

**LACROSSE from A1***Swarm enters a sports scene with void from NHL lockout*

"We're excited and kind of curious to see the pros and see how they play it," said Jim VanLokeren, who never played the game but has become a fan because Taylor has played the game the past few years.

"We're just real interested. I think it's a great sport, and I want to learn more about it."

Others, like Walter Licht of Oakdale, felt the same, despite Friday's blowout.

"It was awesome," said Licht, who was decked out in a royal blue and bright gold Swarm jersey and matching skullcap. "Give it some time. This place will be packed."

Early Friday, the ticket office at Xcel was scrambling to keep up with phone calls from fans wanting information about the team, the schedule and tickets.

By 11 a.m., more than 50 prospective customers had left voice mails for Jamie Spencer, director of sales and service for the Storm and Minnesota Wild, the National Hockey League franchise that owns the Storm.

**On with the show**

"It's crazy today," Spencer said. "It's been nonstop. Everybody is just so excited. A lot of people have never seen a game, and they don't know what to expect. Our view is, let's put on a show for 'em. Let's show them what the game is all about."

In many ways, the timing of the expansion team's entry into the 11-team National Lacrosse League couldn't be better.

With the pro hockey season on hold because of the NHL lockout, many sports fans are antsy to get back to the Xcel and watch a professional game. Any game.

"I'm wishing and hoping they get back on the ice," said Tim Malloy of North St. Paul, sporting a Minnesota Wild

hockey jersey and cap at Friday's Swarm game. "But for now, this will do."

Beginning in January and ending in April, the Swarm will play a 16-game schedule, with eight at home.

To help generate interest for Friday's exhibition, the Swarm distributed 20,000 free tickets in hopes of filling the arena.

"We feel if people come once, they'll get hooked and want to come back," Spencer said. "It's kind of a test drive."

To get Twin Cities fans excited for the Swarm season that begins in January, team officials distributed 20,000 free tickets with hopes of filling the Xcel Energy Center.

**Support for St. Paul**

Mark Kirchner, of St. Paul, who shares season tickets to the Wild and Timberwolves, and who bought two season tickets to the Swarm for a total of \$400, was among the novices in the stands Friday.

"I don't know a thing about it," he said of lacrosse.

Kirchner, who works in the food service industry, said it was simply good to be back in the arena. What's more, he said, he was motivated to buy season tickets to help support the businesses near Xcel that have taken a financial hit because of the NHL lockout.

"I feel awful for them right now," he said. "Whatever we can do to help out, let's help out."

To date, about 3,500 people have bought season tickets, Spencer said. The average ticket price for games is \$18, but seats can be had for as little as

\$5, he said.

"It's a great sport, and it's at a reasonable price," said Paul Ferry, a corporate bond trader who lives in Edina and is president of a lacrosse youth organization there. "It's coming at the right time, too. Since hockey has the lockout, people will be able to see that this is a fun sport. And it's already exploding here."

Said Jim VanLokeren: "It's more exciting than baseball. I probably shouldn't say that. But baseball is a slower sport, and this is the Nintendo generation. My son is a football and hockey player, and this is kind of a combination of the two."

Rob Graff, an attorney who lives in Bloomington, bought four season tickets and took his son, Ryan, 6, and several of Ryan's friends to Friday's exhibition.

Graff, who started playing lacrosse on Long Island in 1977, played the game in high school and college and has coached a men's club team at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, for the past 12 years. When the Swarm formed, he bought "the four best seats I could." Total cost: \$800.

"The question is, what happens after the first two real games?" Graff said. "If they get 10,000 or 12,000 people, I think it will be an unbelievable success. It's my hope that it'll work out. The big questions will be, can they get established quickly enough and can they survive when the NHL is around?"

"I think they'll be able to."

*Staff writer Terry Collins contributed to this report.*

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