

Steve Sigafoose's Scorekeeper Column: Blackhawks come home

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Jake Hiffeman, the Iowa Blackhawks general manager, sat down among the first row of seats at the Mid-America Center Wednesday afternoon.

His team was coming out of the locker room for a brief practice and the meet-and-greet with fans.

Of the ones already on the field, some had their young children on the turf. The youngsters were giving their own versions of wind sprints, passing and kickoffs.

"Hey, sign him up," was heard more than once as one young bundle, not that much taller than the ball, boomed a kickoff two, maybe three yards. But the youngster was laughing. Maybe he had visions of Super Bowls dancing in his head.

"There is a lot of interest in football in this area," said Hiffeman. He was not only talking about Council Bluffs, but about the American Professional Football League, the Blackhawks' home base. The league has teams in Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa.

The Nebraska team, which should have been in St. Joseph, Mo., the story gets sticky, is in Lincoln, maybe. But there is an interest and the league hopes to have matters settled for a smooth ride in 2007.

Hiffeman was looking ahead.

"There are players out there, who would like the chance to play the indoor game," said Hiffeman.

Eastern Iowa could be an expansion site.

"Look at the success and interest the Iowa Barnstormers had in Des Moines," said Hiffeman. "Then, boom, they were gone. But I think the interest and the players are there."

There are facilities that could serve as home fields. The home venues of the United States Hockey League's Des Moines, Cedar Rapids and Waterloo teams have the attendance range that fits the APFL. I don't know if they fit in other matters, but it would be worth a look.

It would be a step towards an eight-team league.

"That would be nice," said Hiffeman.

First there is the matter of Saturday's home opener at the MAC against Wichita. (7 p.m. kickoff).

Indoor football is a quicker, higher-scoring version of its outdoor cousin. But don't let the high scores fool you, they play defense. However with the 50-yard field and fewer players, a mistake is more costly. An outdoor mistake means a 20-yard gain. An indoor mistake often results in a score.

The indoor game is built a bit more for passing, which usually delights fans.

There are several local guys on the Blackhawks' roster, getting their chance at professional football. A player will always wonder if he could have made it "at the next level." Sometimes, there isn't that chance to try out at that next level. So, for some, the APFL has become the opportunity to try the pro game.

Tickets you ask? For a family of four, you will shell out, give or take, what the movies would run. And the television is really getting into reruns.

Now the good public relations guy will also tell you that the only thing faster in town Saturday will be the price line on the gas pumps whirling, but I won't use that line.

"I was talking to another media guy," said Hiffeman. "I told him we're not the Omaha metro team. We're the Council Bluffs and southwest Iowa team. We are working on building our fan base on this side of the river."

Sweet!