

Zachery's magic shot makes Racers a winner

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If Friday night's International Basketball League season opener for the Elgin Racers was any indication of things to come, fans at future games better buckle up.

Taking on the expansion Chicago Heights Soldiers, the Racers built a lead as big as 20 points in the second half — only to watch it evaporate.

But after the Soldiers took a 112-110 lead on a layup by Barry Bradford (24 points) with just seven seconds left in regulation, Elgin's Nick Zachery drained a very long 3-point bank shot as time expired.

The magical shot by Zachery gave the Racers a 113-112 win at the Elgin Community College Events Center in front of an estimated 1,000.

Among the notables in the crowd were former Bull Dickey Simpkins and Illinois State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulis.

"When I shot it, I saw it going toward the backboard and I didn't know if it was too long," Zachery explained moments after he sent the crowd into a frenzy.

The second-year guard finished the night with a team-high 28 points.

After Mike Hadley put back a missed shot for the Soldiers with 1:29 left, the game stood at 106-106, tied for the first time all night.

A free throw by Elgin's TJ McHugh preceded 3-point baskets traded by Zachery and Anthony Kyle within 14 seconds of each other.

The aforementioned sequence set up the improbable events in the final 10 seconds.

"We were playing very bad in the first half and we knew we had to get back to playing our basketball," Kyle said. "That's how we got back into the game."

Bad was somewhat of an understatement, as the Racers (1-0) threatened to run the Soldiers right out of the gym with a 13-3 run midway through the first half that gave them a comfortable 47-33 advantage.

When the Racers' Sherick Simpson got a steal and layup with 10:37 left in the third quarter, Elgin's lead ballooned to 72-52.

But the Soldiers (0-1) immediately countered with a 20-4 run that pulled them to within 76-72.

That merely set the stage for Zachery's last-second heroics.

"(Zachery) hit a few big shots in the second half," said the Racers' Drew Carstens. "It is nice having a player like him. He is a great weapon."

Carstens, the former Downers Grove North standout guard who was playing his first professional game, enjoyed a debut to remember that included 23 points — including five 3-pointers.