The lights dimmed, a subtle hint to leave. A few minutes later, the arena became even darker, the message now clearer. But on this day, not even the powers-that-be for the world’s most famous arena would detour Jennifer Rizzotti and more than 150 friends, family members, fans, and Hawks players. They carried on their summer reunion in section 16 of an otherwise barren Madison Square Garden an hour after the Cleveland Rockers’ 58-43 win over the New York Liberty. No one was leaving until the last words were spoken, the last hugs exchanged. And that message was clearest.

The day, Saturday, August 4, was a memorable one for Rizzotti, who has been key to the first-place Rockers’ success (21-6 after the win in New York). Displaying her usual hustle and intensity, she hit two three-point field goals, including one of the game’s biggest baskets, with 7:14 left, which stopped a New York comeback in its tracks. But not long after the final buzzer, it was time to switch gears and think Hawks.

That shift in focus is commonplace for Rizotti all summer long, as the grueling, compact WNBA schedule takes teams from city to city, often on consecutive nights. After the Rockers had lost a tough game at home one July evening, they boarded a bus to Detroit. As many of her Cleveland teammates reached for a book or pillow, Rizzotti dug out her cell phone and had an hour-plus conversation with Hawks Associate Coach Mimi Walters, who was in a Chicago hotel. “The cell phone is our lifesaver,” Walters explains, noting that 1 a.m. calls between the two are not a rare occurrence during the summer months.

Also not rare these days is seeing a smiling Rizzotti, who says she is the happiest she’s been in the long time she’s played basketball. After seeing limited playing time in Houston the past two seasons, she was traded to Detroit, only to be dealt again at the end of training...
Hawks to Host Women’s Tournament

America East’s automatic bid to the 2002 NCAA Women’s Basketball Tournament will travel through Hartford. The University has earned the honor of hosting the conference’s annual postseason tournament, to be held March 7–9 at the Chase Family Arena.

“It’s the best thing that’s happened for our program since I’ve been here,” an excited Head Coach Jennifer Rizzotti said. “We’ve taken some really big steps over the last two years, and with six seniors who are ready to lead our team, I can’t think of a better time for this to happen.”

Friendship Cottage Cheese, maker of all-natural, cultured cottage cheese and sour cream, has been named the America East tournament’s title sponsor. Friendship Cottage Cheese, creator of the “Building Healthy Friendships” women’s health education campaign, and spokesperson Rizzotti aim to encourage Connecticut women to build healthier lifestyles through nutrition, exercise, and the relationships they have with others. Based in Jericho, N.Y., Friendship Cottage Cheese is available in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Florida, and Atlanta, Ga.

Watch The Observer for more details and ticket information for the 2002 Friendship Cottage Cheese America East Conference Women’s Basketball Championship.