

Spirits ax McKay; seek dynamic coach

By LEN HOYES
Journal sports writer

Doug McKay is out and the Flint Spirits are looking for a new coach.

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The veteran International Hockey League coach was fired in an announcement today by Bob Perani, president of the new ownership which bought control of the team in late January.

"It's difficult to make a change when you're dealing with a nice person," Perani said. "Doug is capable but we need a more dynamic person to deal with the young guys on our team."

He said McKay was told of the decision Wednesday afternoon in a telephone conversation.

McKay was unavailable for

comment. He and his wife, Marilyn, live with a son near Hamilton, Ontario. Doug McKay, Jr., said his father wasn't home.

The senior McKay has been gone from IMA Sports Arena since April 16, three days after the Spirits completed the regular season. They did not qualify for the Turner Cup playoffs which are in their semifinal rounds.

Perani, a one-time all-star goalie for the Flint Generals, insisted the ouster was not the result of the Spirits' 16-66-0 record in their first season with a young team.

He said, "Doug may have accomplished as much as possible under the circumstances. But he may be too conservative. With the type of team we hope to have, we

would like to see a motivator.

"I don't mean a wild man but someone to create excitement."

Perani said he had no one in mind but had made calls to see who might be available. He said he planned to talk with general managers of three National Hockey League teams.

"We're making the change early enough so Doug will have a good chance to get another job and to get the word out that we're seeking a coach," Perani said.

He indicated the final choice might be held off until the NHL meetings in Montreal in late June.

Perani said the new person's title would depend upon credentials.

"He might be general manager

and coach or maybe manager-coach whose sole job is to handle the team without regard for the front office business," Perani said.

McKay, 54, was completing a one-year contract. He signed with the Spirits last Sept. 6, exactly one month after the IHL's Board of Governors had granted a new franchise.

He previously had coached four seasons in the IHL, in 1979-80 and 1980-81 at Kalamazoo and at Muskegon in 1982-83 and 1983-84. He led Kalamazoo to the Turner Cup in 1979-80 and lost to Saginaw in the 1981 finals. He was IHL coach-of-the-year in 1980-81.

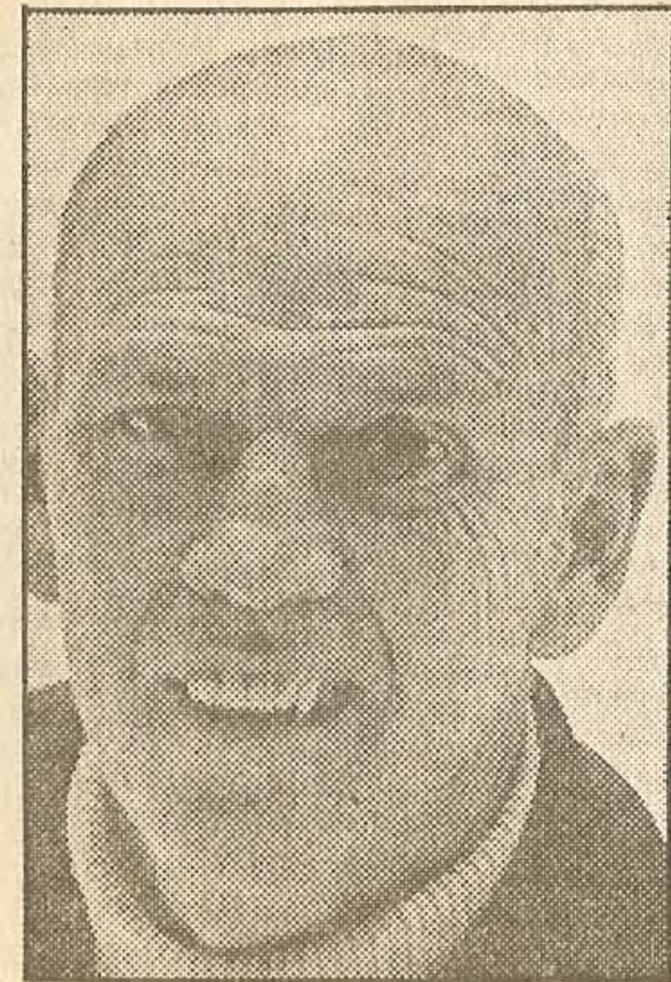
The Spirits replaced the Generals who left abruptly on July 6 to become the Saginaw Generals.

McKay was one of two holdovers from the original front-office group. Only Cathy Steele, the box office manager, remains.

McKay was hampered in his bid to form a team from scratch because the Spirits had no working agreement with an NHL team. All 21 NHL teams were accounted for when the Spirits came into existence.

He tried 40 players in an attempt to combat superior manpower which the Spirits faced.

The 66 defeats set an IHL record and the Spirits allowed 497 goals, also a league record. Flint finished in 10th place among 10 teams, missing a playoff position by 50 points, the equivalent of 25 victories.



Doug McKay