led by coach Natalie and her coaching staff," Nyanin said.

During the season Chase Center got a new nickname: "Ballhalla," a reference to the Valkyries' origins in Norse mythology, gave the WNBA team a sense of ownership over the facility that the Warriors have called home since 2019. In August the team introduced Violet the Raven, a new team mascot to boost the game day atmosphere still further.

"We have a really talented game entertainment team, and we spent a lot of time on that heading into the season," Valkyries President Jess Smith said.

With the Valkyries additional 22 home game dates adding to the Warriors 41 regular season games, Thrive City, the hospitality-focused commercial cluster around the stadium, is living up to its name.

The Golden State marketing team has procured some of the hottest names in Bay Area catering like Che Fico and Fikscue BBQ creating a destination that is drawing visitors outside of game day.

Away from the court, the Valkyries have been active in the local community supporting a range of youth, health, social equity and justice programs across the Bay Area. Working with corporate partners including United Airlines, Kaiser Permanente, JPMorganChase, Rakuten and PG&E the team has launched programs to support local businesses, nonprofits and career development programs for Bay Area youth.

The WNBA will add two new franchises next season, the Portland Fire and Toronto Tempo, before franchises in Cleveland in 2028, Detroit in 2029 and Philadelphia in 2030 take the league to 18 teams.

Kimberly Veale, a longtime Golden State senior marketing and communications executive, recently left the organization to join the Portland Fire.

Any new organizations looking for a violet-tinged blueprint of how to succeed as an expansion team could look at what the Valkyries have done.

"We didn't allow for any of the external noise to permeate what it was that we were building," said Nyanin. "We said publicly on multiple occasions how confident and how competitive that we wanted to be, and we also wanted to do it in a way where we put humans first."