

RACING

INDIANAPOLIS

Kiss bassist Simmons signs deal to promote IRL

Don't be surprised to find a checkered flag soon amid the black-and-white Kiss face paint of tongue-wagging bassist Gene Simmons.



SIMMONS

Simmons and marketing partner Richard Abramson have signed a deal to promote the Indy Racing League, the racing circuit announced Tuesday.

The promotion campaign features a 91-second anthem called "I Am Indy" sung by Simmons, backed by the band BAG.

"It's a personal statement that's a sort of personal allegiance to the United States of Indy," Simmons said.

The Indianapolis-based IRL posted the song on its Web site, www.indycar.com.

Details of the rest of the campaign were being kept under wraps (a spokesman declined to release the length and cost of the contract), but Simmons said it would include a clothing line.

The IRL is trying to increase its fan base.

"I think it's very aggressive, and I think it's exactly what the IndyCar Series needs," said Brian Barnhart, IRL's president and chief operating officer.



NADAL



SAFIN

TENNIS

MELBOURNE, Australia

Injuries put Safin, Nadal out of Australian Open

Defending champion Marat Safin and French Open winner Rafael Nadal are out of the Australian Open, joining Andre Agassi on the sidelines for the first Grand Slam of the year.

"I am very sad that I cannot go to the Australian Open to defend my title as champion," Safin said on his Web site.

Bothered by a left knee injury, he played in only one tournament in the past five months of 2005.

Nadal, the world's second-ranked player, said Tuesday he was pulling out because of the left foot he injured in October at the Madrid Masters, the most recent event he played.

OLYMPICS

WENGEN, Switzerland

U.S. ski coach wonders if Miller should quit team

U.S. ski coach Phil McNichol questions whether Bode Miller should remain with the team following his comments about racing and drinking.

The overall World Cup champion said during a "60 Minutes" profile on CBS that it's not easy "to ski when you're wasted."

The United States Ski and Snowboard Association has been swamped with angry phone calls from team donors and corporate sponsors since those remarks, and president and CEO Bill Marolt traveled to Wengen to meet with Miller.

McNichol said Tuesday that Miller has been testing the team's limits the past two years with his contentious statements, late-night habits and refusal to compromise with staff.

"I don't know what the answer is. First we have to call the question, 'Can we still do this together?'" McNichol said. "I think the question Bode has to answer is, 'Do you still want to be a part of the United States ski team?'"

NEW YORK

Skeleton coach's appeal denied by state court

Embattled U.S. skeleton coach Tim Nardiello lost his bid Tuesday to be with his Olympics-bound team at this weekend's World Cup competition in Germany.

New York Supreme Court Justice James Dawson upheld Nardiello's suspension and issued his decision by fax a day after the coach went to court in Elizabethtown, N.Y., seeking reinstatement.

Nardiello, placed on paid administrative leave Dec. 31 by the U.S. Bobsled and Skeleton Federation after two sexual harassment complaints were made against him, is expected to continue appealing with hopes of coaching the U.S. team at the Winter Games in Turin next month.

'Glory' team just wanted to win

BY TIM DAHLBERG
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Don Haskins didn't realize the impact of what he had done until a few days later.

That's when the letters started arriving. Thousands of them, mostly from the South.

Almost all began the same way: "Dear n— lover:"

His Texas Western basketball team had won the national championship. But Haskins was no longer in any mood to celebrate.

"The worst time of my life was the next few weeks after we won the national championship," Haskins said. "It didn't really dawn on me what this was all about until that time."

Haskins' crime, an unpardonable one in certain parts of the country, was that he started five black players against Kentucky's lily-white team in the NCAA final.

Worse yet, his players had beaten the Wildcats 72-65 to become national champions.

It was March 19, 1966. America was a different place then, and basketball was a different game.

A world away, blacks were fighting and dying alongside their fellow white soldiers in Vietnam.

They weren't, however, playing ball at many schools in the South, where de facto segregation still reigned.



AP PHOTO

Josh Lucas stars as Hall of Fame coach Don Haskins in the movie "Glory Road," which tells the story of the Texas Western men's basketball team.

Just two years earlier, President Johnson had signed landmark civil rights legislation prohibiting discrimination of any kind.

But change came slowly, even on the basketball court, where ability was supposed to matter more than a player's skin color.

Haskins and his Miners weren't trying to change all of that when they took the court against Kentucky in the national final, and the argument could be made that they really didn't.

It would be another season before a black player took the court in the Southeastern Conference, and two more after that before Kentucky's team was integrated.

Putting five black players on

the court wasn't meant as a statement for racial equality. It was a lineup put together to win a basketball game.

"We had one goal, one objective, and that was to win the basketball game," said Harry Flournoy, a Texas Western forward immortalized on the cover of Sports Illustrated that week blocking a shot from Kentucky's Pat Riley (yes, that Pat Riley).

"We blotted everything else out around us."

The ensuing win against the favored Wildcats was the kind of thing Hollywood movies are made about. But even Hollywood took its sweet time with the subject, waiting four decades before presenting

its version of what happened that night in College Park, Md.

You won't have to wait any longer to see it. "Glory Road" opens this week around the country, and Haskins and his players say the movie makers got most of it right.

It's a story about a team and a time inadvertently coming together to make history.

Texas Western, now the University of Texas El Paso, wasn't supposed to make the championship game even though the Miners had lost only once and had a team so cocky that one player, Bobby Joe Hill, fell asleep the afternoon of the final during a chalk talk.

"The guys drove me crazy because they did not think anybody could beat them," Haskins said. "I asked Bobby Joe years later how he could fall asleep on me. He said, 'Coach, they weren't going to beat us.'"

Haskins had alternated starting lineups all year, starting five of his seven black players on several different occasions. He did it against Kentucky because the Wildcats were known as a fastbreaking team, and he wanted three guards on the court instead of two.

It turned out to be the coaching move of a lifetime for Haskins, whose team played tenacious defense and frustrated Kentucky at every turn.

The final score showed only a seven-point margin, but the Min-

ers were in control all the way.

Riley, newspaper accounts said, cried on the bench afterward but then went to the Texas Western locker room to congratulate the winners.

Interestingly, there was never a word in the papers about the color of anyone's skin.

Haskins swears he never said anything about race, either, though center David "Big Daddy" Lattin says Haskins told the team he was starting all black players because he had heard Rupp say five blacks couldn't beat five whites.

Depending on who you ask, Rupp was either a racist who wouldn't allow blacks on his team until his final years, or himself a victim of the times and circumstances in the South.

Those times were already changing long before Texas Western took the court for the final game. Blacks had been playing pro ball for more than a decade, and most universities outside the South had several blacks on their teams.

In a lot of ways, the 1966 title game was just that, a game.

More than changing the way basketball was played, it simply reflected the way the country itself was changing.

Tim Dahlberg is a national sports columnist for the Associated Press. Send comments to tdahlberg@ap.org.

TUESDAY'S NBA

ROUNDUP

The Associated Press

Knicks 92
Cavaliers 84

CLEVELAND — Jamal Crawford scored 26 points, 20 in the second half, and New York held Cleveland to 12 points in the fourth quarter as the Knicks won their season-high fourth straight by beating the Cavaliers.

Stephon Marbury added 22 points as the Knicks, suddenly playing their best ball of the season, also won their first road game since Dec. 6.

Cleveland wasted another superb game from LeBron James, who finished with 36 points, seven rebounds and seven assists in 46 minutes.

James became the first NBA player to get at least 30 points, seven rebounds

and five assists in seven straight games since Oscar Robertson in 1966.

But he got little help from the other Cavaliers as Cleveland went without a field goal for a 7:29 stretch of the fourth while the Knicks pulled away. New York outscored Cleveland 15-6 during the final 7:47.

Celtics 98
Hawks 94

ATLANTA — Ricky Davis converted a three-point play with 1:40 left to give Boston its first lead since the opening quarter, and the Celtics held on to beat Atlanta.

Paul Pierce scored 27 points, and Davis added 21 to lead the Celtics, who denied Atlanta its first three-game winning streak since April 2004.

The Hawks built a 16-point lead in the

second quarter, but Boston slowly chipped away at the deficit.

Finally, the Celtics pulled ahead when Davis grabbed a long rebound at the top of the key, took off the other way and converted the lay-in, drawing a foul from Joe Johnson in the process. Davis made the free throw to give Boston a 94-92 lead, its first advantage since going up 13-12 just five minutes into the game.

Zaza Pachulia led the Hawks with 18 points, while Al Harrington chipped in with 16 and Johnson 15.

Grizzlies 99
Kings 85

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Mike Miller had 21 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists, recording the Grizzlies' first triple-double since moving from Vancouver, as Memphis beat the Sacramento Kings.

Miller was 8 of 16 from the field, including 4 of 9 from outside the arc. He grabbed his 10th rebound with a little more than a minute left, drawing a roar from the home crowd.

Pau Gasol led Memphis with 27 points, going 12 of 18 from the field, while Hakim Warrick scored 16. Shane Battier and Bobby Jackson each scored 15 for Memphis.

Mike Bibby had 26 points and eight assists for the Kings, who lost their second straight. Peja Stojakovic scored 19 points, while Kenny Thomas scored 14 of his 16 points in the first half and grabbed 10 rebounds.

Pistons 96
Hornets 86

OKLAHOMA CITY — Richard Hamilton scored 30 points, including 20 in the

second half, and the Detroit Pistons rallied to beat the New Orleans Hornets.

Chauncey Billups added 18 points for the Pistons (27-5).

The Hornets lost their second straight game despite the unexpected return of rookie point guard Chris Paul, who played with a torn ligament in his right hand.

The Hornets led 53-48 after a basket by Desmond Mason with 9:48 left in the third quarter, but Detroit scored the next nine points to take the lead for good.

Detroit scored the final eight points of the quarter, including consecutive 3-pointers by Tayshaun Prince and Carlos Arroyo, to go ahead 74-64.

New Orleans closed the gap to 80-79 with 6:20 left, but a 12-0 Detroit run, capped by 3-pointers by Billups and Rasheed Wallace, extended the Pistons' margin to 13 points by the 3:40 mark.



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