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BASKETBALL

Slam switches leagues

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The Bellingham Slam will be playing in a different professional basketball league next season.

The Slam announced Wednesday they will be moving to the International Basketball League for the 2008 season. The Slam makes its IBL debut sometime in March. A schedule hasn't been finalized yet.

"Obviously we feel like this is the right move for us," Slam general manager Bob Hofstetter said in a phone interview. "It's something we talked about doing last year, but we decided to watch the league development in the area before doing anything. After a solid year we decided to make the move."

Bellingham spent its first two seasons playing in the American Basketball Association, but a lack of teams in the area, travel costs, and IBL's growth in the Pacific Northwest were all reasons for the change, Hofstetter said.

The IBL, entering its fourth season, had 22 teams around the nation for its 2007 season, including clubs in Everett, Seattle and Tacoma as well as further south in Vancouver, Wash., and Portland. A majority of the ABA teams on the West Coast are in California. Hofstetter said that in the ABA the team flies to about 80 percent of its games. In the IBL the Slam would fly to about 20 percent.

"There were a few different factors for the move, but two of the biggest were the growth of the IBL in the region and a reduced cost of travel," Hofstetter said. "The ABA is still very strong in the Northeast, but has slipped on the West Coast."

The IBL also plays a spring schedule instead of the more traditional winter schedule like that of high school and college basketball teams. The game is billed as a more fast-paced, high-scoring form of basketball, with just one timeout per quarter, an immediate in-bounds pass, and a 22-second shot clock.

The IBL season also is shorter, with teams playing 20 regular season games instead of 36 in the ABA.

"Playing in the spring is going to be the biggest difference," Hofstetter said. "The good thing is it will allow us to recruit a different type of player, like those playing in Europe who would normally be under contract during the winter season. The challenge will be getting people to recognize there is basketball being played in the spring."

The Slam, which plays at Whatcom Community College, has a 43-26 record in its two seasons in the ABA, advancing to the quarterfinals of the ABA Playoffs both years. Rob Ridnour will continue to coach the team but a roster for the 2008 season has not been determined.