

# Spirits' ex-coach locked out on return to Sports Arena

By LEN HOYES  
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Doug McKay was disappointed by his firing but hopes to continue in coaching.

The former coach of the Flint Spirits already has a couple of irons in the fire for the 1986-87 season.

McKay, who was fired from his one-year post in the International Hockey League last Wednesday, returned to IMA Sports Arena Monday to clean out his personal effects.

His frustration was heightened when he discovered the lock had been changed on his private office.



McKay

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"I guess they didn't want me stealing my own stuff," he said with a wry grin.

He was at a loss to explain his ouster.

"A couple months ago they were begging me to stay. Then they decided they don't want me," McKay said.

McKay said his firing was precipitated by a call to Bob Perani, president of the group which bought the franchise last January.

McKay said, "When I left for home a couple weeks ago, Perani said he would call in a day or so to set up an appointment. He never did.

"I called to talk about a young player I discovered in Hamilton. I could tell something was bothering him. I told him if he didn't want me as coach to say so and he did.

"That's all there was to it."

McKay said he worked all season without a contract.

"Laraine Lamb and I worked with a handshake agreement," he said. "I told her that if she didn't want me to coach, just say so and I would go home. I told her my word was good and I would coach as long as they continued to pay me."

Lamb was the first owner of the Spirits, being awarded a franchise by the IHL Board of Governors last Aug. 6. McKay was named coach on Sept. 6 and had only one month to build a new team.

The Spirits were badly outmanned against nine other teams and finished with a 16-66-0 record, setting an IHL record for defeats.

McKay said he came within one day of quitting in early February. Although

the players agreed to work three weeks for the new owners at one-half pay, (they later received the other half) McKay said he was not part of the agreement.

When his first check also was for one-half of the amount, McKay said he told Flint officials he would leave the next day.

"The situation was corrected and everything seemed to be OK for the rest of the season," he said. "I told them I wanted to come back and they seemed to want me. Something changed their minds.

"I'm disappointed but that happens in hockey. It isn't the first time. I've had a call from a team which needs a coach and I'm going to call a couple friends later this week to see what's open."

Perani indicated last Wednesday that

the Spirits may wait until late June before naming McKay's successor.

McKay said, "They could be losing valuable time. I already had made preliminary contact with a couple teams about working agreements but I'm going to tell them that I'm not the coach anymore."

He indicated only six of last year's players might be good enough to help make the Spirits competitive.

He said, "I don't know how many would be back even if I were the coach.

"It's important to be selling season tickets during the summer but it's also the time to be working on getting players.

"All the season tickets are no good without a competitive team."