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Pro basketball league eyes Mac

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By JIM WALKER

Of the News-Register

Yamhill County - and more specifically, the city of McMinnville - is in line for a professional basketball team, if all the details can be worked out and sufficient sponsorship pledges lined up.

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The new team would compete as a member of the International Basketball League, which is preparing to open its fifth season in April, 2009.

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The minor league club, whether or not it reaches "go-status" in time for the next IBL campaign, already has a name: Yamhill High Flyers. And it has a logo.

The IBL's Eric Bailey, based in Portland, was in McMinnville last week, seeking pledges from businesses and individuals who would like to see a team in Mac. If the push is successful, Bailey, who graduated from Tualatin High School and the University of Oregon, will serve as the team's general manager.

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"We're seeking pledges for sponsorships - not cash up front," Bailey emphasized. Those pledges, he said, could result in a payment plan for sponsors after the commitment is made to support the franchise.

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Bailey explained that several levels of sponsorships are available - along with their accompanying benefits and perks.

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The singular "presenting sponsor," for example, would pledge \$15,000. In return, the sponsor's company name would be listed on letterheads, T-shirt merchandise, the official team poster, banners and more.

Other benefits for the presenting sponsor include 20 courtside tickets, valued at \$20 apiece, for each of the team's 10 home games (a \$4,000 package), a framed uniform signed by each of the players, autograph sessions at the sponsor's place of business and a number of additional benefits.

"Gold sponsors" (limited to three at \$5,000 each), will receive six courtside tickets for each of the 10 home games and six more adult general admission tickets (a value of \$1,680) as well as other advantages. Other sponsorship opportunities include the "silver sponsor" (six at \$2,000) and the "bronze sponsor" (unlimited number available at \$500).

Additional sponsorships for the team, which could potentially use Ted Wilson Gymnasium on the campus of Linfield College as its home court, are also being sought. Included in that group are the official health & fitness sponsor; official practice facility sponsor; official hotel sponsor; official car rental sponsor; official dance team sponsor; and media sponsors.

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The league plays its games in spring to avoid conflict with other leagues.

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For that reason, the April to June schedule allows players coming off seasons in Europe to participate on IBL teams or showcase their talents for prospective owners of European league contingents for the winter leagues.

To save on costs, IBL teams are organized in geographical clusters.

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"The IBL is built so efficiently, we can offer an international league," Bailey said during his visit to Mac. Even the teams from Japan and China, he said, "can come here after their winter seasons are done and play 20-game road schedules."



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In his letter to potential sponsors, Bailey emphasized the following: "The High Flyers would love to bring Yamhill County its first professional sports team, but these next couple months will be critical. We have to show the league office that a team in this community is viable and will thrive.

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"Our case will be made with a mixture of community surveys and company sponsorship pledges.

"Only once we meet a certain threshold of support will the franchise be awarded. If awarded a franchise, the team could begin play as early as April, 2009."

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