

Spirit assistant dies at 27; game postponed

□ Perkins' death makes Spirits grow up fast, B3.

By LEN HOYES
Journal sports writer

"Hockey is the farthest thing from my mind right now."

Coach Rick Dudley's comment echoed the thoughts of all the Flint Spirits' family Tuesday night as he tried to recreate events leading to the shocking death of his assistant coach, Frank Perkins, during the afternoon.

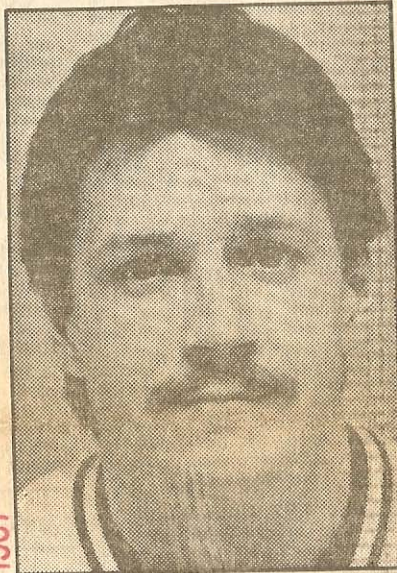
Perkins, 27, apparently died of natural causes at his apartment in Davison Township.

He was discovered by his fiancée, Cathy Stoker, at approximately 6 p.m. Paramedics rushed him to St. Joseph Hospital where he was declared dead.

Bob Perani, club president of the Spirits, said he was told by a physician that Perkins had been dead for several hours.

The body was to be taken Tuesday night to Hurley Medical Center for an autopsy today.

"I'm still in shock," said Perani, who joined the Spirits' board of directors in a meeting Tuesday night with all except four players who could not be contacted.



Frank Perkins

The four were told of the death later Tuesday night.

Tonight's game between the Spirits and Salt Lake City has been postponed because of the death.

"Most of the guys felt they couldn't be mentally ready to play," Perani said. The decision was made at a morning team meeting.

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PERKINS

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Perani said he had contacted IHL Commissioner Bud Poile in Indianapolis and apparently received permission to postpone the game if the players so decided.

Dudley notified Perkins' father who lives in Pueblo, Colo.

"I don't even remember his first name," said Dudley. "I just know he's scheduled to arrive Wednesday morning to make decisions."

The Spirits' coach was notified of the situation by Captain Jayson Meyer who first was called by Ms. Stoker.

Dudley said, "By the time I got there, I knew he was dead."

"I talked to him around 2 in the afternoon. We had planned to get together Tuesday night but we called it off."

"I'm just stunned. I'm sitting here trying to figure out why."

Dudley and Perkins had worked closely in building the Spirits into a contender in the IHL's East Division. Perkins was the first player brought to Flint after Dudley was hired last summer.

They had been coaching rivals

for several seasons in the Atlantic Coast Hockey League, Dudley at Winston-Salem, N.C., and Perkins at Pinebridge, N.C., and Salem, Va.

"I loved the way he played and the way he coached," said Dudley. "He acted so much like me, I wanted him on my side. He was an intense person who meant a lot to this team."

Perkins was Dudley's confidante in choosing players for the team. He also played in 53 games, as a defenseman, center or winger. He scored eight goals and assisted on 13 for 21 points.

Dudley said, "He could fill any role I wanted. He was an intelligent hockey person."

"He had a bad back all season but you'd never know it by talking to him. He would get bumped and come back for more, even though you knew he was hurting. That kind of desire rubbed off on the entire team and that's one of the reasons we have been successful."

Perani said today's decisions would be made in conjunction with Perkins' survivors.

He said, "We're prepared to do anything the family wants us to do."