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Sports books popular for Christmas



The Sports Zone

By Jamie H. Vaught

When I was a young kid, believe it or not, I was probably a bigger fan of the Kentucky Colonels than the Kentucky Wildcats, especially after ex-Cat stars Dan Issel and Mike Pratt joined the Louisville-based professional basketball team in 1970.

At that time, there were 28 pro teams – 11 in American Basketball Association and 17 in National Basketball Association – and I was very excited to follow a pro team in Kentucky.

And about 40 years later I was excited – perhaps it's too strong of a word – again when a review copy of newly-published "Kentucky Colonels of the American Basketball Association: The Real Story of a Team Left Behind" (Acclaim Press, \$29.95) arrived in the mail a couple of weeks or so ago.

The 352-page hardback, written by freelance writer Gary P. West along with ex-Colonels trainer and former head coach Lloyd "Pink" Gardner, really brought back warm memories and it is filled with numerous photos and never-before-told fascinating stories about this popular ABA franchise, which ran for nine years from 1967 to 1976 and was among the league's top leaders in home attendance.

While the Colonels, who captured the 1975 ABA title, had many outstanding players like Issel, Louie Dampier and Artis Gilmore along with coaches like Frank Ramsey, Joe Mullaney and Hubie Brown, they had several colorful moments or characters, including drafting a short 55-year-old professor by mistake, having the first woman (who was a jockey) to play in a major pro basketball game (for a few seconds), a real do named Ziggy serving as the team mascot, sexy player Wendell Ladner crashing into a glass water cooler near the bench, legendary Adolph Rupp joining all-woman Colonels' board of directors, among others.

In addition, as you may recall, the other ABA clubs did some crazy promotional stuff like the Miami Floridians having bikini-clad ball girls and the Indiana Pacers conducting cow-milking contests. And there was one game that drew less than 100 fans in 1969 in Houston.

At this writing, I have read about three-fifths of the book and the Colonels are an entertaining read so far.

While I noticed the misspelled names of individuals – broadcaster Marty Brennaman (twice) and ex-UK trainer Claude Vaughan – as well as the incorrect spelling of 'Tar Heel', this very enjoyable book is recommended for a basketball fan who would love to know more about the old Kentucky Colonels.

With Christmas just around the corner, this volume obviously would make a wonderful gift.

Jamie H. Vaught, whose syndicated sports column currently appears in Kentucky newspapers, is the author of four books about UK basketball. He is currently a professor at Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College in Middlesboro and can be reached by e-mail at jamiehv22@gmail.com.