

HighFlyers launch home slate Monday at MHS

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By Whitney Bermes

A new location. A full schedule. A revamped roster.

Yamhill County's only professional sports team, the Yamhill HighFlyers, is looking to make its official debut in the International Basketball League a soaring success.

"I think we have a very exciting brand of basketball that will have a lot of high-flying dunks and high-scoring action," HighFlyers general manager Eric Bailey said. "We have some really high-caliber talent on the roster that I think fans will really take a hold to, representing Yamhill County well."

With four games already under their belts, the HighFlyers make their home debut Monday at McMinnville High School when they play host to the Central Oregon Hotshots at 7 p.m. Yamhill won its first two games of the season — 112-105 and 115-89, both wins over the USA All-Stars. The team took on the Vancouver Volcanoes on Friday and will travel to Washington to take on the Tacoma Tide tonight.

The HighFlyers played their inaugural season last year, but the shortened branding season lasted only nine games, with seven of those on the road. This year, the HighFlyers are set to play in 22 games, including 10 at home.

The HighFlyers are getting out of last year's home gym at Patton Middle School, though, and will play seven of their home contests at McMinnville High School and three at Linfield's Ted Wilson Gym.

"I think its hands-down one of the most pristine venues there is," Bailey said of Linfield's digs. "I think Linfield is completely amazing. That will definitely help us. Capacities at both venues are fairly similar and can only help attendance."

Taking over the HighFlyers' bench this year is first-year coach Bruce "Bubba" Jones. Jones spent 22 years as a volunteer coach in the Pro-Am summer basketball league before transitioning into minor league coaching positions.

"We're going to be a well-coached team for the short amount of time we've been together, very disciplined," Jones said. "We hustle because one of my philosophies is it takes no ability to hustle ... Fans can expect an exciting brand of basketball."

“He’s a very talented individual who we definitely think can lead this team really well and already has, obviously with our start of two wins right off the bat,” Bailey said.

Familiar faces from last year’s roster include Chris Hunt and Jason Hartford.

Hartford, a forward from Cornell, averaged 29 points and 13 boards last year for the HighFlyers.

During the off-season, Hartford competed professionally in both Africa and Portugal. He was named the Pro Basketball MVP in Africa and earned a spot on the all-Portugal first team.

Hunt, out of Occidental, averaged 23 points and 12 rebounds in last year’s 10-game season.

But much of this year’s squad is new to Yamhill County. Bailey said he wanted to keep some key components from last year’s lineup but come up with an almost entirely new roster.

“I wanted to make sure that we were very competitive this year as we head into our first season in the International Basketball League,” Bailey said. “I made sure that we kept the best elements from last year’s team and then went on from there to find the best talent available to complement them.”

One of those fresh faces is Nate Bowie, starting point guard. Bowie hails from Central Arkansas, where he led the Division I Southland Conference in scoring in 2008.

“He’s very exciting to watch — a six-foot guy but can shoot 3s and can drive nicely to the hoop,” Bailey said.

Also from Central Arkansas comes Durrell Nevels. In 2007, Nevels was fifth overall in Division I in shot blocking. Forward Cheyenne Moore, another newbie, comes to the HighFlyers after stints at Clemson and George Washington. Moore is known for his prolific dunking, Bailey said, which is something they wanted to add to their program.

“I think that’s one thing our team was missing last year, not too many good dunkers. But I wanted to make sure with a name like HighFlyers, we had a lot of people that could dunk this year,” Bailey said.

With the full season also comes the opportunity to win an IBL championship. The IBL consists of two divisions, the HighFlyers’ International Division and the Continental Division.

All home games tip off at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$8 for adults, \$6 for seniors and \$4 for kids and students. At Monday’s home opener, mothers receive half-price admission.

“It’s really fun family entertainment and hopefully we can lighten up the valley, living up to our name of the HighFlyers,” Jones said