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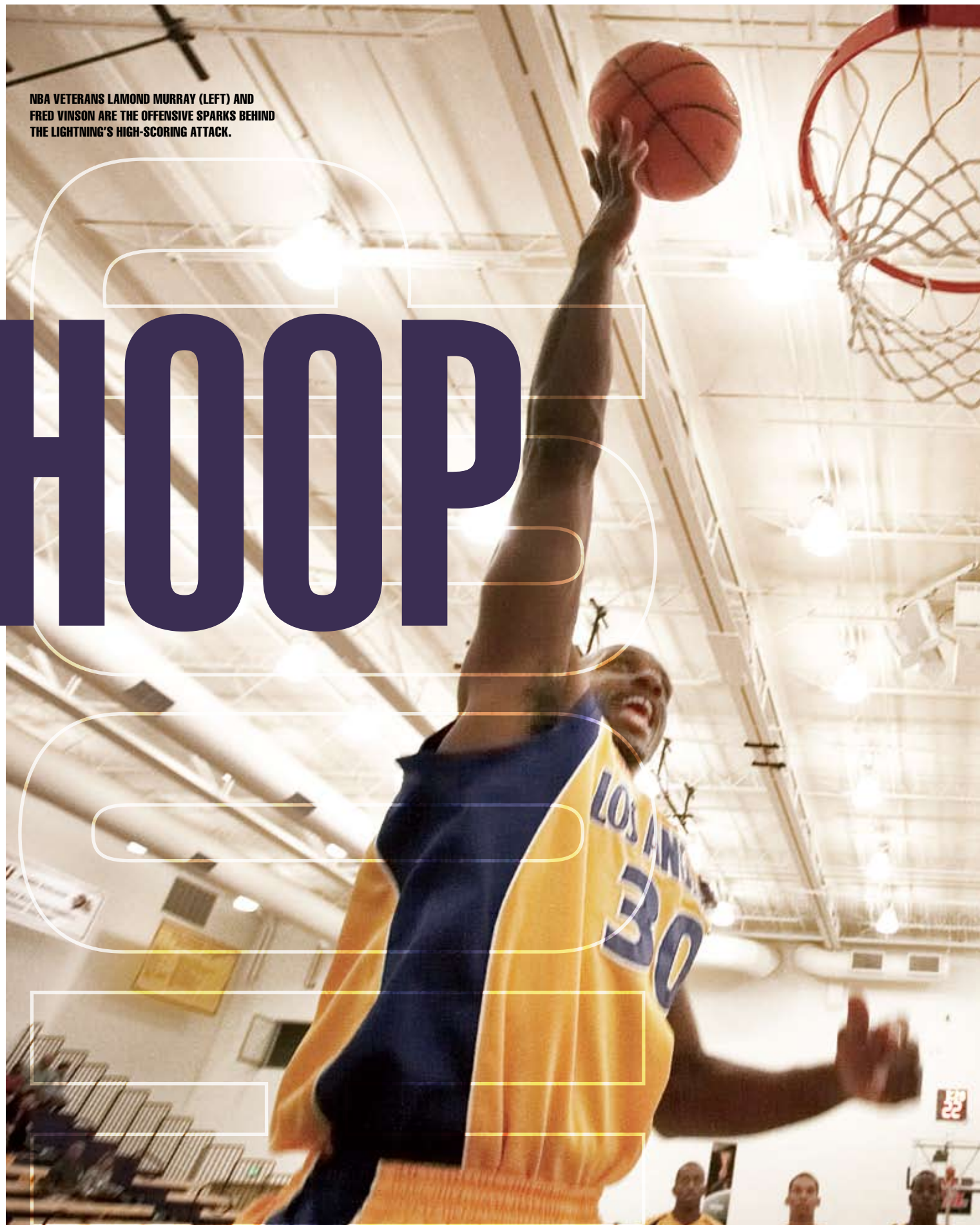
## The Guys' Issue





**NBA VETERANS LAMOND MURRAY (LEFT) AND  
FRED VINSON ARE THE OFFENSIVE SPARKS BEHIND  
THE LIGHTNING'S HIGH-SCORING ATTACK.**

# HOOP







# DREAMS

**THE LOS ANGELES  
LIGHTNING HOPE TO  
STRIKE IT BIG IN  
THOUSAND OAKS.**

**BY ANTHONY HEAD  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY MOSS**



**E**ven after an NBA champion has been crowned and the current season is officially in the record books, there will still be a Los Angeles team playing professional basketball. The Los Angeles Lightning is the newest team to enter the ranks of the International Basketball League (IBL), and, with a season that stretches through June, keeps the round ball action going for a little bit longer.

This is the first year of operation for the Lightning, which play their home games at the Gilbert Sports Arena at Cal Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks. Owner and general manager Mark Harwell believes that even though the NBA's seemingly endless "second season" of playoff games is exhaustingly long, he's not concerned about basketball fatigue from area fans. "It's the perfect time of year for us, actually. After college basketball's March Madness, fans still want more basketball. And although their season is long, the NBA's tournament is exciting. So just as their playoffs are getting underway we get our season going and interest is already high in the game," he says.

Cal Lutheran's 1,500-seat arena is draped with enough purple banners for the university's sporting achievements that, when mixed with the Lightning's bright yellow uniforms, invoke some of the majesty of the Los Angeles Lakers. But Harwell wants fans to know that they are not a feeder team for the Lakers or anyone else. "We're in a stand-alone league. The IBL is not a minor league to the NBA," he says. "The IBL has been around for four years and is growing. We're at 18 teams this year and more will be coming

next year. We're an expansion team, but there is no draft, so we get former NBA players and European talent and top college players. Everyone is up for grabs."

Without a draft or a budget cap, teams like the Lightning are given carte blanche to assemble their rosters as they see fit, which in this league is heavily geared towards speed. The IBL format emphasizes fast-paced action with little down time. For example, there is only one timeout per team per quarter and there is a 22-second shot clock. Such rules—along with the use of the college three-point line (three feet closer to the basket than the professional line)—help run up the scores.

One Lightning player who knows how to use that shorter distance to full advantage is Fred Vinson. This 6-foot-4-inch guard played college ball for Georgia Tech and the Seattle Supersonics in the NBA. When he played for the IBL's Santa Barbara Breakers he set a single-game league record of 15 three-pointers. So far this season he's continued ripping the net from three-point land.

The Santa Barbara team disbanded despite well-attended games, but one of Vinson's former teammates, Lamond Murray, is now running with him and the Lightning. Murray is a 6-foot-7-inch forward who was a first-round draft choice of the Los Angeles Clippers. He also led the Cleveland Cavaliers in scoring in the 2001-02 season and averaged more than 25 points per game for the Breakers.

When Vinson and Murray team up, they prove a formidable offensive duo with precision passing and veteran leadership. They're not alone, though, as the roster also includes exciting players like



Ronell Mingo, who's been a steady presence in the lane. The team is under the direction of Ron Quarterman, who's had experience coaching at all levels of the game.

Unfortunately, the team didn't light up the "win" column early in the season, dropping their first six games before finally netting a victory. But that's to be expected from any new team while players work out the right on-court chemistry and try to keep their game legs strong down the fourth-quarter stretch. Such fast-paced action is taxing, and games are won with endurance as much as scoring—fatigue seemed to be a factor in the Lightning's early season record.

Harwell isn't despairing, though. As an executive at True Grit Entertainment, he's often involved in acquisition and development of television and movie projects, so he's used to the long road from idea to fruition. More importantly, he spent several years in different basketball leagues putting together teams just like the Lightning, and he knows that expansion squads rarely top the division in their first year.

"My two favorite things growing up were playing basketball and going to the movies," Harwell says. He's a basketball lifer and he's got game. This 6-foot-4-inch native of West Texas was a point guard for Ventura College and later Prairie View A & M in Texas, where, he says, he was the first white man in history to play basketball for that school. Harwell chose Thousand Oaks for the Lightning because of its familiarity. "It reminds me of western Texas. It's suburban and friendly and is removed from LA just enough to feel normal. That's not meant as a slap at Hollywood at all. But I just wanted to be in a place that felt like home. And to be able to develop this franchise to be a part of the fabric of the community."

After a long, six-game road trip, the Lightning return to Thousand Oaks for their last home stand of the season against the Arizona Flame on June 20 and 21. If their record warrants, the Lightning will move on to the IBL playoffs at the end of the month. ■

*For more information on the Los Angeles Lightning go to [www.losangeleslightning.net](http://www.losangeleslightning.net).*

**OPPOSITE PAGE: OWNER AND GENERAL MANAGER MARK HARWELL LOOKS FORWARD TO MANY YEARS IN THOUSAND OAKS. THIS PAGE: GUARD FRED VINSON HAS HIS SIGHTS SET ON A WINNING SEASON.**

## THE IBL FORMAT EMPHASIZES FAST-PACED ACTION WITH LITTLE DOWN TIME.

Of course, Harwell had his own dream of playing in the big leagues: "I think every kid does. But I had a few injuries, and after that I didn't have the same dynamic. I lost that edge that you need in order to take it to the next level. So I'm living vicariously through these guys. I would love to get out there but they would run over me. At this point I'm happy just to enjoy the show."

He's also not looking to coach the team, stating that there is too much to do behind the scenes that, as tempting as it may be to direct the action from the bench, he doesn't have time to coach and stay on top of all the other details. "Basketball is a passion but I have to work on the business side of the operations. My focus is making sure everyone is having fun and to ensure that we'll be here for many years," Harwell says.

