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QUAD-CITY TIMES
Sunday, Feb. 4, 1996

SPORTS

RECORD-BREAKER

■ **The score:** Quad-City Matadors 4, Madison Monarchs 2.
■ **Attendance:** 9,443.
■ **Key to the game:** The Matadors scored a short-handed goal, a power-play goal and an empty-net goal with 12 seconds remaining to even the season series at 5-5.
■ **Records fall:** The Matadors set a Colonial Hockey League single-season attendance record of 127,831 with 13 home games remaining. The game attendance of 9,443 was also a Matadors and Colonial Hockey League record.
■ **Blake Matadors** (who were scored by) Butch Kubit (left-handed), Mark Franks, Karson Koebel (power play) and Frederik Nasvold (empty net) when he fired the puck from one goal into Madison's unused goal.
■ **Today:** The same two teams play for the last time in the regular season in Madison.
■ **Page 35:** Story summary.



Nightmares get worse for Iowa, Illinois

Hawks now are 4-5 in Big Ten

By Don Dossie
QUAD-CITY TIMES

IOWA CITY — Matt Gaudin served as a volunteer coach for the Penn State basketball team last season. But his back looked pretty strong Saturday as he carried 10th-ranked Penn State to one of its biggest victories of the Big Ten season. Gaudin fired in eight points in overtime after his teammates had launched a record-setting 3-point barrage at the Nittany Lions shot down Iowa's lingering hopes for Big Ten glory with a 95-87 victory at Carver-Hawkeye Arena. The win kept the surprising Nittany Lions (16-2 overall, 7-2 Big Ten) atop the league standings and kept the Hawks, the preseason favorites, right where they were, too — in sixth place. Saturday's loss was Iowa's first at home this season. It makes the turn and

heads into the second half of the conference schedule with a 4-5 record (15-6 overall) and only a marginal shot at an NCAA Tournament berth. "It's not time to give up," Penn State coach Jerry Dunn said. "It's not a wasted season at all." But it certainly was a wasted afternoon, thanks to Gaudin, a 6-foot-8 senior who has risen above his back ailments to become Penn State's go-to guy. "He's a good free-throw shooter and he can finish down there," Penn State coach Jerry Dunn said. "He's our horse and we went to him." Iowa went to its horse in the overtime, too, as the extra session evolved into a shootout between Gaudin and Woolridge. First, Gaudin would score, then Woolridge, then Gaudin, then Woolridge. When Woolridge missed the first of two free throws with 1 minute, 15 seconds left, Gaudin made the second. — IOWA
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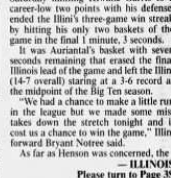


Loss drops Fighting Illini to 3-6

By Steve Batterson
QUAD-CITY TIMES

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Illinois coach Lou Henson couldn't decide which was worse — his basketball team's sorry shooting or its wretched rebounding Saturday night. But there was no mistaking the fact that the Fighting Illini turned in their worst performance of the year as Wisconsin walked away from the Assembly Hall with a 57-46 Big Ten win. "In my 21 years here, that was one of the worst games we've played," Henson said. "It was horrible." Illinois shot just 33 percent from the field — its second-worst effort of the year — and was manhandled on the boards 47-33. But numbers alone don't

tell the entire story in Henson's eyes. "We wouldn't have scored if they had nobody on us. That's how bad we were," he said. "We were very pathetic offensively." When the game was on the line, Illinois may have been even worse defensively. Henson's Auriant, who spent most of Saturday limiting Kwame Harris to a career-low two points with his defense, ended the Illini's three-game win streak by hitting his only two baskets of the game in the final 1 minute, 3 seconds. It was Auriant's basket with seven seconds remaining that erased the final Illinois lead of the game and left the Illini (14-7 overall) starting at a 3-6 record at the midpoint of the Big Ten season. "We had a chance to make a little run in the league but we made some mistakes down the stretch tonight and it cost us a chance to win the game," Illini forward Bryant Notters said. As far as Henson was concerned, the loss was a disaster. — ILLINOIS
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SUNDAY SPECIAL

'Those were great days'

Tri-Cities Blackhawks were in the right place

By Don Dossie
QUAD-CITY TIMES

THE weather was... well, just look out the window. That's what it was like. It was Jan. 3, 1947. There had been a lot of snow already that winter. The overnight temperatures dropped to minus 7. There was going to be a basketball game at Wharton Field House that night. There was a new team in town. The mayors of four cities were going to shoot free throws at halftime of the preliminary game between the John Dore Plows and the Cane Eagles to determine who got to throw up the first ball. Noted sports writer Fred Goetz was in the crowd to officiate the game. The defending league champions were coming in to provide

Part I of a 3-part series looking at the wild story of the Tri-Cities Blackhawks' evolution.

But that weather... that was a problem. What kind of crowd could they get in that? "About 1,500. It was almost as many fans as the team had drawn in 11 games in its previous location, Buffalo, N.Y."

Leo Ferris and Ben Kerner, the majority owners of the newly-named Tri-Cities Blackhawks, must have looked at one another that night and smiled. Knowing they had chosen the right place to situate their new National Basketball League franchise.

Five years later, after employing perhaps the greatest coach in pro basketball history, moving into the new National Basketball Association, uniting the citizens of a half-dozen towns and becoming a part of the daily fabric of the community, the franchise was gone, never to return. It became the Milwaukee Hawks, then the St. Louis Hawks, and finally the Atlanta Hawks. But it probably never found a more fervent fan base than the one it had for five seasons in what already was beginning to occasionally be called the "Quad-Cities."

"The town was great," said Marko Todotovich, a Tri-Cities player for two years and the team's coach for most of its final season. "We got good support. The ballplayers there were very big fish in a small pool. They treated us royally."

Marko Todotovich, former player and coach

College basketball was at the peak of its popularity and American servicemen were flooding home from World War II, eager for new types of sports entertainment.

Kerner and Ferris figured they could capitalize on the situation by starting their own professional basketball team.

The two men first got together as employees of Jacobs Brothers Sports Service, the prominent concessions company of the 1940s.

"They were an unlikely pair. Kerner was energetic, sometimes volatile, always persuasive. Ferris was calm and quiet, an idea man who never went anywhere without a pencil tucked behind his ear."

"They formed a partnership and opened their own company in which they sold advertising for programs — mostly for boxing, wrestling and auto racing events — throughout the East and Midwest. They recognized that basketball was gaining in those other sports in terms of popularity."

The NBA had been founded since 1947 when it was founded in Oshkosh, Wis., by a man

named Loomie Darling. It hadn't been a rousing success. At one time during the war, it only had three teams but by 1946 it had ballooned to 12 clubs, most of them located in smaller Midwest cities.

Between them, Kerner and Ferris scraped together \$1,500 to buy a franchise and they founded the Buffalo Bisons. They recruited an old New York Celtics hero named Nat Hickey as their coach, signed a 6-foot-11 Bowling Green star named Don Otten, and purchased some flashy red uniforms with black trim.

They were only 13 games into the venture when they realized they had made one major mistake. They had chosen the wrong city. Buffalo wasn't interested. Attendance was terrible. They were already \$10,000 in debt. The venture was ready to crash on take-off.

Kerner and Ferris began to seek greener pastures and fresher money.

They were somewhat familiar with the Tri-Cities from their travels as ad salesmen. When they heard that an exhibition game between the Chicago Gears and the Syracuse Nationals had drawn a crowd of 3,300 at Wharton Field House, they contacted acquaintances in the area.

They were eventually put in touch with the late Bryan Grafon, the owner of the Rock Island Metal Foundries and an avid sports fan. "He got it organized," said his son, James Grafon of Moline.

Bryan quickly assembled a group of local businessmen who would buy stock in the team. Included were Wayne Cook, Newell Day and Charles Schuler of Davenport; Ed Harrelson and Paul

Superkrup of Moline; Melvin McKay and Ted White of Rock Island; and Dal Muhl and James Leach of Bettendorf. The team eventually had as many as 31 stockholders.

The operation came together very quickly and by the first of the year, the Buffalo Bisons had become the Tri-Cities Blackhawks.

Grafon became president of the team, with Superkrup serving as vice president and Cook, a Davenport attorney, taking the title of secretary-treasurer.

However, Kerner and Ferris still ran things. Kerner would later take over as the majority stockholder in 1949, when the NBA merged with the Basketball Association of America to form the NBA. Ferris decided to get out at that point but in the early years Kerner apparently was a silent partner.

Game programs from the team's early seasons show Ferris' photo with the title of executive director. Business manager Mike Fitzgerald and publicity director Charles Getz also are shown. But not Kerner.

The team immediately found much more support than it ever had in Buffalo, as evidenced by the turnout for the Jan. 3 opener with the Fort Wayne Zollners.

"They did pretty well to start off with," recalled Jerry Jurgens, who was then sports editor

of the Quad-City Times. "They were very big fish in a small pool. They treated us royally."

— BLACKHAWKS
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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO OF MARKO TODOTOVICH

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Don Dossie

Last laugh belonged to Kerner

■ He owned part of team for 22 years

THE man who should be able to shed the most light on the five-year run of the Tri-City Blackhawks can't.

Or won't.

Ben Kerner refuses to be interviewed on the subject.

He is 82 years old and lives in comfortable retirement in the St. Louis suburb of Ladue, Mo. But the infirmities of old age have had their way with him. He barely remembers the 1940s and '50s. He only vaguely recalls the Tri-City Blackhawks.

"I don't even really remember those days," Kerner tells an inquiring historian in a very brief phone conversation. "I have no comment."

"There's nothing I can tell you. Just leave me out of it."

That's difficult to do. In many ways, to many people, Ben Kerner was the Tri-City Blackhawks.

Players and coaches came and went at an alarming pace. In each of the last two years the team played here, it employed at least 20 different players. It had seven coaches in five years.

But Kerner was here for the duration. In fact, he owned a piece of the franchise for 22 years.

"He was something else," says Dwight "Duke" Edleman, a Blackhawks player for three seasons. "He'd try anything to win and promote hooliganism. Ben was all for Ben Kerner. Everyone knew that. I got along with him OK, but he was a different guy."

Ask a dozen different people who crossed his path and you'll get a dozen different responses about Ben Kerner.

"Ben was a nice guy," says Jerry Jurgens, the sports editor of the Davenport Times in that era. "He treated the press real well. Even when you wrote something bitter about something the team did, he still treated you good."

Bear in mind that Kerner invited almost every local sports writer to the Plantation — later "Vie" — after almost every game and bought each of them a steak dinner and all the drinks they could consume.

But even some of the men who worked for the mercantile little owner liked him. Marty Blake, now the director of scouting for the NBA, was Kerner's public relations director and jack of all trades for 15 years after the franchise departed the Quad-Cities for Milwaukee and St. Louis.

"Ben was great to me,"

— KERNER
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