On the Run

by Carl Olson

"Bee Cee Basketball" chant returns April 30

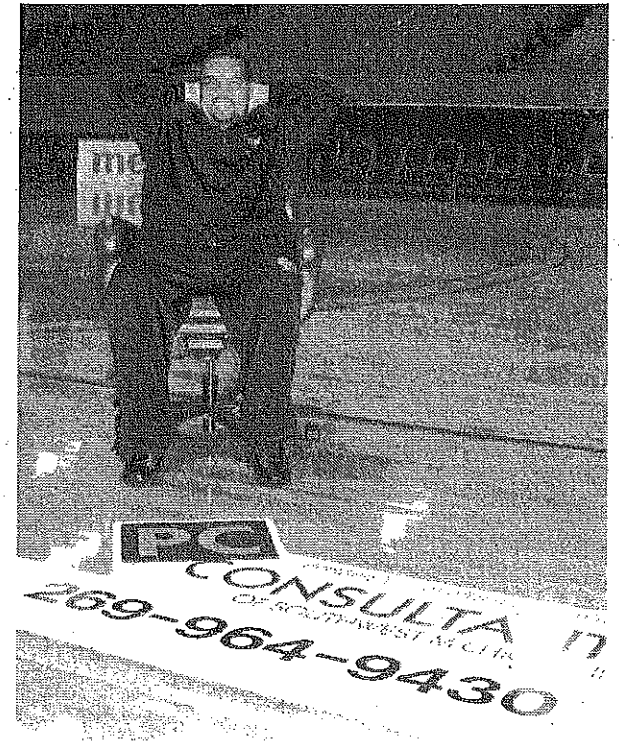
Disheartening news last March when the Battle Creek Knights announced they'd not return to the hardcourt in 2010.

Well, things change. Reconsideration by the Interntional Basketball League's (IBL) efforts to maintain "journeyman basketball" saved the Battle Creek Knights, who'll rise again in Kellogg Arena April 30, 2010.

The Knights in their very first year, 2005, posted a 22-0 record and were the 2005 World IBL Champions. Last year they were the champions of the West division of the Premier Basketball League, then got caught up in the league's post season debacle.

Along the way the original trio of owners - James King, Mike Lee and Scott Niecko - brought a quality, classy pro-type basketball team to Battle Creek's Kellogg Arena. The three locally connected businessmen dedicated themselves to bringing the Cereal City some great pro-type basketball.

Then, last year, and with a fourth wheel - Mike Beck - the Knights left the IBL and joined the Premier Basketball League. They posted an 18-2 record, but East Coast league management created a weird finish. The Knights finished second in the league championship, losing a bizarre one-game playoff in Rochester, New York after a best of three and home court advantage arrangement fell through.



Terrance Dickens relaxes in an easy chair on the Kellogg Arena basketball floor, pondering his quest to coach the Battle Creek Knights to an International Basketball League championship. The Knights, now owned by the IBL, operating through the Kellogg Arena, begin play in April to the first week in July, bringing back "journeyman basketball" to the Cereal City. Dickens hopes to put together a strong group of collegiate players and traveled cagers who'll be seeking to impress oversea's pro programs and National Basketball Association efforts.

Well, that season is soon forgotten with the exception of the record. The four local owners announced non-affiliation with the PBL and decided to take at least a year off. The former owners, although not calling the day-to-day shots and paying the bills, still have a "vested" interest in the Knights.

"It'll be a different operation," said Michelle Genier, the executive sales director for the Knights and Kellogg Arena. "The IBL, in essence, has charged itself with running the team, paying bills and honoring contractual arrangements. The former local ownership has a vested (risk free, supportive) interest."

Duilio's approach works, IBL grows

The IBL was started by Mikal Duilio in 2005. It stretched from the West Coast into the Midwest that year, including in Battle Creek with Knights. The only drawback was that the professional developmental league played games in the spring.

In fact, IBL seasons occur from late April to the first week of July. The IBL season starts after the overseas leagues have been completed and as well, this season occurs after the National Basketball Developmental League season has been completed. The league season finishes before the National Basketball Association summer leagues and overseas tryouts occur; the timing of this season leads to great players wanting to play in the league - players who need to continue their development or maintain their development. These players go overseas, getting great jobs playing basketball.

Also, former NBA players are competing in the IBL. Twenty-one NBA players have appeared in the IBL, including former NBA AllStars Tim Hardaway, Dennis Rodman and Shawn Kemp. Terry Mills and Slick Watts, former NBA players, have coached in the IBL.

Commissioner Duilio has made IBL play fun and interesting. He's been operating sports leagues and events for 24 years. As a teenager, Duilio founded and directed the Indianola Jamball League in Iowa from 1985 to 1992. He obtained a Masters Degree from Iowa State University and moved to Portland, Oregon where he founded, and directed Portland Basketball.com in 1993.

PortlandBasketball.com has been, and is, the world's largest baasketball league with 6,5000 amateur basketball games per year. Duilio founded PugetSoundBasketball.Com in Seattle in 1994, but sold the business withina a year. In November 2003, the IBL surfaced under his direction and heads into its sixth year this spring.

Play is interesting and entertaining

By allowing only one timeout per quarter, and reducing dead time with an immediate inbounds, IBL games are always fast and entertaining, and the contest lasts two hours.

Terrance Dickens has been with Duilio since the beginning of the IBL. He's helped in operating the Vancouver Volcanoes and coached the Portland Chinooks to the IBL finals, losing to Elkhart (Indiana) in 2007. Last season it was Dickens leadership running the first year Oregon Waves, who advanced to the IBL finals again.

"It will be my job to bring the best players into Battle Creek," said Dickens recently. "I'm commited to bring Battle Creek a championshp. The IBL has always liked the venue in Battle Creek. So far the former owners have been great and the people of Battle Creek supportive."

Dickens said that former Knights players would not be retained, unless they contacted the team and were at a tryout. He did not know where any of the old Knights were playing. Former general manager David Darkey is now with the Battle Creek Revolution ice hockey team.

"I attended the IBL's tryout camp in Illinois two weeks ago," said Dickens. "I was looking for speed and I like winners from good college programs that also bring athleticism to the team. Hopefully we can bring in some big-name college graduates, who are continuing to develop their skills. Like I said, I like winners and Battle Creek deserves a champion."

Terry Sare, the Knights former coach who has moved on to Wyoming Lee High School, "produced a championship team for Battle Creek and I'm hoping not to fall shy of that quest," said Dickens. "Sare was a great coach, but when there's change, there's change and everyone moves on. The IBL felt Battle Creek was a great place for a team, thus they picked up the tab on the Knights."

The Kellogg Arena, Dickens and the IBL are now responsible for operating the Knights. The 2010 Knights open on the road against the USA All Stars, playing April 3-4 and April 17-18 prior to an IBL opener in Kellogg Arena Friday, April 30 against the Southern Illinois Truth. The 18-game slate features nine games at home.

I'm looking forward to "Bee Cee Basketball," via James King's chant echoing from Kellogg Arena.