

# What does a professional team mean to Yamhill County?

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By Troy Shockley

Professional basketball is coming to Yamhill County soon. As soon, in fact, as late May.

The Yamhill High Flyers, affiliated with the International Basketball League, an organization with a five-year history, will start an abbreviated season in Portland May 26 against a club from China. The team's first home game will come two days later at 7:15 p.m. at McMinnville's Patton Middle School.

2009's four-game schedule will give local basketball fans just enough action to whet their appetites for a full-season campaign in 2010. At least that's the hope of High Flyers' General Manager Eric Bailey, IBL officials and several local sponsors.

But just what will a professional sports franchise mean to McMinnville specifically and Yamhill County in general? The most obvious answer is that the team will provide one more activity for sports fans to enjoy during the spring season as the NBA playoffs wind down following a long campaign and the Major League Baseball season is just getting underway.

The team, if it catches on, will also give county communities bragging rights. How many other small cities and towns like those in Yamhill have a professional sports franchise? Few, if any. And, the High Flyers could bring a few much-needed shekels into the local economy if Bailey and his team sponsors have success marketing both the team and the IBL.

Plus, High Flyers' games will provide yet another opportunity for good old family fun at a reasonable price.

Sure, team rosters will be made up of players that, for the most part, will never see action in the NBA, but many will have made their marks in college or in European, Asian or Australian leagues.

Bailey and IBL officials are promising a fast-paced, action-filled brand of basketball that should be entertaining and the product will improve over time as the High Flyers become established and offer a viable roost for players from around the country.

To kick off the inaugural season, Bailey organized a press conference Friday at McMinnville City Park and a number of local dignitaries were on hand to welcome the High Flyers. All were looking forward to the team's first of home game.

The tone of Friday's press conference was optimistic, not only with local dignitaries and team officials, but the three players in attendance as well. Chris Hunt, a 6-foot-7 forward from Occidental College, explained that his folks own a winery in California. Before returning to Portland later in the afternoon, he said he just might visit a few local wineries to sample their products.

Two other players, Rome Holley, a six-footer from Baltimore, and Quentin Demeritte, a 6-5 Bahaman with professional experience, also were enthusiastic about playing IBL basketball.

"We're hungry," Holley said, "and we'll play hard."

For future seasons, Bailey hopes to showcase his team at more than one venue around the county, and he is eyeing a larger arena — Mac High and/or Linfield College — for the High Flyers to hold what he hopes will be a growing fan base in seasons to come.

Hopefully, sports fans in general and basketball fans in particular will jump on the High Flyers — and IBL's — bandwagons right off the get-go and give the team and league their support as the Yamhill High Flyers become an integral part of the county's sports fare.

*If you have an idea for a column or feature story or a comment, contact me by e-mail at [jwalker@newsregister.com](mailto:jwalker@newsregister.com) or by phone at (503) 472-5114, ext. 333.*