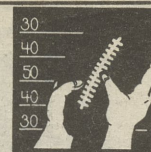




Sports



Review ...

The Phillies, The Eagles, and The Flyers

By Ed Blackburn
Lion's Eye Staff Writer

As I looked through my old sports memorabilia - newspaper clippings and magazines from earlier this decade, marking big events in Philadelphia sports, like championship runs by the Flyers and Phillies, I remembered how great it felt having winning teams to stand behind. I remember seeing the Flyers jerseys and the Phillies pennants in windows, the newspaper filled with huge headlines like "Phillies to host Blue Jays in Series" and "Flyers face Detroit in Cup final." I even found a full-page pull-out with a picture of the Phillies jubilantly rushing to the pitcher's mound after beating the Braves in the playoffs. The swaggering headline rapped "Whoomp there it is!"

I also found the clippings I saved from the day the Flyers went out on a limb and traded half their team to acquire the rights to a certain "Next One" named Eric Lindros. "Flyers land a star they can wish upon" trumpeted the headline.

At this point, I could stop sifting through the pile of newspapers and be satisfied. I knew that after these particular papers were put through the press, bearing good news and hope for the future, bad things happened. I let myself believe for a moment, while reading, that maybe the bad things never occurred; like when you watch *Titanic* the second time, maybe you wishfully think that somehow, this time they won't hit the iceberg.

Alas, as I dug deeper into my pile of newspapers, however, I uncovered those expected and sad things which inevitably completed the picture; things that turned my short-lived, euphoric reminiscing into aggrieved recollection. They were other headlines, ones that seemed like concise dirges. These ones cried "Jays break Phils' hearts" and "Shut down in Motown - Wings stop Flyers, then hoist the Cup".

After that latter headline, which was on June 8th, 1997, when the Flyers were swept by an unstoppable Detroit Red Wings team, just four wins short of hoisting the Cup themselves, I stopped collecting headlines. Not because I was so heartbroken that I adamantly refused to save them, but because since then, there hasn't been much to cheer about, or much worth saving.

But now it seems that future headlines will again bear good news. We Philly sports fans may have something significant to cheer about. As with two years ago, it's those Flyers making the news, but this time, the orange and black have more speed, skill, chemistry and guidance; and virtually unmatched depth.

Let's take a quick glance at Philly's other major sports teams to

see why we have but one hope, and why I stopped collecting memorabilia. The Phils and Eagles, both pushing for new ballparks, have more maintenance and rebuilding due than the South Philadelphia projects. The Phils at least have someone to build their future team around - third basemen Scott Rolen, who often reminds us of a former hometown great at the same position, Mike Schmidt. The Eagles, with new coach Andy Reid, are entirely optimistic about their future - which is good - but they have a lot of roster modifying to do. The Sixers, off to a pretty good start, are looking good, with a good core of talented young players, but it's too early to tell (even in this lockout-shortened season) whether they have a shot. With the other hometown teams down and out, fans are lining up to buy tickets for the Flyers bandwagon.

It's only March, still a few months from playoff time, but you can already see those Flyers jerseys and memorabilia in home windows, just like that '97 season when they steamrolled through the playoffs, using their size to wear down opponents before being stopped by the Red Wings. How long before we again see Billy Penn himself, adorned with an oversized Flyers jersey, atop City Hall?

Flyers GM Bob Clarke has realized that team size and strength alone aren't going to cut it. Smaller but quicker teams like the Buffalo Sabres were exploiting holes in the Flyer defense, or simply skating right around them. Knowing that size was still a grand asset, Clarke began making deals that would keep the Flyers big, but also make them quicker on their skates. Enter speedy forwards Mikael Renberg (again), Andrei Kovalenko, Valeri Zelepukin, and Daymond Langkow.

There was always another substantial flaw on the Flyers. Goaltending. Sure, Ron Hextall is usually a pretty good goaltender (and you gotta love the guy); but he and Garth Snow weren't going to weather the storms which the Flyers defense occasionally allowed to brew. So Clarke went out and signed free agent John Vanbiesbrouck, who everyone thought was washed up. Hey, guess what? The 'Beezer' turned out to be a *steal*. He's among the top few goalies in the league, habitually making those huge saves you see, slow-motion, the next morning on SportsCenter.

Up front, Lindros is playing like a madman, with passion we've never before seen from the giant Flyer captain, but always expected. He's scoring almost every night, while setting up great plays for his wingman, John LeClair, who leads the NHL in goal-scoring. On his other side, newly-acquired Keith

Jones is talking much trash toward the other team and watching the backs of his two high-scoring and often-targeted linemates. Rod Brind-Amour, the funny-nosed, durable Flyer, who works so hard that he could probably build Rome in a day, is guaranteeing the Flyers aren't the one-line team they used to be. Eric Desjardins, the suave French-Canadian defenseman nicknamed "Rico," is also pitching in offensively and is having a marquee season. Overall the Flyers have

finally bought into coach Roger Neilson's system and are playing like an unstoppable, well-oiled machine.

Save the need for one more established defenseman (Chris Chelios, anyone?) - it seems that all the pieces are in place for another Stanley Cup run. If all continues to go so well, I'll see you on Broad Street, come June - with ticker tape and camera in hand, buying up the papers for my memorabilia folder.

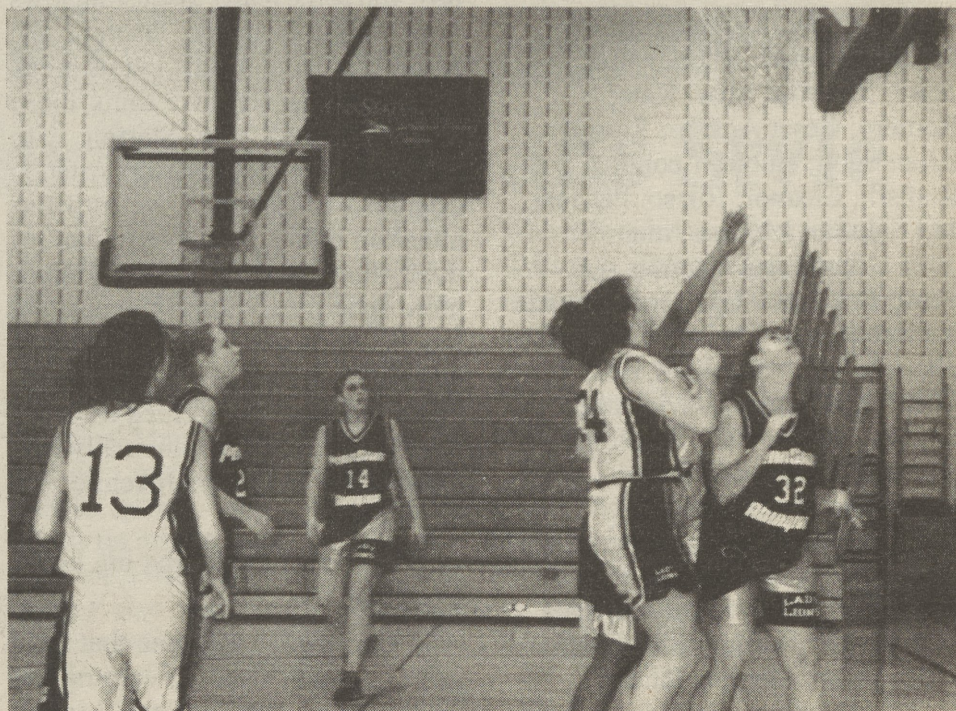
Women's Basketball Playoff Action



Joan Zimmerman fakes out an Abington opponent.



Mixing it up under the net.



Anticipating the rebound.