

Energy back with enough cash for full season

Owners pulled the plug on last year's playoffs to save money; scheduling will help lower costs this year

By Chris O'Leary, Freelance February 12, 2011



Rick Stanley will be the Edmonton Energy's general manager this year.

Photograph by: Photo By Larry Wong, The Journal, Freelance

The Edmonton Energy is back, ready to quell the sour taste left in the mouths of local basketball fans after an abrupt end to the 2010 season.

The Energy ownership group announced during the week of the International Basketball League playoffs that it could not afford to send the team to the post-season, leaving the future of the organization up in the air.

David Dorward, a local accountant, part-owner of the Energy and a 2010 Edmonton mayoralty candidate, spoke on behalf of the team's ownership group, promising that what happened a year ago wouldn't happen again.

"We will be down there," Dorward said about the playoff tournament, which is held in the Portland area.

"What we've done is we've found a way to address that issue. We said, 'Let's have our final road trip in Portland, so we'll actually be down there.' It's no longer a trip that's going to cost us a lot of money."

The Energy's season doesn't start until May -- a three-game series in Albany, N.Y., against the Legends -- but a key question already hangs over the team: Can it fill seats at the University of Alberta this year? The franchise has struggled with attendance the last three seasons, with the 2010 campaign being its toughest thus far.

The Energy will play at the U of A's Main Gym again this season, before moving to the GO Centre in 2012.

Dorward said he's reached out to fans who felt jilted last season.



"When the fans understand our side of it -- we're not millionaires, we're community owners," he said. "We're not deep-pocketed folks. We've put a lot already into the team in the last couple of years and there is a limit from a business perspective that you can do with that.

"When I've explained that to fans, I think they've understood."

The Energy will have a different look this year, with Rick Stanley taking over as general manager from head coach and GM Paul Sir.

Stanley coached for 12 seasons at Jasper Place High School before taking a job this school year at Centre High, where he began a prep program for players upgrading high school who have post-secondary hopes.

He said building relationships in the community is key to the Energy growing in Edmonton.

"When you have a new franchise, whether it's the Toronto Raptors or any team that's coming into the league in its first few years ... you go through some growing pains and bumps in the road," he said. "I remember Don Horwood (Stanley's coach at the U of A), and he said it best back in the early 1980s, and it was about bringing community together.

"I'm excited about the atmosphere we're going to create and some of the partnerships ... that we're going to build in the community with various organizations."

Stanley won't be working the sidelines, however. He said that the search for the Energy's head coach is ongoing.

Sir, who handled both duties in his two seasons with the Energy, was mentioned numerous times during Friday's news conference. But while he was thanked warmly for his time and services with the semi-pro basketball team that last two years, Sir wasn't reciprocating those feelings.

"I guess, from my standpoint, I walked away from the team because of several different reasons," Sir said. "First and foremost, because of the owners' lack of involvement and commitment last season. Secondly, the shameful way that they treated the staff and volunteers who worked really hard with no advertising budget and any owner support at all in any capacity. Third, I had strong, strong personal differences with them."

The ownership group, which said it was forced to choose between sending the team to Portland or not having a season in 2011, cancelling the playoff trip last July was the last straw.

"I did not buy for one second their excuses for not going to the playoffs," Sir said. "If \$10,000 would have cancelled this year, they wouldn't be in business this year. Their problem wasn't having money; their problem was not wanting to spend money."

The Energy plays its home opener against the Bellingham Slam on May 20.

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