

Dwane McFerrin's Column

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The Iowa Blackhawks, now in their fourth year of existence, are a factor in the race for the 2006 American Professional Football League championship

From very humble beginnings, the team has grown in talent and competitiveness, making it one of the best tickets in town for sports enthusiasts.

The team originally was comprised mostly of former area high school stars. Today, the roster is filled with players from NCAA Division II, Division III and NAIA programs. Of course, the biggest name is former Thomas Jefferson and Nebraska-Omaha star Justin Kammrad, the Blackhawks' running back.

Beyond the quality of football played, the fan-friendly atmosphere has the Iowa Blackhawks developing a solid fan base.

Spectators are close to the action and if you are seated in the end zone, you may be close enough to whisper a little unsolicited advice into a player's helmet before a kickoff.

Head coach Mike Wolff stands just yards behind the huddle when the Blackhawks are on offense. Defensive Coordinator Demetrius Richards can be seen celebrating on the field when his defenders make a big stop. There can't be a sideline warning when coaches (and even photographers) can be seen on the playing surface.

The Hot Wings Dance Team has a stage behind the end zone to perform throughout the game and is coached by Wolff's sister, Lisa Wolff. With high-energy music after each play, the Hot Wings add spice to the football action.

Another big difference is the announcing. Rather than sitting at the scorer's table, the Blackhawks emcee, Tim Serreta, roams the arena and interacts with the fans. The public address announcer, Carey Gunter, also gets in on the action. After a recent big hit by a Blackhawk defender, he yelled into the mike, "that has got to hurt!"

At the end of the game, fans are invited to go onto the field for autographs from their favorite players.

General Manager and owner, Jake Hiffernan, is looking for a combination of fan involvement in the game and fan entertainment throughout the three hours. The formula is working as the fan base continues to grow and a home field advantage has developed.

The Blackhawks host the Missouri Minutemen Saturday at the Mid-America Center. Kick off is 7:05 p.m.

And if a football finds its way into the crowd, some lucky fan can take it home.