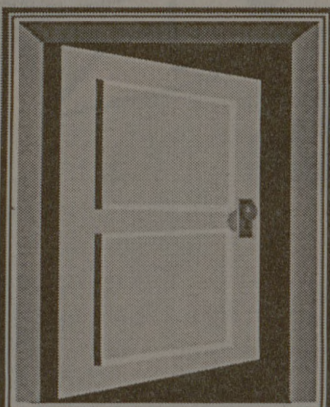


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Oilers free to move to Nashville after buyout

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The Tennessee Oilers are free to negotiate a deal to play next season in Nashville under an agreement approved Tuesday by Memphis officials.

The Memphis and Shelby County Sports Authority and the Memphis Parks Commission signed a deal calling for the Oilers to pay them \$1.2 million to get out of a two-year contract to play in the Liberty Bowl. The city also will not refund the \$118,904 the team spent improving the stadium last year.

Under the agreement negotiated by the authority and the Oilers, the team has until April 30 to find another temporary stadium for this fall. If they do not, they may play a second season in Memphis.

"We're disappointed to see the Oilers go, but that's the way it is," said Wayne Boyer, executive director of the parks commission.

The Oilers, who averaged an NFL-low 28,028 fans at the Liberty Bowl last year after leaving Houston, had no immediate comment.

The team's likely option for the 1998 season is Vanderbilt in Nashville and its 41,448-seat stadium a few miles away from the 67,000-seat stadium being built for the 1999 season.

Negotiations with Vanderbilt could begin as early as next week, and Mayor Phil Bredesen said he is ready to help.

"The mayor has put a call into Mr. Adams this afternoon to see when we need to take the next step and get the ball rolling in Nashville," spokesperson Shannon Hunt said, referring to Oilers

owner Bud Adams.

The Oilers already know about Vanderbilt, having played two pre-season games there last summer. They paid 10 percent of gate receipts as rent, while the school received all concession, parking and suite revenues.

Vanderbilt athletic director Todd Turner has said that deal would be a basis for any regular-season deal.

For months, the Oilers publicly denied they had any plans to try to leave Memphis early. Even last week, when the authority voted to begin negotiating a buyout, the team declined to comment and said it was concentrating its mar-

keting efforts on Memphis. Vanderbilt officials expect to hear from the Oilers even went ahead and talked with stadium's neighbors about the team and looked for potential problems like parking, garbage pickups.

For the Oilers, it would be the second straight year they have bought themselves out of a near-empty stadium. They paid \$4.1 million last year to Houston's Astrodome.

The Oilers went to Memphis hoping to draw at least 40,000 fans to the Liberty Bowl for two interim seasons. But they met with a lukewarm response from fans still angry the NFL passed over their city for an expansion franchise for the first time in two decades.



Frye hurts knee in spring training

(AP) — Jeff Frye's knee punctuated Boston's spring training camp with a big, loud pop Tuesday.

In the middle of a rundown drill, the second baseman fell to the ground, his left knee apparently damaged.

"I heard something pop," said

Darren Bragg, the runner on the play of the accident.

"It definitely didn't sound good. It definitely didn't look good."

Frye, coming off his best season and signed to a \$7 million, three-year contract, was driven off the field on a golf cart.

About a half hour later, he left the clubhouse on crutches and was driven away to undergo X-rays and an MRI.

"I saw him go down and grimace. He didn't get right back up," manager Jimmy Williams said. "I knew it wasn't good."

Even before the test results, which probably will be announced Wednesday, speculation began on replacements.

Mike Gallego and Mike Benjamin are in camp, and Triple A players Lou Merloni and Donnie Sadler could be given chances.

John Valentin began last season as the second baseman but was moved to third, where Williams wanted to keep him.

"It's going to be a great year," Mo Vaughn said. "We were looking forward to him getting the base for us and starting the season thing off."

Other teams had intrasquad games, getting ready for the exhibition season later this

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