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## Clippers to Join Kings, Lakers in New Arena

*Sports: Donald Sterling's NBA team agrees to a six-year pact to play in the downtown Staples Center when it opens next year.***April 17, 1998** | STEVE SPRINGER | TIMES STAFF WRITER

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The Clippers, who have never shared in the glamour and the glory of the Lakers and Kings, will now at least get to share their new home. The Clippers have agreed to a six-year lease to play in the downtown Staples Center when it opens in the fall of 1999.

By getting all three teams under one roof, the new basketball and hockey arena will have the immediate distinction of being the only one in the nation to ever house three major professional teams during concurrent seasons.

Sources say the Clipper deal was signed Monday and is expected to be announced today, along with news that the Fox Group, which spent \$311 million to purchase the Dodgers in a deal that was approved last month, has purchased an interest in the Staples Center and an option that would eventually give it a stake in the Lakers.

The deal will give the Fox Group a 40% stake in the arena and a similar percentage of the Kings' option to buy 25% of the Lakers. That would translate into a 10% ownership stake in the basketball team.

The National Basketball Assn. must approve the Clipper move. That is not expected to be a problem, although league officials have long made it known that they prefer a Clipper move to the Arrowhead Pond of Anaheim, where the team has been playing eight to 10 games each season under a year-to-year agreement. Playing in the same building as the Lakers could create scheduling difficulties for the NBA.

The Clippers will play one more season in the Sports Arena, which has been their home since they arrived from San Diego for the 1984-85 season. It has not been determined whether the Clippers, who have the lowest attendance in the league, will play at the Pond during the 1998-99 season.

Under the terms of their deal with Kings and Staples Center owners Philip Anschutz and Edward Roski, the Clippers will pay rent but will receive a percentage of the luxury-box revenue, parking and concessions for their games only. It includes an escape clause after three years.

Their status is clearly spelled out as being that of the third occupant. The Kings and the Lakers will get first priority. The Kings will play on Thursdays and Saturdays except for those dates that cause scheduling problems for the National Hockey League. The Lakers will get Fridays and Sundays. The Clippers will get whatever is left. But the two basketball teams could play at Staples on the same day when necessary, and the new facility would also be able to accommodate basketball and hockey on the same day.

\*

Although sources on all sides of the negotiations confirmed the Clipper agreement, nobody would go on the record before today's planned news conference.

"We are respectfully unable to comment on various speculation pertaining to any arena developments," said Joe Safety, the Clippers' vice president of communications. "As always, our intent remains to do everything we can to bring clarity to our arena situation at the appropriate time."

Clipper owner Donald Sterling was traveling and unavailable for comment.

Sterling had other options if he hadn't wished to stay at the Sports Arena. He could have moved to Anaheim or to a proposed arena on Hollywood Park property in Inglewood.

Sterling's decision not to move to Anaheim makes the Walt Disney Co. the biggest loser in today's expected announcement. The owner of the powerful ESPN sports cable TV channel as well as baseball's Angels and hockey's Mighty Ducks, Disney had been eager to entice the basketball team to its arena in Anaheim or to buy the team in part or outright. Disney Chairman Michael Eisner has approached Sterling several times in recent years about coming on board.

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
For Disney, ownership of the Clippers is a key to building a regional sports channel to take on Fox Sports West, owned by News Corp., parent company of the Fox Group. Although Fox has the rights to broadcast Clipper games for three more years, Disney has been hoping to snap up those rights when they became available. ESPN already has postponed the scheduled launch of its new regional sports channel, ESPN West, in part because it lacks programming.

Sources say Disney's efforts could be entirely derailed if the Staples move is tied to renewal of the Clippers' cable contract with Fox. Negotiations between Sterling and the Staples people broke down several weeks ago because of Sterling's dissatisfaction with his proposed share of luxury-box revenue. He was hoping that Fox, as the new minority owner of the arena, would intervene on his behalf. That would happen only if Sterling, in turn, indicated a willingness to keep his team on the Fox network.

The metropolitan area could be left with two white elephants in the Forum and the Sports Arena after the Staples Center opens. The Sports Arena will retain the USC men's basketball team and hope to attract, along with the Forum, whatever events the Staples Center can't accommodate. That is if the Forum is still standing. In the event Hollywood Park should build a football stadium, the area where the Forum stands could become a parking lot.

Times staff writer Sallie Hofmeister contributed to this story.

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