



The Other Fish In The Sea

If the Blazers ever leave, we'll still have pro hoops: the IBL's Chinooks.

BY PAUL GERALD

Fear not, Portland pro basketball fans: Even in the unlikely event that Paul Allen finagled a way to move his money-hemorrhaging Trail Blazers, the city would still have professional basketball.

This other version is cheaper (\$8 for all adults vs. a top ticket price of \$131 for the Blazers). It's higher-scoring. And these hoopsters have other *jobs*, since a player would need to play 1,368 games to match Blazer Zach Randolph's \$171,000 or so per night.

And on Sunday afternoon, March 12, they're even playing in the Rose Garden.

They're the Portland Chinooks of the International Basketball League, both in their second year.

The men who run the IBL and the Chinooks see themselves as no less than basketball's saviors.

IBL Commissioner Mikal Duilio's reason for starting the league of ex-college players and others sounds over-the-top, but is offered with pure sincerity: "To save the game of basketball, without losing money."

And what's wrong with the state of basketball? "For starters, it was never intended to last three hours," Duilio says. "It's supposed to be an athletic game, with flow, but all the commercialism and TV timeouts have slowed it down so much that defense has taken over."

Duilio's fixes were simple: only one timeout per quarter, a 22-second shot clock (vs. 24 seconds in the NBA), and referees don't explain, much less defend, their calls. Just give teams the ball and let them inbound it. As a result, IBL games last less than two hours, and teams average 127 points apiece instead of the current NBA average of 97.

"Our game is better," he says, "even though the NBA's players are better."

Duilio bought the rights to the IBL—an earlier version of the league folded years ago—before last season. A prospective owner pays the league \$22,000, and in return the new team gets uniforms, refs, marketing, PR and space on the website, iblhoopsonline.com.

Travel costs are kept low by "clustering" the league's 26 teams; for example, in addition to Portland and Vancouver, Wash., there are teams in Bend, Salem, Eugene, Seattle, Tacoma, and the Tri-Cities. (There's another cluster around Ohio and Michigan.)

Duilio says another \$30,000 is all a team typically needs to spend. "Our economic model is not just about being a rich guy's hobby," he says, echoing a steady, subtle anti-NBA theme.

Chinooks owner Terry Emmert, who also owns Emmert International, a heavy-haul transportation company, is a regular free spender by IBL standards. He has the league's only team bus and furnished apartments for out-of-town players.

Asked if he turns a profit on the team, Emmert laughs. "There ain't no money in this," he says, sounding like another man on a mission. "We want this team to belong to the community."

That "of the community" sentiment appears to be genuine, given that a while back Emmert sent several of his "pro" players to the Oregon Employment Office to find real jobs.

No, it's not your fantasy for what should happen to chronic Blazers underachiever Darius Miles. Consider that Emmert says the Chinooks recently cut a player who missed practice without an excuse, and then tossed two more guys who complained about it. And everybody on the Chinooks, even future Hall of Famer Gary Payton's little brother Brandon, has a full-time job—and not just because IBL players make only an average of \$125 per game over a 20-game season.

"I'd love to make it to the big-time, but I know I have to have a life after basketball," says Brandon Payton, who makes less than average. "I'm a real-estate broker's assistant...if you're only making \$100 a game, you have to do something else, so you can eat and have soap and stuff."

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