

# The Oakland Raiders revisited

By Jim Hughes  
staff writer

**I**F EVER THERE was a man qualified to start a semiprofessional football team, it's Chuck Van Robays. He's spent enough time doing battle on minor league gridiron to draw veteran's pay.

Van Robays, a former assistant football coach at Rochester Adams and minor league player from 1968-1976, is spearheading a venture for a franchise which he hopes will result in exciting football in Oakland County. He is managing partner of the Oakland County Raiders, a semipro team which will make its debut in the Northern States Football League (NSFL) this August.

His excitement is manifested in the team's motto: "We Play For Adventure."

There's still some wrinkles to be worked out, but come August, Oakland County will be represented in the league along with Grand Rapids, Racine, Wis.; Lincolnwood, Ill.; Janesville, Wis.; Indianapolis, Ind.; and Gary, Ind. There's a possibility the league will approve more new franchises in addition to the Raiders.

**THE OAKLAND COUNTY Raiders** whose decor will bear a striking resemblance to the Los Angeles Raiders of the NFL, have their office based in Rochester, although the team will play in Pontiac. Van Robays announced last week the team will play five home games at Warner Stadium and one at the Pontiac Silverdome. A practice site has yet to be determined.

Van Robays also announced Robert "Pur" Kaufman will be the head coach of the Raiders. A coaching staff of three assistants has yet to be appointed. One possible candidate is Joe

Zelmański, former head coach at Adams.

The groundwork has been set, but there's still plenty to keep Van Robays busy. He's managing partner with Dr. Richard Klein and Dr. Thomas Chwierut, but putting the operation together is Van Robays' department.

"I've always been interested in putting a team together. It's just that the climate wasn't right," said the former Adams assistant, who played minor league football with the defunct Pontiac Arrows and Pontiac Firebirds. "When the Michigan Panthers left (and merged with the Oakland Invaders in the United States Football League), I thought the timing was perfect. We applied to the NSFL and our franchise was voted in."

Van Robays received the formal nod of approval Jan. 6 at the monthly league meeting in Chicago. Now, everything is full speed ahead — which is the only rate possible in order to field a team for the final schedule.

"We've had 70-80 calls already from possible players," Van Robays said. "We have 8-10 people with the right credentials who have signed letters of intent."

**THE RAIDERS** will have a free agent-type camp in the spring. Van Robays also talked about "hospitality houses" at the University of Michigan and Michigan State University, where prospective players can see what the Raiders are all about. "We have to have to put out a good team. We have to if we want to compete in this league," he said, adding the NSFL is the best minor league around. "If we don't, we'll be on the short end of a lot of big scores."

With the Panthers moving to Oakland, Calif., Van Robays would like to

## football

get some of the players left behind. There won't be a Doug Flutie among them, but Van Robays hopes to find some name players.

"Maybe we can pick up some of the backstabs (from the Panthers)," he said. "We won't be of that caliber, but we won't be that far off. There won't be any \$7 million players, though, that's for sure."

No, the salaries are more like \$2,000-3,000. He calls it a "working man's league," certainly because players need other work to support themselves. So, why would anyone be interested in playing semipro football when the chance of making the big league is about as likely as hitting the Lotto when you only play five numbers?

"We'll get the kids who only played high school football and haven't yet got football out of their system," Van Robays said. "Some will make it. A majority of the players will be those who haven't quite made it in the NFL or USFL — the players who need more seasoning. We're going to need those types of players to compete."

"And, there's a lot of great athletes out there who just haven't played football."

**FOR A FEW** — albeit very few — the NSFL can be a step toward the big time. That player would have to be a longshot, not unlike Hall of Famer Johnny Unitas, who was cut by the Pittsburgh Steelers, played sandlot ball

and eventually latched on with the Baltimore Colts where he rewrote the NFL passing records.

"We (NSFL) have a contract with the NFL and the USFL," Van Robays said. "They can bring one of our players up at anytime. We have very close ties with both leagues."

Van Robays knows what he's up against the first year. The Panthers' brief history is enough for a quick education in the study of selling a football team. Even during a championship season, the Silverdome wasn't packed with spectators.

"We're not fools," he said. "We know there's not a million people out there who want to see minor league football. We're working with corporate sponsors with hopes of selling blocks of tickets for distribution. Hopefully, we can break even the first year, and next year, maybe make a profit."

Promotions will have to play a part if the Raiders expect to draw big crowds. The game at the Silverdome — either Sept. 21 or 28 — will feature an automobile giveaway to the spectator who is credited with breaking the league attendance record for one game, which, Van Robays said, is "22,000 something."

**ALL THE** home games will be followed by a concert afterward. After the game at the Silverdome, the concert performers will be headliners, depending on who's in the area at the time.

Van Robays said tickets for games at Warner will be \$5 (adults) and \$3 (children). Season tickets are \$25.

There's still plenty of time to latch on to season tickets.

"We've sold two already," Van Robays said with a smile.

# Pioneer cagers burned by GVSC

## OU sports

It's tough enough to beat the Grand Valley State College men's basketball team in their own gym on a normal night. But, when the Lakers shot 57 percent from the floor (65 percent in the second half), it's darn near impossible.

So the Oakland University cagers found out in Thursday night's 81-76 loss.

The Lakers, despite GVSC's fireworks, led 39-38 at the half and 65-64 with 6:56 left in the game.

Then Grand Valley started to burn the twine. In a short 2 minutes, the Lakers recited off a 12-4 spurt to assume command of the game.

Ironically, GVSC's chilly free throw shooting (five missed 1-and-1 opportunities in the final 2:30) allowed OU to pull within 2, 76-74 with 39 seconds left.

Ron Polus, one of the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference's leading scorers, ended the OU charge with a thundering slam-dunk. Polus scored 20 points, 16 in the final half.

Randy Parlier led Grand Valley (13-2 in the GLIAC, 18-7 overall) with 24 points.

Chris Howze and Scott Bittling each scored 19 to pace OU. Freshman Pete Sehlhi chipped in 16.

OU, seventh place in the GLIAC with a 5-10 record, is 13-14 overall.

The Pioneer's did get some good news Thursday. Junior guard Rob Skinner from Essexville was named to the GLIAC All-Academic team.

### OU WOMEN WIN

Despite shooting a frigid 37 percent from the floor and committing 31 turnovers, Oakland University's women's basketball team defeated Grand Valley, 76-70 Thursday night. Defense did the trick for the Lady

Pioneers. They trailed by as many as 8 early in the second half. But on two occasions, the Pioneers held the Lakers scoreless for four minutes.

During those intervals, the Pioneers outscored Grand Valley 23-4.

Brenda McLean led the way for OU with 15 points and 15 rebounds. Kim Nash added 13, Toni Tasparovic 11, Sara Knuth and Julie Wilga 10 each. OU also got a boost from freshmen Cherry Wilks and Marla Boyle. The two came off the OU bench and contributed 12 points, 5 assists and 3 steals between them.

The OU women are in fourth place in the GLIAC with a 9-6 record, 14-13 overall. GVSC is 10-5 in the GLIAC, 13-13 overall.

The GLIAC honored a pair of Lady Pioneers, also. Brenda McLean, averaging 15.3 points per game, was named to the GLIAC's All-Academic team and Kim Nash earned honorable mention All-GLIAC honors.

### ON THE MATS

Oakland University sophomore Jerry Umin will be one of three Pioneers competing in the National Division II Wrestling Tournament March 2-3.

Umin, a 158-pounder, qualified by winning the Mid-East Regional title at 158. He's expected to be one of the top seeds in his weight division.

Sophomores Dave Wilgen (142) and John Solomson (167) also qualified for nationals. Both earned wild-card berths.

# Livonia boxer makes pro debut

By Brad Emmons  
staff writer

Livonia's Craig Payne will launch his pro boxing career in familiar surroundings.

He'll make his long-awaited debut March 21 at Detroit's Cobo Arena as part of a card put on by promoter Bill Kozerski of Gold Circle Productions.

"We've signed for one fight, but we hope to be on a show here every other month," said Paul Soucy of the Livonia Boxing Club.

Soucy, who manages Payne along with Dick Quilton, said an opponent has not yet been lined up.

Payne has been inactive since last summer when he lost a controversial 3-2 decision to Philadelphia's Tyrrell Biggs in the super-heavyweight finals of the Olympic Box-Offs held in Las Vegas. (Biggs went on to win the gold medal.)

"By not winning a medal you've got to work 10 times as hard to get a pro career going," said Soucy. "Being out for long (seven months) is tough."

But with Craig's background and name, we hope to draw some people down to see him fight."

**BECAUSE OF CONTRACTUAL** problems and inactivity, Payne was ready to quit the fight game

less than a month ago.

"Things just kept falling through," said Payne, a former National Golden Gloves champion. "Nothing came through. I was to the point where I wasn't hungry any more. I had hoped to fight at Cobo on Dec. 20th, but the show fell through because it was too close to Christmas. Ticket sales were way down."

Payne is currently in training at the Castaway Hotel in Las Vegas, sparring with James Broad, a heavyweight ranked in the top 10 in the world.

"This fight is going to make me or break me," he said. "I'll train here through March 15th and hopefully work with Larry Holmes (the world champion)."

Payne's team has grown to five. In addition to Soucy and Quilton, the Livonia boxer has obtained a physician, Dr. Casper Ruffalo, an attorney, Mark Risan (who represents Holmes), and a trainer, Eddie Futch (Holmes' trainer).

**SOUCY ALSO** announced Monday that the LBC will host the Detroit area Golden Gloves Tournament, scheduled for March 9 and 16 at the Inkster Recreation Center.

The event, sponsored by Budweiser, is a stepping stone to the National Golden Gloves Tournament March 25-30 in Little Rock, Ark.

Soucy predicts that two of his LBC fighters in the open division, Farmington's Mike Dardini (125 pounds) and Todd Vickers (165), have a good shot at making the nationals.

Tickets for each session are available at Griffin's Sport Shop in Livonia for \$5 (ringside) and \$3 (general admission).

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