

# Time Machine: The Iowa Cornets

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## Iowa's professional women's basketball team operated from 1978 to 1980

Molly Bolin drives for two of her game-high 40 points during a WBL contest on Sunday against St. Louis. Cornets won the regular-season home finale, 101-81 on March 10, 1980. (Bill Neibergall/Des Moines Register file photo)

By [Diane Langton](#), The Gazette

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CEDAR RAPIDS — “Just as little boys sometimes dream about becoming the next Pete Rose or O.J. Simpson, here in Iowa the little girls may soon be dreaming of becoming the next Molly Bolin of Sister Green,” wrote a Gazette sports reporter in December 1979.

Women’s professional basketball started taking shape in January 1977 with the formation of the Women’s Basketball Association. Franchises had been sold to New York City and Dallas. Agreements were close for Des Moines, Los Angeles, Phoenix and Milwaukee.

Iowa’s franchise was financed by George Nissen, owner of Nissen Corp. in Cedar Rapids. His franchise attracted the attention of Hollywood filmmaker Mike de Gaetano, who explained in 1978 that his choice of Iowa as the setting for his movie, “Dribble,” a comedy about a professional women’s basketball team, was based on the popularity of Iowa girls’ basketball.

“Women’s basketball didn’t go big back East the way it did here in Iowa,” he said. “We found after we set it in Iowa that it was growing all over the country because of Title IX provisions, back in 1971, saying that all of the money going for athletics had to be divided equally between men and women. Because of this there have been more participants — 100,000 girl basketball players seven years ago, now up to three or 4 million gals playing.”

That led to creation of professional women’s teams like the Cornets.

De Gaetano scheduled 4 1/2 weeks of filming in Cedar Rapids with five or six days of background footage in Des Moines. The plot about the mishaps of a down and out women’s basketball team that eventually plays a men’s Army team also featured Pete Maravich of the New Orleans Jazz. Shooting for the movie engendered excitement for the Cornets.

The Cornets already had four players under contract — Robin Tucker, Molly Bolin, Denise Sharps and Tanya Crevier — before the first women’s pro draft in New York City in July 1978. Tanya Crevier was

discovered by Cornets General Manager Rod Lein at the Girls State Tournament in March.

“I did a ball-handling act at halftime on Friday night and Rod called me after that,” she said. “I think that’s the reason they chose me to be in the movie, because I make trick shots and have a ball-handling act.” She, Robin Tucker and Joan Uhl spent two weeks in Hollywood taking acting lessons for their roles in “Dribble.”

Molly Bolin acquired two nicknames while with the team. “Dolly” referred to her posters and commercials promoting the Cornets. Her resemblance to actress Farrah Fawcett led to a look-alike pose on the team’s most popular poster. “Machine Gun Molly” referred to her league-leading scoring average of 31.5 points.

After their first game against the Minnesota Fillies in Bloomington, Minn., the Cornets’ first home game was in the Veterans Auditorium in Des Moines against the New York Stars. Gov. Robert Ray tossed up a ceremonial jump ball and a Dixieland band played the Iowa Corn Song as the Cornets ran onto the floor. The Cornets won, 99-87, in front of 4,231 fans, a crowd described in a newspaper report as “very much like that at any other sporting event, with perhaps just a few more women than normal.”

The Cornets’ first Cedar Rapids game in 1979 marked the first sports attraction at the 7,000-plus-seat Five Seasons Center. They beat the New Jersey Gems 94-80 on Jan. 27, the day after “Dribble” premiered at the Iowa Theater.

With its first year showing promise, the WBL surprised its critics.

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