

WARRIORS SLAM JAM IN HOME DEBUT

Festivities, dunkfest, win leave fans cheering new team

By JACOB MAY

jmay@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — Flash-flood warnings weren't going to stop the debut of D-League basketball in Santa Cruz.



WARRIORS 93,
JAM 88

THURSDAY'S

GAME: Armor

at Warriors

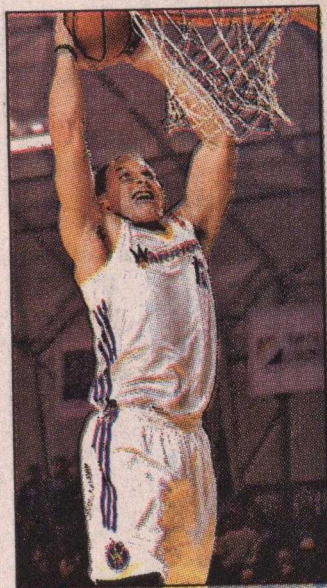
TIME: 7 p.m.

locals who had been waiting the better part of a year for professional basketball to arrive.

With BMX freestyle stunts at halftime, the Warriors' dancers performance and James Durbin singing the National Anthem, fans weren't left wanting for excitement.

"Even the timeouts and the halftimes, it's NBA enter-

SEE WARRIORS ON B8



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL PHOTOS

RIGHT: Jeremy Tyler, on assignment from the Golden State Warriors, sails to the basket for one of his spectacular dunks Sunday night for the Santa Cruz Warriors in their first home game in the new Kaiser Permanente Arena. LEFT: The Warriors' Taylor Griffin throws down a dunk.

WARRIORS

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tainment," Warriors coach Nate Bjorkgren said. "With the fireworks — the video screen is a little smaller — but the atmosphere in here was great."

Oh, and the basketball team didn't disappoint either. The Warriors beat the Bakersfield Jam 93-88 on Sunday night with a capacity crowd of 2,505 in their home opener.

The raucous atmosphere often spurred the Warriors' momentum and they, in turn, provided fans with plenty of highlight-reel plays throughout the night.

"It definitely boosted our energy and our intensity," recently added forward Jeremy Tyler said of the crowd.

And while the Warriors (6-2) relied on a balanced offense that involved most of their players, it was the their two most recent additions that did most of the heavy lifting. Tyler and fellow forward Kent Bazemore — both of whom joined the team Saturday — propelled the offense and defense throughout the night. Tyler did most of his damage in the first quarter while dominating the offensive glass and Bazemore nailed several critical shots down the stretch in the fourth quarter to keep the Jam's comeback hopes at bay.

Tyler had 14 points and a game-high 12 rebounds, while Bazemore led the Warriors with 18 points on 7-of-16 shooting.

"Both were trying to be excellent team players," Bjorkgren said. "They came down and shared the ball

nicely and played within the system."

In all, five Warriors scored in double figures. James Nunnally led Bakersfield with 19 points.

The early offensive output and crowd energy enabled Santa Cruz to build several leads throughout, including a 15-point advantage in the third quarter. But the Warriors' energy level dropped at times, which allowed the Jam (8-5) to get back into the game.

"If you relax against any team in this league, they're going to score on you," Bjorkgren said. "They're going to cut deficits."

And then there were the consistent official-related stoppages. The staff for a brand-new arena was still working out some of its kinks. The officials often had to converge at the scorer's table to set the clock and determine how many personal fouls each team and player had.

While the Warriors expected such minor glitches, it still affected their game.

"It was tough to get into a rhythm early because you get going, you had to stop for three or four minutes," Bazemore said. "It was kind of frustrating, but coach warned us before the game, 'There's a lot going on, a lot of emotion, a lot of people nervous.' The ball boys were nervous having to go out there every five seconds to wipe the floor."

So Tyler and center Mickell Gladness did what they know how to do best — dunk. Whatever stoppages the crowd grew irritated by were quickly erased by yet another highlight-reel play.

"In that first quarter, they came out with a dunkfest and really got the crowd into it," Bazemore said.



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Warriors guard Cameron Jones splits two Bakersfield Jam defenders as he moves to the basket Sunday night.