

Mac lands a pro sports franchise

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By Jim Walker



Yamhill County Flyers team members Quentin Demeritte, Rome Holley, and Chris Hunt listen as IBL basketball league commissioner Mikal Duilio thanks Yamhill County for its support of the new franchise. Marcus Larson/News-Register



Mayor Rick Olson welcomes Yamhill High Flyers Quentin Demeritte, Rome Holley, and Chris Hunt at a press conference Friday in McMinnville Upper City Park. Marcus Larson/News-Register

McMinnville, OR--The International Basketball League welcomed its newest team, the Yamhill High Flyers, at a press conference held Friday at McMinnville's Upper City Park. The professional sports franchise is not only Oregon's newest, but also Yamhill County's first.

A number of dignitaries attended to welcome the High Flyers to the community, including Mayor Rick Olson, Chamber President Phil Hutchinson, City Councilor Kevin Jeffries, IBL Commissioner Mikal Duilio and city parks official Steve Ganzers. They were joined by Travis Parker of Comfort Inn & Suites, the new team's top, gold-level sponsor.

"What an honor to sponsor the launching of a basketball team in our community," Parker said. "It would be great if the community came together to support this team."

Parker presented the team's general manager, Eric Bailey, with a check for \$500 to mark the launch.

"It's a historic day," Olson said. He said McMinnville's historic district was a fitting venue for the welcoming of a sports franchise to the city, as the city's first house, Cozine House, overlooked the site chosen for the press conference.

Players Chris Hunt, Rome Holley and Quentin Demeritte joined in the festivities.

Hunt is a 6-foot-7 graduate of Occidental. His folks own a winery in California, so he figures to be right at home in wine country.

Holley is a 6-foot guard. Demeritte, who stands 6-foot-5, is a native of the Bahamas.

Olson told them, "It's important you become a partner with the community and give back. Represent McMinnville in a positive fashion."

The mayor said it would take a cooperative effort of players, officials, sponsors and community supporters to make the franchise successful.

Ganzers noted the net proceeds from High Flyers concessions will be donated to the parks department to support youth athletics. "Go get 'em," he urged the team.

This is the IBL's fifth year. It features fast-paced action, with only one time out per quarter.

Teams "go on mad offensive runs for 3 to 5 minutes," Duilio said, averaging up to 127 points.

"Players are hungry. They have their own dreams and a tremendous amount of passion."

He stressed the international flavor of the league. "We have teams from Japan, China, Canada and America," he said.

Bailey promised the team - using the Patton Middle School gym this year, but eyeing the Linfield and Mac High gyms next year - would bring high-quality basketball to the community at an affordable price. "We're very excited to be Yamhill County's first sports franchise, and to be the newest members of the IBL," he said.

"We will be playing our home games this year in McMinnville, but we really want the High Flyers to be a team that all of Yamhill County - from Newberg to Sheridan - can rally around and support. Some future games may be played in communities throughout the county, and we hope that bringing two truly international opponents to the area this season - the Nippon Tornadoes and Vancouver BC Titans - will serve as an economic boost."

Terrence Burns will serve as the High Flyers interim head coach this season.

Once a premier athlete at Portland's Benson High School, the 51-year-old went on to star in both football and basketball at Portland State before a serious knee injury ended his playing career. He has a son starting at guard for West Texas University.

The High Flyers have lined up seven sponsors so far, led by Comfort Inn & Suites.

The silver level features the Valley View Retirement Community and Corvallis Metro Mortgage Company. The bronze level features Farmers Insurance, V2 Family Dentistry, Copy Cats Northwest and The Photo Treehouse.

Eric Bailey holds an ownership stake in addition to serving as general manager. He launched the endeavor through YHF Entertainment LLC in partnership with Greg Levinson, Erik Abel and Kevin Bailey.

Bailey grew up in Tualatin. his senior year at the University of Oregon, he won the Ray Hawk Award for displaying the best combination of community service and academic achievement.

He has experience with minor league baseball, soccer and basketball organizations.

The official slogan for the High Flyers' 2009 season, which opens May 26, is "Yamhill vs. the World." That reflects the international nature of the schedule, which has the locals playing teams from China, Japan and Canada.

Within two weeks, the High Flyers plan to establish a website up at www.highflyersbasketball.com. Once that happens, fans will be able to purchase advance tickets via a link to TicketsWest.

The High Flyers also have an official IBL page at www.iblhoopsonline.com/yamhill_highflyers.

While IBL teams normally play a 20-game schedule, the High Flyers will only be playing four games in their inaugural season, two at home and two on the road. Bailey said the IBL requires that new teams go through a "branding year" in which they are limited to four to 10 games.

Next year, the High Flyers will play a full schedule.

Bailey said, "We hope to be a fixture of the community for years to come. This season will allow us to get our name firmly out into the community and help us build a solid fan base."

The Yamhill High Flyers' season opener, set for Tuesday, May 26, has them playing the China-Shanxi Zhongyu at 3 p.m. in Portland. On Thursday, May 28, they will play the Japan Nippon Tornados at 7:15 p.m. at Patton Middle School.

They are slated to play the Vancouver BC Titans at 7:15 p.m. Friday, June 26, at Patton, and the Snohomish Explosion at 7:15 p.m. Sunday, June 28, in Monroe, Wash.

Patton is located at the corner of Northeast 19th Street and McDonald Lane, one block south of Highway 99W. Its gym seats about 500 spectators.

Tickets for home games will run \$4 for children or students with ID, \$6 for senior citizens and \$8 for everyone else. They can be ordered through highflyersbasketball.com or ticketswest.com, or picked up in person at the McMinnville Safeway.

A VIP area will be reserved for groups of 10 to 25. Those interested in the area are asked to e-mail Bailey at ericbailey@ymail.com.