

Commentary

Las Vegas Summer of '94—Bonanza of Trash Sports?

Depending on your perspective, the summer of 1994 in Las Vegas was either a pro sports bonanza or the invasion of the trash sports.



JOHN SANTANA

Four expansion teams began operation this summer. Throw in the established Stars of the Pacific Coast League and a total of five teams were vying for the sports entertainment dollar in a city with a population below 900,000.

How did they fare? What follows is a team-by-team look at the participants.

The Las Vegas Dustdevils of the Continental Indoor Soccer League were a mystery. Here was a team which should have drawn better. They were the only team this summer to have a winning season, and half the roster was

comprised of talented, former UNLV players.

Instead, the Dustdevils were last in the 14-team CISL in attendance, averaging 2,709 fans for 14 games at the 12,000-seat MGM Grand Garden.

Nevada Pro Sports, who owns the Dustdevils, should take the blame. They never got a season ticket drive going even though the franchise was granted a year before the team's first game. They never got a deal to broadcast games on radio and did little marketing.

The Dustdevils made the playoffs and as of this writing are going to a decisive third game in the Western Division semifinals in San Diego. If the Dustdevils survive the series, it is still unlikely attendance will improve for the Western Division finals.

They will return next year. But if paid attendance doesn't dra-

matically improve, don't be surprised if the team folds or is moved a year from now.

The Las Vegas Flash of Roller Hockey International were a mess from day one. The ownership group consisted of two Utah businessmen, a medical doctor from New Jersey (who bought an 85 percent interest in the Edmonton RHI franchise in midseason, yet kept his 15 percent interest in the Flash), and two Russians. Of the five, only the Utah businessmen ever made it to Las Vegas for any games.

The team had the largest, most non-productive front office staff in the league, which drained what little funds the owners invested. Some former staffers have accused others within the organization of embezzling money meant to run the daily operations.

The Flash were unable to get anyone into the Thomas & Mack Center despite handing out more comps than a casino does for its

buffet. Management even handed out 2-for-1 passes to every elementary school student in Las Vegas for the June 12 season opener, but only 3,406 were announced.

Attendance at Flash games were announced as being between 1,800 and 3,500, although some T & M employees said fewer than 1,000 tickets were usually counted per game.

Flash management promoted the team worse than the Dustdevils and were also without a broadcast deal.

After majority stockholder Dan Kotler closed the team office and fired all employees Aug. 16, it seems the Flash are the first victim of the finicky Las Vegas market, although nothing has been officially announced.

Unlike the Flash and Dustdevils, the Las Vegas Posse of the Canadian Football League marketed extensively and had a radio and television contract. But it still appears the franchise will

move after the CFL season ends Nov. 5.

That's because the team is now run by a no "gobbledygook" businessman in Glenn Golenberg, who took over as team chair in late August. Golenberg quickly streamlined the operation, eliminating numerous front office positions while forcing others to take a 20 percent pay cut.

Golenberg cut more fat two weeks ago as he fired the team's cheerleaders and horse-mounted mascots.

What's left is football. No horses staining the field around the 52-yard line and no half-time bikini contests to boo. It also means Golenberg has a pair of lawsuits to deal with as both parties intend to recover the rest of their season-long contracts.

Golenberg said the team would remain in Las Vegas

Please see Trash—16

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