



Volcanoes' second season gets heated up

Friday, March 10, 2006

By TIM PYLE Columbian staff writer

They're back and better than ever.

That, condensed, is what the Vancouver Volcanoes are saying as the franchise begins its second season.

The Volcanoes tip off the International Basketball League's second year with a 1:30 p.m. game Sunday at the Rose Garden against the Portland Chinooks.

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"I really think we can at least double the amount of wins we had last year at the very least," said Vancouver co-owner Terrance Dickens, whose team was 4-18 in 2005. "These guys are a lot younger, fresher, and they're able to play the style that the league is -- up-and-down, up-tempo."

Posts Eric Dunn and Ross Mills and wings Kevin "Pip" Bloodsaw and Jeremiah Martin played for the Volcanoes in Year 1. The rest of the 15-man roster is new.

Guards Alto Virgil, Brad Lechtenberg and Ryan Menten, wings Taron Pickett and Porter Troupe and center Jason Beau Keep are projected to be the newcomers who make the biggest impacts.

Evergreen graduate Chris Neal, a guard who is fighting back problems, and Prairie alumnus Michael Brown, another guard, give Vancouver local flavor.

Guards Matt Frey and Doug Rice, wing Robert Mitchell and post Mike Figert round out the roster.

"Things are starting to mesh," said coach Dave Waldow, who expects to get a full season in charge of the Volcanoes as opposed to taking over after an 0-6 start like he did last year. "I can see our team just getting better each day."

Vancouver has been practicing since early February, including multiple scrimmages against top-level recreational teams in the Portland area. That competition, however, doesn't figure to match what the Volcanoes will see in the IBL.

"We haven't really played anybody on our competition level, playing city-league and all-star teams, nobody with any coaching," said the 6-foot-4 Troupe, 22, whose college teams included the University of Portland and Warner Pacific. "So it's

hard to gauge where we are right now. But so far, it's been good. We've been winning our preseason games, and we've looked pretty good."

Vancouver will face the Chinooks without the services of big men Dunn and Keep.

The 6-9 Dunn is expected to rejoin the team next week after completing business obligations in California.

The 6-10, 280-pound Keep -- who was a first-team all-West Coast Conference standout as a senior at the University of San Diego in 2002-03 -- is playing professionally in Argentina. The Volcanoes hope to have him in uniform come a season-long four-game road trip to the Midwest in early April.

"He's a beast," said Lechtenberg, a long-range marksman who was a teammate of Keep's at San Diego. "And the style of play in the IBL will suit him well, because he's a big guy that likes to run. He's an athlete."

Without Dunn and Keep, the 6-11 Mills and 6-8 Figert will be Vancouver's only players taller than 6-5.

That should mean even more running and gunning for the Volcanoes in the already hyper-speed IBL.

The faster, the better, according to Virgil, who scored 26.3 points per game for Passaic County (N.J.) Community College in 2001-02 and was named New Jersey Junior College player of the year.

"The style of play, that's why I came out here basically -- real fast-paced, up-and-down and exciting for the fans," said the 6-2 23-year-old.

"Me personally, I'm trying to take my game to the next level, as far as building my resume and things of that nature. I feel like this is a good place to start. I'm going to try to win some games, get some stats and help further my career while trying to help Vancouver get some people in the stands and build this up."

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