

# The CourierNews

## Zachary's heroics at buzzer save Racers

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By **Tim Masmar** Staff Writer

ELGIN -- Elgin Racers owner Bob Fischer was worried Friday night that fans might start getting antsy when the Racers pulled ahead of visiting Chicago Heights 72-52 early in the third quarter of the team's season-opener at the Elgin Community College Events Center.

Fischer must have temporarily forgotten that no lead is safe in the International Basketball League.

Sure enough, the Soldiers climbed all the way back and eventually tied the score at 106 with 1:27 remaining in the fourth quarter. Seconds later, Chicago Heights took its first lead of the game, 109-107, on a 3-pointer by Anthony Kyle.

The news then got even worse for the Racers when the Soldiers answered a 3-pointer by Elgin's Nick Zachary and forged ahead 111-110 on a short jumper by Mike Hadley with five seconds left.

But again, no lead is safe in the IBL.

Improvising on the run, Zachary single-handedly erased that deficit and sent the home fans out the door feeling giddy after his off-balance, bank-shot, 3-pointer at the buzzer somehow found the bottom of the net to give the Racers a dramatic 113-111 victory.

"Sherick (Simpson) threw the ball in and I looked at the clock and it was down to four (seconds) so I knew I had to get something up," said Zachary after getting mobbed by his teammates. "I saw it going toward the backboard, but I didn't know if the shot was too hard or not. It was a great feeling to see it go in."

Fittingly, Zachary was the hero of the game after turning in a superb all-around effort that included a game-high 25 points, 11 assists and three steals. Simpson, who graduated from Larkin, added 19 points, four steals and a game-high 16 rebounds. Newcomer Drew Carstens chipped in 23 points.

"We let them back in the game and you have to give them credit for that," said Simpson, who was an IBL all-star last season along with Zachary. "But we were able to keep our heads in it and get the win. I've learned that in this league anything can happen."

Zachary and Simpson wasted little time getting a rise out of the fans with a back-door, alley-oop dunk -- from Zachary to Simpson -- on the team's first possession. Elgin then surged ahead 7-0 before the Soldiers scored their first basket. Carstens had eight points and reserve Brandon Moore added seven as the Racers maintained a 32-26 lead after the first quarter.

"This is definitely a different style of basketball than what I'm used to but it was a lot of fun," said Carstens while signing autographs after the game. "Everyone played good. We got a few new guys this year, including myself, but our team chemistry was there and that got us off to a fast start."

In the second quarter, the Racers outscored the Soldiers 35-25 to take a 67-50 lead at halftime. Led by Zachary's 11 points, eight different players scored for Elgin in the quarter. Newcomer Keith Gayden -- predicted by coach Mike Murphy to be a fan favorite because of his leaping ability -- didn't disappoint. Gayden had six points and four rebounds in the first half. He finished with 12 points and eight rebounds before fouling out late in the final quarter.

"I was very happy with our execution on offense," Murphy said. "We do have some things to shore up defensively."

Sparked by former Racer Rodney Rollins (19 points) and Barry Bradford (23 points), the Soldiers outscored the Racers 30-21 in the third quarter to pull within 88-80 heading into the final 12 minutes.

"Chicago made some good adjustments at halftime and they took it to us," Zachary said. "We just decided we were going to do whatever it took to get the win."

Zachary had nine points in the fourth quarter, including the team's last six.

"The fans definitely got their money's worth," Murphy said. "We couldn't have planned it any better in terms of the ending." **International Basketball League: Elgin 113, Chicago Heights 111**