



June 10, 2005

King Finds His Motivation

TIM PYLE, Columbian staff writer

It was closed for a couple years after exhausting his college eligibility at Weber State in 2000, but now King sees a clear path in his quest to make a career out of professional basketball.

King has earned his way, with a prolific nine-game stint in Germany during the winter that is now being followed by more impressive play for the International Basketball League's Vancouver Volcanoes.

"I think my biggest thing was not to give up," said King, a 6-foot-4, 195-pound guard who will help the Volcanoes (3-12) try to improve to 3-1 against Central Oregon (9-7) in a 7:45 p.m. game today at Skyview High School. "A lot of athletes get to the point where, if things are not going right for them right at that point, they give up. I was motivated enough to continue trying and not give up on my dream."

A native of Milwaukee, King, 27, played at Blinn (Texas) Junior College before Weber State.

He averaged about 10 points a game as a senior for the Wildcats, who call Ogden, Utah, and the Big Sky Conference home.

After graduating from Weber State in 2001, King briefly moved to North Carolina in hopes of playing in a league that never got off the ground. He then went back to Milwaukee before coming to Portland two years ago, originally for a Nike job which he has since left.

All the while, King kept working on his game, and it paid off when he hooked up with a pro team in Ulm, Germany, this winter. He said he averaged close to 30 points a game despite joining the team for just the tail end of the season.

Upon returning to Portland in late April, King joined the Volcanoes. He had a prior relationship with Vancouver co-owners Terrance Dickens and Mikal Duilio, also the IBL's commissioner, as a player in exhibition games that served as the league's trial run. King has averaged 17.9 points as the Volcanoes have gone 3-5 since his addition.

"I think we've played our best basketball with him on the court," Vancouver coach Dave Waldow said. "He can score, or he can dish. He reads the game real well. He can get to

the glass, he can pull up and he can drain the 3-point jumper. I haven't seen a big weakness in his game."

The combination of King with fellow guards Jeb Ivey and Joe Buller has been lethal, in stretches, for Volcanoes foes. Waldow often shifts to a full-court press with the trio in the game, and, offensively, Ivey's spot-up shooting and Buller's knack for getting to the rim blend in nicely with King's versatility.

"We read each other well," King said. "Jeb and I are two of only a couple guys who have played overseas ball, so we do the little things and know where to find one another. Joe is more of a slasher-type player, and it all meshes in together."

King's production for Vancouver has led to inquiries from agents, according to Dickens. Duilio said he believes that if the fledgling IBL kept complete statistics, which it plans to do in Year 2, King's stock would be skyrocketing.

"His efficiency is outrageous," said Duilio, noting King plays about 28-30 minutes per game. "People think he's doing what he's doing in 41 minutes or something, but he's doing it in much less."

Although King is a long way from the NBA, Waldow said, his skills are of that caliber.

"At Clark open gyms over the years, I've seen NBA players go against a Damon King, a Charles McKinney or some of these guys, and they are very subtle differences," said Waldow, the former Clark College men's coach. "To me, when you match Damon King up physical ability and basketball ability to probably a lot of guys even in the NBA, there's not much difference. But those guys, for whatever reason, have gotten their foot in the door."

The secret, King said, to his recent success and rejuvenated basketball career has been reinventing his game.

"I'm a completely different player than I was in college," King said. "Back then, I focused on my athleticism, and not really the fundamentals of the game. Now that I'm older, I'm much better fundamentally and use my head, trying to outwit guys."

So much hard work already behind him, King said he will continue sweating in order to go as far in the sport as he can.

"There's always new avenues opening up," he said.

That lane is getting wider.