

## Local Sports

### Volcanoes basketball brings together all sorts

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Vancouver Volcanoes center Bryson McKenzie throws down a monster dunk during a recent game at Clark College's O'Connell Center. (Zachary Kaufman/The Columbian)

It's a bit of a chemistry experiment: Bring together players who have different backgrounds, different ages, different levels of experience, and get them to play as a team.

NBA franchises do it all the time.

But what places the Vancouver Volcanoes in a unique position — along with the rest of the International Basketball League — is the varied long-range goals of the players.

There is, for example, Bryson McKenzie, a 6-foot-11 center who has D-League experience and visions of playing in the NBA.

And there's Alex Hartman, who uses the IBL as an annual pit stop between his seasons overseas.

And there's Kevin Bloodsaw, who at the age of 36 sees the Volcanoes as a diversion from his day job in the golf division at Nike.

Yet while their long-term desires are dissimilar, the Volcanoes have embraced the philosophy of team owner Bryan Hunter.

"First off, he's got to be a good person who I like to be around," said Hunter, talking about his method for evaluating prospective players.

"Second, they have to care about winning games. I don't care if they want to go to the NBA or overseas; they have to care about winning."

The formula has been successful; the Volcanoes are 7-2. But it also can be tenuous, as players walk a tightrope between helping their team win and trying to draw the attention of scouts.

"The reason these guys are playing here," Hunter said, "this is the time for them to get ready to play overseas.

"If somebody has to leave because they've got a better job, we're doing something right."

#### Exposure is the goal

For the IBL, doing something right means the league has been able to survive for five years.

The brainchild of Portland's Mikal Duilio, the IBL has 16 teams this season, mostly in the Northwest but ranging to Los Angeles, Michigan and Edmonton, Alberta.

The emphasis is on fast, up-tempo play — there's a 22-second shot clock — and scores often climb into the 140s. Rosters are populated with former college players, and the Volcanoes' lineup ranges from veterans of community colleges to Division I programs.

"The league is built on exposure and getting people seen, getting people overseas," said Thomas Morris, a 23-year-old forward from the University of North Alabama. "Get film, get exposure, get contacts."

For the Volcanoes, that exposure is the payoff. Players receive about \$80 a week as reimbursement for gas, travel and food, but they do not receive salaries.

"It's not really about the money," said Morris, who also works a part-time job at a Jamba Juice outlet. "It's really to get better, get exposure.

"I got lucky. I ended up on the best team in the league, in my opinion. And our chemistry is outrageous."

Morris is the youngest player on the roster; Bloodsaw is the oldest.

"I might be the oldest man in the league," said the veteran from the University of the Ozarks in Arkansas. "I used to be a slasher, take it to the hole. Now I shoot more jump shots."

Bloodsaw has played professionally in Mexico and Germany.

Now the game is a sidelight for him.

"For what I was able to come out and do, see the world, I've been blessed," he said. "At my age, I've had my time. I'm just trying to help the younger guys."

For those younger guys, that means balancing their dreams with team chemistry.

"There's 50,000 people," Morris said, "trying to do what I'm doing."