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A lightning strike



A few more things of note following [today's Daily News column](#) about the upcoming season for the [International Basketball League's Los Angeles Lightning](#), which will play its games at Cal Lutheran in Thousand Oaks starting in April: Owner/general manager [Mark Harwell](#) may have a history in Hollywood dealings, and even had some acting roles, but he hardly seems like the too-slick type that's trying to sell a bag of marbles to a fan base expecting to watch some diamonds in the rough trying to get back to NBA status. Harwell's track record doesn't show that he's afraid of having a few obstacles put in his way. The last two seasons of his college basketball career, for example, were spent as a point guard at [Prairie View A&M](#). That's the same historically all-black school that plays in the Southwestern Athletic Conference against Grambling, Mississippi Valley State, Southern and Alcorn State. Harwell, who played as a freshman at Texas Wesleyan and as a sophomore at Ventura College, was recruited to come to Prairie View A&M and became the only white player on the team. "When I was young, I saw that **Bruce Jenner** movie, '[Grambling's White Tiger](#)'," said Harwell of the 1981 made-for-TV movie that told the story of white player **Jim Gregory** playing quarterback for the all-black school (**Harry Belafonte** even played coach **Eddie Robinson**).

"I was thinking, 'How cool would it be to do that?'" said Harwell. "I took them up on their offer and it was an amazing experience."



Harwell said the highlight may have been when Robinson himself, after a Prairie View A&M-Grambling game, put his arm around his shoulder and told him: "Son, I'm real proud of you. Not many would do what you've done."

Harwell ended up averaging double-digits in scoring and almost eight assists a game from 1983-'85. It earned him the nickname "White Lightning" and drew attention from ABC's "Wide World of Sports" and **Howard Cosell's** "Sportsbeat."

That, in part, is how Harwell came to name his team the [Los Angeles Lightning](#).

Harwell ended up breaking both his legs playing basketball, which ended any sort of thoughts about joining a league after his college days ended. He also survived a life-threatening car accident about six years ago that has had a profound impact on how he looked at life.

"All my life I had done things that might be a little crazy, like running up Pike's Peak, or dribbling a basketball while running the L.A. Marathon to raise money for charity," he said.

"The way I was raised, if you take care of everyone around you, life will take care of you. Everything that meant anything to me growing up was playing basketball, or going to movies. And now I've combined the two. And I think I can help other guys who want to get back to the NBA keep their dreams alive. And when they play for the Lightning, they'll feel like they're in the NBA -- first-class catering, travel bags, warmups ... all the little things that they'd get a taste of as if they're in the show.



As for the [International Basketball League](#), a 22-franchise organization that's heading into its fourth year of existence has entries such as the Central Oregon Hotshots, the Snohomish City Explosion and the Battle Creek Knights, who are the first visitors to the Lightning in April. There's also the Arizona Flame, Las Vegas Stars and Portland Chinooks. The lure of playing in the IBL may be its fast-paced approach and inclusion of teams outside the U.S. A traveling team from China plans to play in the league, as well as one representing Holland. The rules are much more international as well -- no ref-checks as the ball is brought in bounds, for one. There's a 22-second clock and only one time out per team per 12-minute quarter. The squads generally average 120 points a game, and can get as high as 180. Yet, the implicit goal in the owners' manual is to get [games over in two hours](#). Last season, [Fred Vinson](#), who most recently got a taste of NBA play with the Clippers on their 2005-06 preseason roster, set a league record with the Santa Barbara Sounders by hitting 15 3-pointers in a game. "The fans have really been impressed with the quality of play," said Harwell. "The game just flies." The league also has a commitment to getting players back into either the NBA (leading into the summer leagues) and playing overseas by holding an ["international exposure camp"](#) in May.