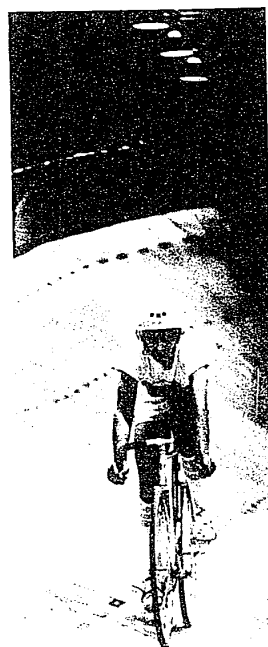


Fast...



Riders sail through the 50-degree curve of the velodrome set up at the Southfield Sports Arena. (Staff photos by Mindy Saunders)



The loneliness of the long-distance rider. Southfield's John Natoci heads down another straight.

Velodrome lures speed-crazy

By BOB GROSS

With the recent downswing in the economy, perhaps it's an ominous sign that a velodrome has been set up in the ice arena at the Southfield Civic Center.

But don't go looking for bread lines to stand in or apples to sell just yet. A velodrome is a banked bicycle track, which may be made of concrete, or wood, as is the case of the track set up in the Civic Center Arena. And velodromes, and the types of racing associated with them, were once entertainment institutions of the Depression — entertainment along the line of marathon dancing.

Some races were brutal affairs that consisted of a pack of single cyclists competing against each other for 24 hours. People needed money, and some promoters were willing to exploit that need with races designed to test the limits of human endurance.

You could make a living at it, a pretty good living of \$20,000-\$30,000 a year, said Dale Hughes of Rochester, one of four partners who built and travel with the portable track set up in the Civic Center Arena.

"It," SAID HUGHES, "used to be the place to be at. It was like rock concerts are now."

But World War II came along, and hard times got better. Humane societies lobbied for laws banning some of the more brutal contests, and people just lost interest in cycling.

Velodrome racing, if it didn't die completely in the United States, went into a deep coma.

Both road racing and velodrome racing, however, remained popular in Europe. The United States was the birthplace of bicycle racing on a banked track, yet Europe took the lead in the sport after World

War II. Certain team Olympic cycling events are contested on velodrome tracks.

Europe is where Hughes saw his first indoor velodrome — there are several outdoor tracks still extant in the United States including one on Mound Road in Detroit. An avid cyclist, he wondered why such a track couldn't be built here.

SO, IN 1976, he and his partners built one. That track has crisscrossed the country in the four years since it was built and has become something of a celebrity along the way.

Not only does it have the distinction of being the world's only portable indoor bicycle track, but it was also an integral part of a two-minute scene in the motion picture "Little Miss Marker."

The track is as physically impressive as are its credits. The straightaways of the

(Continued on Page 2C)



Dale Hughes of Rochester wanted a velodrome, so he built his own.

Lanier leaves Piston memories behind

He would be the franchise — the one player capable of pulling the team out of its doldrums and into the limelight. A talent who would vault the squad into the championships.

That was the public's view of former Detroit Piston Bob Lanier — the player who would make Detroit a winner. It never happened.

The Pistons had a few good seasons with players like Lanier, Dave Bing, Chris Ford, Don Adams, George Trapp and Howard Porter. But they never reached the heights fans expected of them.

So what was the public's reaction? Maybe these so-called "superstars" weren't all that good, and while the Pistons were making the playoffs, they weren't getting past the first or second rounds. Obviously, changes were still needed.

RESENTMENT GREW TOWARD the one player who always gave Detroit a thread of respectability — Lanier. Despite labels that he couldn't play defense or that he was lazy, he played, often injured and with inferior teams.

Lanier showed his true potential when he was traded to the Milwaukee Bucks last season. He led them into the National Basketball Association playoffs and to a near-upset of the then-defending NBA champion Seattle SuperSonics.

Lanier enjoyed the post-season tournament, in which his new team came so close to making it into the NBA's final four. But the ending was another in a long career of disappointments for the 6-foot-11 center.

"DETROIT HAS HAD two very talented individuals, Dave Bing and myself, who have been labeled because the team's been losing," Lanier said during a break from a basketball day camp which he and Dick Vitale co-



C.J. Risak

sponsor at West Bloomfield High School.

Lanier was talking about the poor-defense label he had been stuck with throughout his career with Detroit. Bing suffered through much the same stigma — all offense, no defense.

"Dave didn't get out until late in his career," Lanier said. "I myself know I can't do some things now that I could earlier in my career."

The no-defense tag didn't stick long with Milwaukee. Buck coach Don Nelson said soon after the acquisition of Lanier that he was surprised what good defense the big man played.

It seems, looking back, that Lanier regrets his playing days in Detroit. There were times when it seemed the Pistons were on their way — in 1973-74, when the team won 52 of 82 games.

BUT, AS LANIER pointed out, 1½ years after that season, six out of 12 players from the team were gone.

So Lanier doesn't take the blame for the Pistons' floundering. There have been too many mistakes with personnel, too many front-office blunders to make a winning team.

"I firmly believe the main part of being able to win is organization and management, from the top down," Lanier said. "If you have a good product and good management, you're going to make money. If you don't, you won't."

"Chrysler cars aren't that much different than Ford, but Ford sells and Chrysler doesn't," he said, referring to

superior management as the reason why.

Lanier doesn't doubt that the Piston management wants to produce a winner. "There's no question about it," he said. "Detroit management wants to win."

But how badly? Last year, they gave up a proven performer, John Shumate, to keep a rookie. Shumate finished the season as a starter for San Antonio. The Piston rookie, Earl Evans, rode the bench and the disabled list for most of the season.

THE PISTON MANAGEMENT also let M.L. Carr get away when they could



Now here's the way you do it. Dick Vitale shows Dave Younger the right way to shoot a basketball while Bob Lanier looks down upon the proceedings. (Staff photo by John Stano)

have signed him before he played out his option. Carr's last year with Detroit was a great one and he decided to sign with Boston.

Lanier witnessed this and many other ill-advised moves that crippled the team and put them in their present position.

"I was always hoping the situation would get better and it never did," Lanier said about his years with Detroit. "There's no other place I'd rather win than in Detroit. The fans here are great."

Lanier had less complimentary things to say about the Piston management.

"You don't want me to compare them," he answered when asked about the Milwaukee management vs. Detroit's. "There is no comparison. One team has been a winner most of the time, the other's been a loser. It's all in the attitude."

HE WAS UNHAPPY leaving Detroit, his home for his first 10 pro seasons. He sees the end of his basketball camp at West Bloomfield and another inner-city league he runs. He still owns a home in Farmington Hills, but thinks he may move to Milwaukee.

As far as his career is concerned, Lanier explained his contract has two more years to run and he'll play through that at least. Milwaukee lost two forwards: Richard Washington in the expansion draft and David Meyer to retirement. With no draft picks in the first two rounds, the Bucks will be thin up front next season.

Still, they will no doubt be better than Detroit. And in that respect it gives Lanier the chance to pursue the one goal he knows he will one day reach.

"I know I'll have an NBA championship before I retire." That's more than the Piston management can say.

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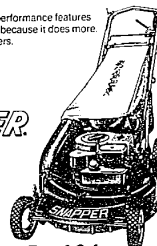
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