

Blast set for home stretch of first season

By [LEE LAMBERTS](#)

When Mike Ahrens talks about his Holland Blast being in the home stretch of their inaugural season, he's not kidding.

The Blast, who have five games remaining in their first year in the International Basketball League, play their next three at the Holland Civic Center. That includes back-to-back games tonight and Saturday at 7:15 p.m. against the West Virginia Wild.

"They come into town with a 3-12 record, but that's kind of misleading because they've played one of the most difficult schedules in our division," Ahrens said. "Plus, they've got three guys who are averaging over 20 points a game."

J.R. VanHoose, a four-year, All-Mid-America Conference player while at Marshall University, leads West Virginia with 23.4 points per game while Shamel Jones, at 23.5 ppg, is close behind.

The Blast (10-5) counter with Jared Bledsoe (27.9 points a game), point guard Dennis Springs (21.7 points per game) and James "Boo" Jackson, who is averaging 20.6 points per game and is one of the league's better rebounders.

Holland (10-5) will need a good effort against West Virginia on both nights if they hope to keep the momentum going into the playoffs which begin July 13.

"This is our first taste of playing back-to-back games against the same team on consecutive nights, but I feel we're ready for it," Ahrens said. "We had a really good practice (Wednesday)."

The Blast also made a roster change as they attempt to fill the void left by Carlton and Corey Epps who left the team and left the state to be back home in Milwaukee with their mother.

Post player Carlton Aaron who joined the team just a couple of weeks ago has since moved on to the Grand Rapids Flight, who are in more need than the Blast of a big man. In his place, Holland has added Brian Snider, recently of the Battle Creek Knights where he averaged 13.2 ppg in 12 games. Snyder is a 6-5 forward from Western Michigan.

Snider scored 17 points against the Blast in the Civic Center on April 28. So it appears as though he likes playing here.

Chad Carlson, who spent four years in the Civic Center while playing for Hope College, just finished his second year as the college's men's junior varsity coach. Earlier this week, he returned from Mexico where he and five other Hope grads spent a few days on a goodwill trip as guests of Pablo Salazar, governor of the province of Chiapas, and Vern Sterk, a missionary in Mexico who also is a Hope College alumnus.

Carlson teamed up with Siena Heights College graduate Perry Gilbert to win a six-game, round-robin tournament of Mexican teams, each of which included two American players, including Carlson and his brother Jeff along with Greg Immink, Andy Phillips and Eric Voisin.

Chad Carlson said he and his friends enjoyed the trip and he especially enjoyed the chance to play with (and against) his younger brother.

But duty calls this weekend and Carlson and the rest of the Blast are ready to play.

"This will almost be like a playoff series ... back-to-back nights against the same team and we'll see who has to adjust the most," Carlson said.