

Tipoff for pro basketball

By **JIM RILEY**

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Nathan Mumm, one of the owners of the Everett Explosion, has a simple goal for his team's inaugural season in the International Basketball League (IBL).

"Success, for me, would be a sellout every home game," Mumm said. "That may not be realistic, but we're expecting between 6,000 and 8,000 for opening night and at least 4,000 to 5,000 a game after that."

The Explosion plays a 20-game regular-season schedule. The team has 10 home games scheduled at the Everett Events Center, which can hold 9,100 for basketball.

The Explosion has already sold more than 1,000 season tickets and spent more than \$100,000 in marketing. Mumm remains confident season tickets could double before the home opener is played on April 10.

"I'd be completely shocked if we don't break even this season," Mumm said. "The Snohomish County market enjoys and is excited about having professional basketball here. The response has been very positive."

Basketball, Mumm said, will be only a part of the show in Everett.

"It's much more than a basketball game, it's an entertainment package," Mumm said. "It's two hours of nonstop entertainment."

Single-game ticket prices range from \$11 in the upper bowl to \$49 at courtside. Season-ticket packages bring the cost down to between \$8 and \$30.

The Explosion is owned by Courtyard Media, a production company owned by 12 people with its headquarters in Everett. The group has invested more than \$1 million in the Explosion venture, which they hope will be the first of many entertainment projects around the country.

"We're a production company and this is our first venture into sports," Mumm said. "Hopefully next year we'll be venturing into other sports and we're already looking at the possibility of having basketball in other areas of the country."

Mumm, 33, serves as the team's general manager. He has lived in Snohomish County his entire life and he and wife Tracy have two children, Justin, 10, and Peyton, 6. He spent 13 years as an executive at Microsoft and was also an assistant basketball coach and athletic director at Puget Sound Christian College.

All the players are paid, their contracts full of attendance incentives and perks that range from housing to personal trainers.

The IBL is about to begin its third season with 26 teams. After a 20-game regular season, regional playoffs are held at different sites around the country. All league teams are invited to play in the West and East championship tournaments. The West tournament will be held at Warner Pacific College in Portland and the East in Elkhart, Ind., on July 29, 30 and July 1.

The West and East Division champions then meet in a single game to determine the IBL champion on July 7 in Portland.

The basketball is different from either college or NBA with several rule changes designed to allow the game to be played in two hours.

The games have 12-minute quarters with only one timeout allowed per team each quarter. There is a 22-second shot clock and teams are allowed only seven seconds to get the ball across midcourt. The officials rarely touch the ball with an immediate inbound and the pace of the game often leads to teams scoring more than 120 points a game.

Costs are minimized by playing mostly regional opponents with only one trip requiring air travel each season (for Everett, it's to Colorado for a pair of games).

The IBL plans to add a team from either Japan or Great Britain in 2008. Last season the average attendance was only 700.

Mumm said the league has little trouble finding skilled players, who range in age in Everett from 22 to 41.

"People are going to be surprised at the quality of play," Mumm said. "The biggest difference between our players and their NBA counterparts is about 2 inches. The skill level is there. Some are a little short and in basketball that makes a difference."

There's no difference when it comes to the business side of the operation.

"It all comes down to basic business principles," Mumm said. "It's not much different from when I was at Microsoft."

Mumm has agreed to serve as the team general manager for three seasons and allows assistant coach Randy Redwine to make personnel decisions.

Redwine believes the Explosion needs to win to catch on in Everett.

"I haven't seen all the other teams, but with the nucleus of guys we have here we have a great opportunity to be very successful," Redwine said.