

Ex-goalie leads drive to retain Flint Spirits

By LEN HOYES
Journal sports writer

Bob Perani, former star goalie in the International Hockey League, has emerged as a key figure in finding new investors for and restructuring the ownership of the financially-troubled Flint Spirits.

Perani said Friday he has commitments for \$50,000 and hopes to raise another \$100,000 within a week.

He has been tapped to seek Flint- and Detroit-area investors for the Spirits.



Perani

"We got that total in only four hours without any pressure," he said.

"SOME OF THOSE we contacted said they might increase contributions if we need them. I see no problems in getting \$150,000 within a week."

Perani, a Flint businessman, said that \$150,000, with gate receipts and program advertising sales, would get the Spirits through this season and the 1986-87 season.

He said he met with City Administrator Robert S. Collier Friday as the representative of four separate groups that had expressed interest in the Spirits earlier in the week. The Spirits play at the city-owned IMA Arena.

One group is headed by Robert R. Landaal, an executive of Flint Box-makers Inc. of Burton.

Collier said meetings are scheduled with other groups.

PERANI SAID HE has a list of 85 potential investors and would call them this weekend.

Some investors he knows through his business contacts. He owns Bob Perani's Hockey Shop and The Fish Tank on Davison Road.

Perani, 43, played five seasons with the old Flint Generals and twice was named to IHL all-star teams.

He retired after the 1973-74 season and once owned several pizza restaurants that bear his name. He sold the pizzerias to become part-owner of a hockey arena, which he no longer has a financial interest in.

Perani said, "We don't have anyone with megabucks. We're interested in people contributing minimum amounts. It's not a donation and it's not an investment. No one is going to get rich, but no one will go broke."

He emphasized contributions are to

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be given just once.

"We're not going to come back to these people for more next year," he said. "We have a viable product here, and with proper administration and fan support we can make it a profitable enterprise."

Perani said the Spirits hope to work closely with city officials.

"We feel a proper arrangement can be worked out with the arena management," he said. "We need their cooperation with such things as better dates, etc."

Collier, pledging the city's cooperation, said, "We're committed to keeping a prime tenant at the sports arena. I'm delighted he has a group to help with the financing. I urged him to get his people together as soon as possible."

"THE CITY certainly will help provide better dates."

Flint, with the Spirits created just last year, ranks last in seniority in the 10-team league and already has played 27 of its 41 home games.

No other team has played more than 24 at home and some have played as few as 19.

The home schedule includes five games in a 10-day stretch and six games in a 13-day stretch. The heavy schedule has contributed to a record low attendance.

Attendance for the Spirits has averaged 1,752, well below the break-even figure of 2,100 to 2,200 estimated by President-Owner Laraine Lamb.

LAMB, NOW the sole owner, said her role in any new structure hasn't been defined.

She explained, "My role depends upon what everyone wants. I'm not sure if I'll have part ownership, but I don't care. I just want to keep hockey here. That was my wish when we got the franchise."

Lamb said she has agreed to sell the team, which Perani said is the first step for the new group.

He said, "Now we'll call a meeting to decide the structure. That's as far as we can go until we come up with the money. Then we'll make the transition."

Perani said no changes are expected in the front office personnel.

COACH DOUG MCKAY will have a key role, perhaps as general manager, Perani said. He added: "I'm just the financial coordinator. Maybe my title will be business manager, but most of the duties will be handled by the coach."

"We're satisfied with his performance."

The Spirits have an 11-37-0 record, ranking last in the East Division and overall. McKay was

named coach Aug. 6 and had only a month to round up players before training camp.

He has been hindered by the lack of a working agreement with a National Hockey League team.

Every other IHL team has at least one tie to the NHL, and some have as many as three.

Several NHL teams have expressed an interest in working with Flint next year.