



Wednesday, April 05, 2006

Cavalry lets Aurora fans hoop it up close to home

By Dave Perry

The Aurora Sentinel and Daily Sun

Wednesday, April 05, 2006

The only thing more shocking to many of my close friends that I would be attending Aurora's first professional basketball game, was that I had a great time.

I wasn't alone in getting a charge out of the Aurora Cavalry's premier game in the fledgling International Basketball League. About 1,000 other people turned out to Gateway High School on March 31 to see a new kind of spectator sport start right here in Aurora.

A fan was born. A lot of them, actually.

Oh, sure, I gave a small sneer when I first heard about plans by team owners to bring their little game to our big city.

"Huh," was about all the enthusiasm I could muster.

As those who know me can attest, I have found little interest in watching any kind of sports. Those games are often fun to play, but I've never understood the joy in simply watching others have the fun.

And many pro sports are no fun at all. In the times I have had to watch the end of a game while waiting for the news, I understood that American pro sports is about big, big money and big, big egos. Some fun.

As for basketball, of all sports, I have always been mystified what the attraction is in watching a game with all the purpose and excitement of people crossing streets in Time Square at rush hour.

I was expecting to have to be polite. I was wrong.

Watching the Aurora Cavalry is not like anything I've ever done before, and I can guarantee it's the same for you.

This is the kind of event where the announcer got on the horn to announce there was problem in the parking lot with a white minivan, and the owner needed to step outside. Throngs went for the door. Watching the Cavalry play is a family thing, and I had my wife, my daughter and my pal in tow for the event.

We were watching the gym fill, sighing a lot and rolling eyes with the rest of the crowd over the pomp expressed over "pro-fesh-a-nal" basketball coming to Aurora.

There were a gaggle of players on the court, and suddenly there was basketball happening there.

Unlike the soap opera of big-league pro sports, where it's hard to get interested until you've learned about the messy lives and skills of the players, watching the Cavalry was instantly riveting.

Cavalry basketball is very noisy, very fast and very scrappy. The players, most of them college hot-shots, were not only good as a team, but good by themselves. They played all over the court. It seemed that they were ready to take the game into the stands, and the fans were courting the proposition.

It took only seconds to see that the relatively short No. 4 from the opposing team, the Colorado Crossover, had an attitude like an unpopular neighbor's pushy dog. The feeling spread across the gym fast. Wow, instant rivalry.

Within seconds, Aurora made the first score.

I yelled.

Oh my God, I yelled.

My wife yelled. My daughter yelled. The whole stadium yelled. For a micro-second, the team stopped to grin and wallow in what was mass glee.

It hit me then. For the first time in my life, and for the first time in the lives of everyone in that gym, we got to root for Aurora.

It was like emotional candy. This giant room full of strangers instantly became fans with a common bond and goal: cheering for Aurora.

This big, gangly adolescent city that has been the butt of jokes for too long hit a milestone last week by getting its own edgy and talented basketball team. If Aurora were a teenager, it just got its driver's license.

The more we all cheered, the more Aurora scored—and so did the Crossover. In what could have been another Friday night in an overpriced restaurant and a dull movie, we got drama, laughs, thrills, T-shirts, sore butts and a show. They had team dancers, and they were good. I have to admit, however, that I don't get the dancers' uniform comprising fatigues, black sports bras and shiny gold poms.

It's the Aurora Cavalry, not West Side Story.

There was a half-time show by a local dance troupe that was worth the price of the cheap tickets all by themselves. It was a party.

These players played happily, hard, close to the boards and high in the air for almost three hours. The fans cheered just as heartily all the way through the back-and-forth, seemingly endless finale.

No matter where you sit, you're close enough to read the words on the player's tattoos.

I couldn't get over that all this fun for just a few bucks a ticket was right here in the middle of Aurora.

Oh, they have a ways to go. Don't think I'll ever torture my middle-aged derriere on high-school

bleachers again without at least a cushy coat to sit on.

You could get rich on the cushion concession.

And someone needs to get some help down to the snack bar before the next game.

“Say what?” a fellow fan and I bellowed at the concession stand. “No nachos?”

No diet pop. No cookies. No mustard for the dogs. No way.

Despite having to drink bottled water and eat Skittles when I was ready to ditch my diet for toxic-yellow goo chips, I had a blast.

After the game, the players and the fans rushed onto court to gush over each other. My daughter forced her own basketball into the arms of No. 4 Lamar Karim, who smiled as wide as the gym for his first autograph request. The talk among everyone was all about the highlights and the fun.

On the way to the car, Isabella admired Karim’s scribble and glowed over the game and how he had helped the Cavalry edge itself to victory.

“Aurora won,” she said.

It sure did.

Dave Perry is editor of the Aurora Sentinel & Daily Sun. Reach him at 303-750-7555 or editor@aurorasentinel.com.