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644506 Anaheim Ducks

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NHL, players' union are talking again

A large contingent of players got together with league leadership in New York on Monday.

Staff and wire reports

If the first bargaining session in eight days between the NHL and the players' association made any headway, neither side tipped its hand.

A large contingent of players got together with league leadership in New York on Monday night and met for less than two hours. Not a whole lot was accomplished on the road to a new agreement that could get the hockey season going, but at least there was optimism that the sides would get together again — probably as soon as Tuesday.

The league contends that it is waiting for the players to present a full proposal on all of the major issues — including core economics and player contracting, which deals with the entry-level system, arbitration and free agency. After the request was made, the players' association asked for a break and the meeting adjourned soon after.

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The Angels have intensified their pursuit of Japanese reliever Kyuji Fujikawa, who toured Angel Stadium on Saturday and went out to lunch with General Manager Jerry Dipoto and Manager Mike Scioscia.

Upon returning to Japan on Sunday, Fujikawa, a 32-year-old right-hander who has been Japan's top closer for six years, told reporters, "I was very impressed with the way the Angels welcomed me. I had never been treated like that."

According to Japanese media reports, Fujikawa also visited the Dodgers, Arizona Diamondbacks, Chicago Cubs and Baltimore Orioles. The Texas Rangers are reportedly interested, as well.

Fujikawa was 3-3 with a 1.24 earned-run average and 41 saves in 56 games for the Hanshin Tigers last season.

Because Fujikawa has played 10 years in Japan, major league teams do not have to go through the often-expensive posting system to acquire him.

—Mike DiGiovanna

LA Times: LOADED: 11.20.2012

644507 Boston Bruins

Johnny Boychuk of Bruins signs with Austrian team

By Fluto Shinzawa

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Johnny Boychuk signed with Austria's EC Salzburg on Friday, becoming the 11th Bruins player to join a European team during the NHL lockout. Gery Johansson, Boychuk's agent, confirmed the signing. Boychuk is the only Bruin to sign with an Austrian club.

Boychuk, who lives in Edmonton during the offseason, was one of the first Bruins to return to Boston in August, participating in Milan Lucic's charity softball game Aug. 22. When the lockout began, Boychuk remained in Boston, skating alongside teammates and local NHLers.

Last year, Salzburg employed short-time Bruins goalie Marty Turco. The team currently features ex-Bruins netminder Alex Auld.

Current NHLers David Clarkson and Tobias Enstrom played for Salzburg this season. Both left the team following the European break earlier this month and are back in North America.

This would have been the first season of Boychuk's three-year, \$10.1 million extension. The 28-year-old defenseman is coming off a season in which he had five goals and 10 assists in 77 games.

Boston Globe LOADED: 11.20.2012

644508 Buffalo Sabres

Report: Jaroslav Spacek announces retirement in Czech Republic

Former Sabres defenseman Jaroslav Spacek, who served as Buffalo's captain during the 2007-08 season, has announced his retirement in his native Czech Republic, according to Ispor.t.bleesk.cz.

Spacek spent three seasons with the Sabres after signing as a free agent in 2006. He recorded 22 goals and 98 points in 205 games with Buffalo.

The 38-year-old defenseman finished last season in Carolina after a trade from Montreal. He also played for Florida, Chicago, Columbus and Edmonton during his 13-year NHL career.

---John Vogl

Buffalo News LOADED: 11.20.2012

644509 Buffalo Sabres

Final visit to Montreal Forum by LaFontaine-led Sabres to air on MSG tonight

The Sabres have been airing classic games on MSG on Monday nights, and tonight's game features Buffalo's final visit to storied Montreal Forum.

The game was played Jan. 6, 1996, and (spoiler alert!) featured Pat LaFontaine scoring the winning goal in a 7-6 victory over the Canadiens. LaFontaine, who was in town last week for an alumni fundraiser, will provide commentary during the two-hour broadcast, which starts at 8 p.m.

---John Vogl

Buffalo News LOADED: 11.20.2012

644510 Buffalo Sabres

NHL set to resume talks later today, with players' association setting the agenda

The NHL, with talks at a standstill last week, suggested taking a break from meeting with the players' association. The NHLPA said no.

We will find out soon why it wanted to meet again.

The sides in hockey's labor dispute will reconvene in New York later today (and possibly not until tonight). The league says it has no idea what's on the agenda.

"The meeting was requested by the union and it's their agenda," Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said on NHL.com. "We will see what they have to tell us."

The league insists it is far apart on the framework to a collective bargaining agreement, while the union has said the sides are not. It is not known whether the NHLPA will present a new proposal today.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Gary Bettman has joined Daly in saying the players are not striving to find common ground.

"The union has shown an unwillingness to negotiate," Bettman told the Winnipeg Free Press on Sunday. "So certainly, if they're not negotiating in a meaningful way now, what would they be doing if we were playing under the old system? The entire strategy appeared to be an attempt to maintain what the union had under the expired CBA, which is something they're not entitled to."

In the 30-minute phone call with the newspaper, Bettman also:

\*praised the league's revenue sharing system, which the NHLPA wants to alter;

\*called a Philadelphia report claiming Flyers owner Ed Snider has soured on the lockout a "fabrication," which has led to backlash by some journalists;

\*said he loves the players and the game.

"I work for the owners but I work for the game," Bettman told the newspaper. "What I do transcends what I do for the owners. I do work for the game and I try to do the best I can for the game. You'll find in the course of labour disputes, there's always a lot of rhetoric. Most of it is just noise. Most of it is misinformed. There's propaganda. It's just a fact of life that you live with.

"By the way, I love the players. Nobody should think for a moment that I don't. If I didn't I wouldn't do this job. I couldn't do this job. I believe in the players. I don't believe in what's going on right now. It's part of the business of the game. The least attractive part of the game."

---John Vogl

Buffalo News LOADED: 11.20.2012

644511 Chicago Blackhawks

NHL, NHLPA meet for two hours Monday, will talk Tuesday

TRACEY MYERS

As Day 65 of the NHL lockout came to a close on Monday, so did the latest talks between the league and the NHLPA.

The two sides met for nearly two hours in New York City on Monday, as they still look to get a new collective bargaining agreement in place. And based on reports, it looks like the two will try to meet again tomorrow.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told the New York media that the league wants a full economic proposal from the NHLPA that covers everything (including hockey-related revenue split).

"If their proposal continues to be a guaranteed amount of players' share dollars, we have told them that sitting here on Nov. 19, that's not a proposal that is acceptable to us or would ever be acceptable to owners right now," Daly told the media.

It's been an interesting couple of days regarding the lockout. At the end of last week, several reports stated that NHL commissioner Gary Bettman suggested a two-week "moratorium" on CBA talks. But before the weekend was over the two sides agreed to talk again today.

The league's brass was on the receiving end of some unflattering player comments the past few days. Detroit Red Wings defenseman Ian White told local reports that he thought Bettman was an idiot. Former Chicago Blackhawks forward Kris Versteeg took it an uglier route during an interview with TSN Radio 1050 earlier today, when he called Bettman and Daly "cancers" who have been "looting the game for far too long."

Daly told reports he doesn't take the comments personally, considering it "human nature."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 11.20.2012

644512 Chicago Blackhawks

Emery's new mask impresses again

NINA FALCONE

Blackhawks goaltender Ray Emery is continuing to build on his reputation of having one of the best goalie masks in the NHL, as In Goal Magazine wrote about how the latest one in Emery's collection features the Indian head logo while including the team's traditional colors in the design.

The design once again comes from Emery's artist David Leroux, who kept the style of the mask similar to the one No. 30 wore last season.

Below are images of Leroux's final design and painting for Emery's mask:

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 11.20.2012

644513 Columbus Blue Jackets

NHL: All-Star Game nears cancellation

By Aaron Portzline

The All-Star Game is on the verge of becoming the latest casualty of the NHL's two-month-old lockout.

A source told The Dispatch yesterday that the All-Star Game, scheduled for Nationwide Arena on Jan. 27, will be included when the league cancels its next wave of games.

The ax could fall any day now. Already, the league has canceled all games through November, as well as the outdoor game on Jan. 1. The NHL would not comment yesterday. The All-Star Game was expected to bring \$12 million into the local economy, and it would have given Nationwide Arena — now owned by Franklin County — a chance to show off its many upgrades, including a massive new scoreboard.

The previous two lockouts led to the All-Star Game being canceled, but in both instances the host cities were awarded the game within three seasons. San Jose lost the 1995 game but had it in 1997. Atlanta lost the 2005 game but had it in 2008.

Columbus' best shot would appear to be 2015. There likely won't be an All-Star Game next season because of the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

Officials from the NHL and the players union met last night in New York, the latest round of talks toward a collective bargaining agreement. The sides are fairly close to a split of hockey-related revenue. Both are willing to accept a 50-50 split, but the owners want an immediate "rollback" to 50-50; the players are asking for existing contracts to be honored.

The major gaps appear to be on contracting rules, such as term-length limits, arbitration rights, entry-level limits, etc.

Also, the union wants the NHL to incur the costs of the lockout, saying they should be paid the same amount they made last season — \$1.883 billion — even if hundred of millions of revenue have been lost to the lockout.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 11.20.2012

644514 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings upbeat about new talks

By Ted Kulfan

Red Wings forward Danny Cleary was part of the player contingent that attended talks between NHL owners and players association.

Troy — With the NHL and the Players Association meeting Monday in New York, after an eight-day lull in negotiations, Red Wings players were optimistic an end to the two-month lockout was near.

"That's been our sense the whole time," said Niklas Kronwall, a Red Wings co-player representative. "As long you're together and talking, hopefully sooner you can come out with an agreement."

Commissioner Gary Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly, along with union executive director Donald Fehr and special counsel Steve Fehr, met for an hour and a half with large contingents from both sides, including Danny Cleary, also a Red Wings co-player representative.

Donald Fehr said "more likely than not" the sides will meet again today.

Bettman had suggested late last week it would be a good idea to have a two-week moratorium after failed negotiations the week before, but the union believed it was important to continue dialogue.

"It's positive when they're talking," forward Justin Abdelkader said. "(I'm) staying on an even keel and hopefully we can get something going."

NHL officials have canceled games through Nov. 30, and there is a suggestion they will cancel more games Wednesday, including the All-Star Game scheduled for Jan. 27.

Charity game

Union leaders are organizing a charity game Dec. 8 at Windsor's WFCU Center.

The event will be played only if the lockout isn't settled.

Cleary, Kronwall, Abdelkader, Todd Bertuzzi, Darren Helm, Ian White, Jonathan Ericsson, Cory Emmerton, Jimmy Howard and Jonas Gustavsson are Red Wings expected to participate.

Shawn Horcoff (Michigan State, Oilers), Steve Ott (Sabres, Windsor native) and former Plymouth Whalers standout James Neal (Penguins) also are expected to play.

NHL lockout at a glance

Day: 65

Last negotiations: Monday in New York

Games lost: 327 (all games through Nov. 30, plus New Year's Day Winter Classic).

Glimmer of hope: The league and the players' association met for an hour and a half Monday after an eight-day lull.

Detroit News LOADED: 11.20.2012

644515 Detroit Red Wings

NHL asks players to submit comprehensive proposal, sides to meet again on Wednesday

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

Donald-Fehr NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr said contracting issues are important. AP file The NHL, during Monday's resumption of labor talks, urged the NHL Players Association to submit a formal proposal for a new collective bargaining agreement.

"We made two comprehensive proposals in a row," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said during his media briefing in New York. "We'd like to know where they are on all the issues and asked them to think about putting together a comprehensive proposal for us to consider."

The sides will meet again, likely on Wednesday, when reports indicate the NHLPA will make a series of "give and take" proposals to the league, as urgency to get a deal done in time to salvage the season is mounting.

"We are going to think about what was said and think about our next step," NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr told reporters.

The well-attended meeting lasted less than two hours and included Fehr, Daly, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, NHLPA special counsel Steve Fehr and 18 players, including the Detroit Red Wings' Danny Cleary.

"We had hoped to engage them in discussions of player contracting issues. At least tonight, they were unwilling to do that," Donald Fehr said. "Our position on contracting issues has been that they become more important to players as the (salary) cap becomes limited."

Daly said the league wants to know how close they are on economics (the split of hockey-related revenues) before tackling contracting issues.

"They went over their positions on player contracting issues, suggested they moved in our direction some on economics," Daly said. "We pushed them a little bit on that to understand where they are on economics, and don't think we got any more clarity on that."

Prior to the meeting, players said they were just glad the sides were getting together, following a week-long hiatus and talk that the league wanted a two-week moratorium in negotiations.

"That's been our sense the whole time, that as long as you're together, as long as you're talking about stuff, hopefully sooner or later you can come to an agreement," Red Wings union representative Niklas Kronwall said. "I think it's definitely very good that we're back at the table. We'll see where it leads."

Over the last few days, a couple of players have lashed out at the NHL's top executives. Red Wings defenseman Ian White called Bettman "an idiot" who has damaged the game. Florida's Kris Versteeg, on a Toronto radio station, referred to Bettman and Daly as "cancers" that have been "polluting this game for far too long."

Daly, during his media address, was asked if the pointed remarks had an affect on the process?

"I don't think so," Daly said. "I don't think either Gary or I take those personally. Understand there's a lot of frustration in this process. I'm frustrated in terms of being where we are and not playing hockey. I think that's just human nature."

Michigan Live LOADED: 11.20.2012

644516 Detroit Red Wings

Several Red Wings expected to participate in NHLPA charity game in Windsor on Dec. 8

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

The NHL Players Association is organizing a game at the WFCU Center in Windsor to benefit local charities.

Detroit forward Danny Cleary is one of the organizers, along with Steve Ott of the Buffalo Sabres and Shawn Horcoff of the Edmonton Oilers.

The game will take place only if the NHL does not have a new collective bargaining agreement by that date.

In addition to Cleary, Red Wings who have made a tentative commitment to play include Niklas Kronwall, Jonathan Ericsson, Ian White, Darren Helm, Todd Bertuzzi, Justin Abdelkader, Cory Emmerton, Jimmy Howard and Jonas Gustavsson.

Other NHL players who committed to play in the event are James Neal of Pittsburgh, Brenden Morrow of Dallas, Keith Yandle of Phoenix, Jamal Mayers of Chicago, Eric Belanger of Edmonton, Ryan Wilson of Colorado and former NHLer Sergei Samsonov.

More players will be added to the list prior to the game, which is scheduled to start at 6:30 p.m. and feature three 20-minute stop-time periods.

Ticket information will be revealed this week.

Michigan Live LOADED: 11.20.2012

644517 Detroit Red Wings

CBC 'Hockey Night in Canada' allows deprived fans to choose rebroadcasts of games - including Detroit Red Wings matchups

Eric Lacy | elacy@mlive.com By Eric Lacy | elacy@mlive.com

DETROIT, MI - The NHL lockout doesn't appear to be ending anytime soon, but fans in Metro Detroit can still get weekly action on CBC's "Hockey Night in Canada."

The Canadian TV network's popular show, featuring the always colorful Don Cherry, allows fans to choose each week which old games should be rebroadcasted Saturday nights - including Red Wings matchups.

Fans can currently pick which games should air Saturday night - two days after Thanksgiving.

They have five options to choose from, including two games featuring the Red Wings.

The rundown, courtesy of the show's Facebook page (where you can vote):

May 1, 1993: Maple Leafs vs. Red Wings

Jan. 11, 1976: Red Army vs. Flyers

Apr. 20, 1984: Nordiques vs. Canadiens

Dec. 2, 1995: Red Wings vs. Canadiens

May 27, 1993: Kings vs. Maple Leafs

As of noon Sunday, the Nordiques-Canadiens game had the lead with votes from 81 Facebook users.

The Red Wings-Maple Leafs game received 26 votes by that time, and Red Wings-Canadiens had 12.

You can also vote for rebroadcast's of games on the Hockey Night in Canada website.

A video, explaining the voting for games, can be found below.

The Hockey Night in Canada website and Facebook page offers five game rebroadcast options each week.

Most cable providers, including Comcast and AT&T, have CBC for Metro Detroit subscribers.

For Comcast subscribers, CBC is channel 99.

Michigan Live LOADED: 11.20.2012

644518 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings scouting report: Speedy Darren Helm impacts games in ways without scoring

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

Darren Helm

Position: Center

Age: 25

Height/weight: 5-11/195

How acquired: Selected in fifth round (132nd overall) in 2005 entry draft.

Contract: Signed a four-year deal on June 19 that has a salary-cap hit of \$2.125 million.

2011-12 stats: 68 games, nine goals, 17 assists, 26 points, plus-5 rating, 12 penalty minutes.

Career stats: 248 games, 32 goals, 51 assists, 83 points, plus-3 rating, 52 penalty minutes.

What he's doing during the lockout: He hopes to resume skating this week or next after suffering a fractured orbital bone when hit by a deflected puck on Nov. 2 during an informal practice with several teammates.

Strengths: One of the fastest skaters in the league, he pressures opponents into making mistakes with his aggressive forechecking. He can wear on defenses and be hard to play against with his physical style. That speed also creates scoring chances. A hard worker whose motor is always running. He elevates his game in the playoffs. He learned a lot from the club's long-time grinders, Kris Draper and Kirk Maltby.

Weaknesses: He does not have good hands or scoring acumen, so he misses a lot of chances that he creates. So focused on a north-south game, he needs to occasionally slow down and look more east-west. Needs to improve on penalty killing.

2011-12 in review: Missed four games with a strained groin Dec. 30-Jan. 7. ... Career-long four-game points streak (four assists) from Jan. 25-Feb. 4. ... Career-high three points (goal, two assists) in 4-3 shootout loss to Vancouver on Feb. 23. ... Missed the final 10 games of the regular season after suffering a sprained left MCL on March 17, when he checked San Jose's Dominic Moore but got the worst of the exchange. ... In his first game back from the knee injury, the playoff opener at Nashville April 13, he had his right forearm sliced by Alexander Radulov's skate, severing tendons. He had season-ending surgery that night. ... Won 51.9 percent of his faceoffs.

2012-13 outlook: It remains to be seen if he can develop into a consistent 15-to-18 goal-scorer, but he still has a lot of upside. General manager Ken Holland called him one of the premier third-line centers in the league because of his speed, work ethic and ability to make his linemates better. Potential linemates include Danny Cleary and Drew Miller, with whom he had good chemistry during a stretch in December. Todd Bertuzzi and Jordn Tootoo are other potential linemates for him.

Is Helm capable of producing more offensively? How vital is he to the team's success?

Michigan Live LOADED: 11.20.2012

644519 Edmonton Oilers

Game On: Russian sniper Yakupov lights it up, helps virtual Oilers snap six-game slide

By RENATO PAGNANI AND RAMIN OSTAD, Edmonton Journal November 19, 2012

EDMONTON - Week 6 of the virtual NHL season went surprisingly quite well for the virtual Edmonton Oilers — they snapped a six-game losing skid.

On Wednesday, the visiting Chicago Blackhawks scored four straight goals before the Oilers managed to erase a two-goal deficit in the third period. Sam Gagner then scored the shootout winner, giving the hosts the 5-4 win, their first victory in six games.

Rookie forward Nail Yakupov was moved up to the first line against the Blackhawks and it paid off. The Russian scored twice, following that up with another two-goal performance in Saturday's 3-2 win over the Florida Panthers.

Yakupov, who has seven goals, is second in team scoring behind Taylor Hall, who leads the Oilers with nine.

After two wins in two games last week, there might even be something approaching positivity in the Oilers locker-room these days. Magnus Paajarvi was inserted into the lineup and Oscar Klefbom arrived from the Swedish Elite League in place of an injured Theo Peckham, whose fractured jaw still isn't quite healed.

With only two games played last week, now's a good time to take a look at how the 6-8-2 Oilers are doing on an individual level — it's stats time, baby!

Hall leads the virtual Oilers with nine goals and six assists for 15 points in 16 games. He's on pace for about 45 goals this virtual season.

Ryan-Nugent Hopkins has 11 points — all assists. He hasn't potted a single goal this season, but once the Nuge does, look for his point total to skyrocket into point-per-game territory.

Before his injury three games ago, Jordan Eberle was also playing well, with five goals and four assists in 13 games. According to reports, Eberle's separated shoulder is healing nicely, and he's scheduled to return to action during the first week of December.

Veteran Ryan Smyth has three goals and six assists, including two power-play markers. He's tied for fourth in points, along with Eberle and defenceman Ryan Whitney.

Whitney, whose ankle prevented him from playing large stretches of last season, has a goal and eight assists. He leads all Oilers defencemen in points. Corey Potter and Jeff Petry are second in scoring for blue-liners, both with five points on the season.

When you look at the virtual Oilers goalie statistics, it becomes clear why they are 6-8-2 this season.

In 11 games, Devan Dubnyk has a 5-4 record and a .921 save percentage, but a not-as-impressive 2.79 goals-against average. However, compared to Nikolai Khabibulin, who has remarkably — and inexplicably, based on his performance — started seven games this season, Dubnyk looks like a Vezina Trophy winner.

Khabibulin's record is 1-4, but his statistics are even worse: his GAA is 4.01 and he carries a pathetic .889 save percentage. These are numbers that dictate Dubnyk should be getting the nod four out of every five games for the rest of the season. Otherwise, it's going to be a long, long virtual season.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 11.20.2012

644520 Edmonton Oilers

Again, why no mediator in the labour dispute?

By Jim Matheson

Are you like me? This agonizing labour battle is like a mid-week playoff game where you want to hang in there until somebody scores and it's finally over in the wee hours of the morning with work beckoning but as the game moves into the third or fourth or fifth extra period, you can see nothing's

happening on the ice and as a fan you're thinking "please somebody get a goal, I don't care what it looks like, so I can go to bed?"

You've got two sides that don't much like each other but definitely don't trust one another. This is crying out of a mediator—former prez Bill Clinton has lots of time on his hand, or Arthur Boylan, the judge who helped mediate the NFL labour dispute, or heck, there would be a lineup of available arbitrators—but they won't go there yet. God knows why? This staredown is desperate for an outside voice, somebody to say "get your heads out of the butts."

I have no rooster in this fight. I'm a hockey writer who wants to write about powerplays not labour, but who's right and who's wrong? Both sides, two months into this battle have already hugely alienated a strong hockey base, although in Canada where as somebody said we are "two-legged ATM machines, willing to keep forking over money to watch the game" we will come back. But both sides are wrong in this playground fight.

The owners are losing real money now, especially people like Ed Snider in Philly, who also owns Comcast, which owns NBC, which runs the NHL games on their sports channel. The players will be losing a fourth paycheck at the end of this month, which means Ryan Smyth, the ultimate rink rat, will have lost four paycheques or about 1/3rd of his \$2.25 million salary. He already lost his entire salary in 2004-2005, and he's 36 years old. Time's really a wasting for him.

The rhetoric is flying from the players' side, predictably so, although you have to wonder why it's always ordinary players like Ian White saying Gary Bettman's an "idiot" or Kris Versteeg, a good player with a Cup ring in Chicago but a player with average offensive numbers (201 points in 321 career games), saying Bettman and his right-hand man Bill Daly are "a cancer...they're polluting the game." OK, Bettman is hard to warm to and he's run the NHL through three work stoppages, which is a major cross to bear for any leader, but Bill Daly? I've always found him a strong voice in the wilderness.

White, who plays defence in Detroit and makes \$3 million this season, brought up some good points about Bettman's desire to put franchises in areas in the U.S. where they aren't viable and he's been at the helm of three work stoppages but if Bettman let six franchises fold and they had a draft of those players for the other 24 teams, would Ian White have a guaranteed NHL job for much longer. Maybe it would be bolder of White to take on his Detroit owner Mike Ilitch; after all Bettman is doing the bidding of the owners for his \$8 million a year salary. Maybe if Ilitch and all the other owners weren't under a gag order not to talk, the pizzaman might be saying he's crazy to be paying White that kind of money, but we digress. All I know is, you are seeing nary an NHL player going after a specific owner, just Bettman or Daly.

Bettman did make one stupid mistake when he said a story this weekend in a Philly newspaper by reporter Frank Seravalli was a "frabrication" where Seravalli's sources indicated Snider wasn't happy with the current negotiations and wanted to get back to playing. Snider offered up a rebuttal that it was "absolutely erroneous" but it would not be out in left field to suggest that Bettman, who wants to keep his owners quiet, got on the phone to Snider to clear his throat.

So it's now Nov. 19. We're two months into this senseless battle. If this isn't time for somebody other than the Fehr brothers (Donald and Steve) and Bettman and Daly to step aside and let a clearer outside voice into the stale discussions, when is the time?

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 11.20.2012

644521 Los Angeles Kings

THERE USED TO BE AN ARENA – MAPLE LEAF GARDENS

Posted by Bob Miller on 19 November 2012, 2:46 pm

The hockey arena, considered by many in Canada to be the "Shrine" of hockey, stood on the corner of Carleton and Church streets in Toronto, Ontario. The home of the Toronto Maple Leafs was also known as the "Carleton Street Cashbox" because the Leafs sold out every home game from 1946 to 1999.

The popularity of Maple Leaf Gardens was probably due to the fact that from 1938 to 1970, only two Canadian teams were in the NHL. The

mystique of the Gardens was enhanced every Saturday night when most of Canada gathered around the radio to listen to "Hockey Night in Canada" and hear the "original" voice of hockey, Foster Hewitt, sign on his broadcast with 'Hello Canada and hockey fans in the United States and Newfoundland.' Newfoundland was an independent Dominion before joining Canada in 1949.

Maple Leaf Gardens was built in 1931 at the cost of \$1.5 million Canadian dollars. It was built in an unparalleled five months and two weeks. The first game was on November 12, 1931, with the Leafs losing to Chicago, 2-1. The Leafs went on that season to win their first Stanley Cup. Prior to that season, the Toronto team was known as the "St. Patricks" and prior to that, the "Arenas."

I was never that fond of Maple Leaf Gardens. My impression was that since they sold out every game, they didn't care much about the media or public relations. The first Kings game I ever televised was on KTLA from Maple Leaf Gardens. Hewitt – who broadcast Leafs games for some 52 years – was in the booth next to me and sometimes during a lull in the action, I would lean over to see if I could hear what he was saying. I even had the opportunity to interview the Hall of Fame legend between periods.

I must say, however, that if I hadn't known the Toronto franchise had been around since 1917, I would have thought they had been in existence for about two weeks. The game notes given to the media before each game were laughable. There was little or no information about the players but they contained such notes as, "Happy Birthday to Joe, the usher in section 102," or the best of all-time, "The Leafs welcome 300 Inuit priests to the game tonight. They are in town to translate the Bible into Inuit" (I actually used that note on our Kings telecast).

Our broadcast location started out in the famous "gondola" where Hewitt broadcast from, and it was a decent view of the game. Then it switched to the other side of the arena in the main press box where we were separated from writers and other broadcasters by just a small temporary partition, then back to the gondola where the visitors were given a tiny space with barely enough room for three people.

Two distinct occurrences stand out in my memory of Maple Leaf Gardens, one negative and the other positive. The negative took place March 2, 1981. It was the night Charlie Simmer, the Kings leading goal scorer at the time with 56 goals in 65 games, suffered a spiral fracture of his right leg. Always with a sense of humor, Charlie said, 'If you're going to break your leg, do it on Saturday night on Hockey Night in Canada so everyone can see it. Don't do it on a Thursday night in Pittsburgh.'

The positive was the Western Conference Final playoff series in 1993 between the Kings and Maple Leafs. I think that was the most intense, classic series I have ever seen. Both team captains, Wayne Gretzky of the Kings and Wendell Clark of the Leafs, stood up to lead their teams. Marty McSorley set the physical tone in Game 1 in Toronto, with a vicious check on Doug Gilmour, and then Clark stepped in to fight McSorley. Even the coaches got involved when the Leafs Pat Burns tried to get to the Kings bench and told Kings Head Coach Barry Melrose, who had shoulder length hair, to get a haircut. Melrose then puffed out his cheeks indicating that Burns was fat and said he thought Burns was just trying to go get another hot dog. As the series progressed the Leafs won Game 5 in the Gardens to take a 3-2 lead in the series. The Kings had to win Game 6 at home or be eliminated. Clark had a hat trick and scored his third goal with only 1:21 left in regulation to send the game to overtime. Gretzky then won the game for the Kings 1:41 into overtime and we were set for Game 7 in Maple Leaf Gardens with the winner going to the Stanley Cup Final.

Game 7 was on May 29, 1993, and was one of the greatest games I've ever had the pleasure of calling. Gretzky had a hat trick and with a little over a minute left the Kings led 5-3. But, with 1:07 remaining, Dave Ellett scored for Toronto and the Kings lead was by only one goal. The final minute was so hectic, and as the Leafs were buzzing around the Kings goal, I was sweating, shaking and telling myself to settle down. With five seconds left the Kings cleared the puck to center ice and on our telecast I shouted, 'The Kings are four wins away from the Stanley Cup.'

Jim Fox and I broadcast that series from the top of the gondola, over a hundred feet above the ice. That famous Hewitt gondola was dismantled and dumped into an incinerator in August, 1979, to make room for private boxes.

Maple Leaf Gardens was known for several innovations. It was the first arena to have plexi-glass in the end zones in the 1946-47 season. On November 8, 1963, it was the first arena in the NHL to have separate penalty boxes. Former Kings Head Coach Bob Pulford told me that happened because until then both players went into the same penalty box.

The visitor would go in first followed by the home team player. One night in the Gardens, Pulford, who played for Toronto and Terry Harper, who played for Montreal and later was a Kings captain under Pulford, both received penalties. Harper went in the box first and while he was seated there Pulford hauled off and punched him. They rolled around fighting in the box and police were called. It was then decided it would be best to have separate penalty boxes.

The final game in Maple Leaf Gardens was on February 13, 1999, when the Leafs lost to the Chicago Blackhawks, 6-2. The Gardens still stands but it was converted into a Loblaws grocery store and an athletic center for Ryerson University. The renovation was completed in the summer of 2012, and the building is the new home of the Ryerson Rams hockey team. Thus, it is the only arena of the so-called "Original Six" teams to be used for hockey.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 11.20.2012

644522 Montreal Canadiens

When it comes to NHL lockouts, nothing changes but the names

ERIC DUHATSCHK

In 1994, soon after he became NHL commissioner, Gary Bettman shut down the league for the first time by locking out the players.

Bettman's rationale – then, as now – was that the NHL needed to fix the economics of the game, because the players' share of the proceeds was running too high.

Sound familiar?

Everything old is new again in the 2012 edition of the NHL lockout, including the way player rhetoric is ramping up.

Detroit Red Wings defenceman Ian White delivered a broadside salvo last week, when he called the NHL commissioner an "idiot."

Florida Panthers forward Kris Versteeg took it to an even higher level Monday, in an interview on TSN radio, when he described both Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly as "cancers." According to Versteeg, once collective bargaining negotiations are complete, both Bettman and Daly need to step down so NHL fans can get "the bad taste" out of their mouths and get "a good taste going forward."

There was also a Sportsnet report that Montreal Canadiens players were wearing "Puck Gary" ballcaps at their informal skate Monday – all signs presumably that player patience is starting to fray a little.

Certainly, the declining civility of the lockout dialogue will not help find a meaningful solution to what separates the two parties. And attacking the public face of the dispute (Bettman) is hardly a new or unprecedented turn of events.

Emotions run high every time NHL players face an unknown future and for proof, all you need to do is turn the calendar back to the first lockout, when then-Chicago Blackhawks defenceman Chris Chelios famously suggested: "If I was Gary Bettman, I'd be worried about my family and my well-being. He's going to affect a lot of people and some crazed fan, or even a player, who knows, they might take it in their own hands and figure if they get him out of the way, then things might get settled. You hate to see something like that happen, but he took the job."

Chelios's diatribe didn't end with just a veiled threat. He went on to venture that Bettman's tactics might involve "this little-man syndrome thing," and concluded: "The main thing is, he doesn't know anything about hockey, that's obvious. He doesn't recognize players like Jeremy Roenick and Brendan Shanahan at the meetings."

Thanks to the miracle of YouTube.com, you can watch Chelios's comments leading off an ESPN report on the state of the 1994 negotiations, which also includes an interesting snatch of conversation from then-Boston Bruins forward Cam Neely.

Of the NHL's strategy, Neely says in a visibly disgusted tone: "It's not shooting themselves in the foot, it's shooting themselves in the head as far as I'm concerned."

That is the same Neely, by the way, who is now the Bruins president and works for team owner Jeremy Jacobs, the NHL's chairman of the board, and one of the key players in the current round of negotiations.

If Bettman didn't recognize Shanahan then, he surely does now. Shanahan works for the NHL as a vice-president of hockey and business development.

The point is loyalties – and perspectives – can shift over time.

Only the names of the Bettman bashers change.

Maybe there'd be some merit to inviting the likes of Neely and Shanahan to the table in the next round of talks, on the grounds that both previously endured a lockout from the players' side of the fence.

Joe Nieuwendyk, the Dallas Stars general manager, who was involved in a nasty contract holdout soon after the 1994-95 lockout ended, was scheduled to attend Monday's resumption of talks.

Could a full ex-player team of negotiators lend any weight to the NHL's case and help get some of the soaring and unproductive vitriol out of the conversation?

The way things stand right now, two months into a lockout that shows no signs of ending and with prickliness on the rise, you'd have to think it couldn't hurt.

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.20.2012

644523 Montreal Canadiens

Professor rips NHL for treating fans as 'stupid'

Roy MacGregor

"A disaster."

It doesn't take Andre Richelieu long to get around to his point.

"A nightmare."

Richelieu is an international expert in brand management and sports marketing. The 42-year-old Laval University professor was recently advising in Minsk, Belarus, where they will hold the 2014 International Ice Hockey Federation world championship. Earlier this month he was at the Banff Centre, where he was one of the featured presenters at a forum on sports journalism put on by Mount Royal and Carleton universities.

He was asked, naturally, for his thoughts on the NHL lockout, now more than two months deep into what he believes is fast becoming the NHL's blackest and bleakest season – one that, at the grassroots level, will take another turn for the worse this morning as Kraft Foods moves to cancel Hockeyville 2013 in favour of donating \$1-million to Hockey Canada affiliated minor hockey associations across the country.

"The message the NHL has sent is that 'we are stupid,'" he says. The NHL cannot possibly have any other opinion, he says, because the league has previous proof – two earlier lockouts – that the league can treat its fans in a cavalier way and they will always come back.

"That is the calculation they make," Richelieu says. "When they say 'We have the best fans in the world' the presumption is that the fans will come back. That is the best example of insult and marketing myopia I know."

"From a sports-marketing point of view I think the NHL is about to realize that the last word is what the fans have. It is consumer power. When the consumers decide to act, to send a message to the organization, then the organization has no other choice but to change things."

That message, however, has yet to take full form. With each passing day that shows no signs of resolution the fans' anger will build, Richelieu says.

He says the NHL and its players should be even more concerned about what he calls "the Superfan" than about the so-called "casual fans." Many observers are saying the casual fans will drop off, especially in weak U.S. markets.

"When you are a Superfan," Richelieu says, "you are so involved, because it is a love-hate relationship. You love it. You love it to the extreme. You will

support it. You will buy, consume, spend. But when you are upset you hate it. What we do not know is how long this kind of 'upset' situation will last for the Superfans and how it will translate, because definitely the trust has been broken.

"You have to take care in relationships. Even a flower – if you don't put water on it, it will die. And this applies especially with the Superfans. If you don't take care of them, if you don't nurture this love that they have for your team, your sport, they give so much that they will feel betrayed. And they can react in such an extreme way that they can decide to walk away, at least for a certain period of time, and say, 'Look, I can live without the NHL because the NHL has accustomed me to live without it. They have broken my heart and caused me to spend my disposable income on other options. Well, I will stick with that.'"

Richelieu concedes that there will always be fans who will race back. "There are some Superfans who are blind," he says. "But today, with \$100 the price of a ticket, people might take a step back, have a cooler head and say: 'Enough is enough.'"

Richelieu says he has seen one survey that suggest that as many as 60 per cent of Canadians claim they are not missing hockey – an astonishing figure for a game that has long been the national obsession.

The Laval professor stands among an increasing number who are saying that 2012 is vastly different from 2004-05. "The psychological mindset of the fans has changed," he says, "because for two CBAs in a row they have been told that they can be taken hostage. And what happens in the next seven years? The same circus will start again? Fans will say, 'Why should I commit? Why should I get so involved in a sport, in a team, in players that will treat me with such a lack of respect? Why should I do that?'"

From a branding point of view, Richelieu believes both the league and the players association have done nothing but stumble all fall. The players association should have sent as many stars as possible off to play in Europe he says, and seek a television deal that would show the games in North American and apply pressure to the owners. As for the owners, he says, their haste to cancel the Winter Classic sets up what he calls a "PR nightmare" should the league try to start up before Christmas without the Classic set for New Year's Day. "That," he says, "would be the worst possible scenario for the NHL."

Even if the league does come back before losing the entire season, Richelieu believes there will still be significant fallout – including a change in leadership at the league level – from what has already transpired.

"It will be interesting to see what the NHL will do in order to rebuild this trust," he says. "I don't think they can reinvent the game again. Remember last time they just wrote on the ice, 'Thank you, fans'? Well, that will not do.

"Both sides showed that they didn't care about the fans, and that's the worst part of it. Fans feel betrayed. And because the trust is broken, there is a distance now between the fans and the league, the fans and the teams. How are you going to bridge this gap?"

"I strongly believe that, even in Canada, the fans will not come as strongly back as they did after the last lockout, and they will not come back in the same state of mind. They will know, in the back of their heads, that they can be cheated and betrayed by the league – and it seven years it may very well start again.

"So why should I commit that much toward a product, a team, a league that doesn't care about me and will take me hostage again in seven years."

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.20.2012

644524 Montreal Canadiens

Hockeyville, population zero: Kraft cancels contest amid NHL lockout

SUSAN KRASHINSKY - MARKETING REPORTER

The ongoing dispute between the National Hockey League and its players has claimed a major marketing casualty.

Kraft Canada, a national sponsor of the NHL, is cancelling its Kraft Hockeyville program for 2013.

Early Tuesday morning, the company will announce a new promotional program, and will be giving \$1-million to Hockey Canada-affiliated minor hockey associations across the country.

"We're re-investing our sponsorship dollars to recognize the game is going on – from Victoria to St. John's," Kraft spokesperson Kathy Murphy said in an e-mail.

The program, which runs each year in partnership with the CBC, encourages Canadians to compete to win prize money for their communities. That money is used to upgrade a local hockey arena.

Kraft has been working with agencies for weeks to develop an alternative community-based program it could run if the lockout went on too long. The lockout also meant that the Hockeyville 2012 celebrations in Stirling-Rawdon Ont., north of Belleville, in September did not include the planned pre-season NHL game. (The NHLPA held its own event with Stirling's Minor Hockey Association in October to keep up part of the commitment.)

"We review all of our advertising. We will shift our funds – that's just the reality of the situation. Our brands have to continue to speak to consumers," Jack Hewitt, vice-president of marketing services for Kraft Canada, told The Globe and Mail last month.

The shift to another community program is now in motion – an attempt by Kraft to maintain its connection to the moms who are its key target customers. Its contributions to local hockey through Hockeyville have made a real impact: Kraft Canada's baseline sales have been up 5 to 6 per cent each year for the six years Hockeyville has run. That's a faster rate of growth than in its pre-Hockeyville days.

"The frustration levels among sponsors are nearing the tipping point," said Brian Cooper, chief executive officer of S&E Sponsorship Group, which counsels companies on sports sponsorships and counts NHL sponsors such as Canadian Tire Corp. Ltd., Bank of Nova Scotia, and SiriusXM Canada among its clients.

"The league's been very good about keeping them informed. That works really well in the first six weeks," he said. But more than two months since the lockout began, sponsors are tired of hearing the same message that nothing's changed, Mr. Cooper added.

Earlier this month, Molson Coors Brewing Co. blamed declining sales in Canada partly on the lockout. In the first four weeks of October, sales to retail customers were down "at a high single-digit rate" compared with the same period last year, spurred by larger industry trends but also by the lack of hockey here, which is responsible for creating more occasions for people to drink beer together – both at home and in bars and at the arenas.

"We are looking for and are working behind substitute programming to ensure that we remain competitive in the quarter. But ... there is no doubt that this property is quite unique in its impact, both on industry volume and on our share," chief executive officer Peter Swinburn said on a Nov. 8 conference call. "And so to think that we can actually replace it in the short term, I think is unrealistic."

Mr. Swinburn has said the company will ask the league for financial compensation when the lockout is over, to make up for the damage that a delayed or cancelled hockey season has done to its brand and sales.

In the event of a labour disruption, sponsors have clauses in their contracts allowing them to recoup the funds they would have spent on sponsorship. However, the long lead time of marketing plans means they still must struggle with how to reallocate those dollars in an effective way. And with the holiday period being so crucial for some companies, any lack of certainty in marketing plans can be a real hindrance, even if the dollars are technically returned.

The dispute has now dragged on long enough that marketers are forced to consider, even if the season resumes tomorrow, whether the NHL will be as valuable a brand to tie themselves to, Mr. Cooper said. Hockey is too dominant a sport in Canada for most sponsors to consider dropping their affiliation, of course. But at this point, even when league play resumes, sponsors may have to wait some time before the NHL has regained enough of its goodwill to be a useful selling tool.

"How do you use a tainted brand?" Mr. Cooper said. "...Everyone's losing here."

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.20.2012

644525 Montreal Canadiens

Are the NHL owners cracking? Bettman says no

JAMES MIRTLE

Question: "There was a report out of Philadelphia on Saturday that says you are losing the support of the owners."

Gary Bettman: "It was a fabrication. Ed Snider is the one who told me about the article when he found out about it and he was terribly upset. He's in Europe and it was his idea to put out a statement. Anyone who doubts the resolve of ownership is either uninformed or (being) intentionally misleading."

There are two must reads today on all of this NHL lockout nonsense, both of which come back to trying to pinpoint the end of this silly thing.

The first is that report out of Philadelphia, by Daily News reporter Frank Seravalli, that Flyers owner Ed Snider is growing discontent with the lockout and looking for a way to end it.

The second is an interview with Commissioner Bettman in the Winnipeg Free Press, one of the few one-on-ones he has done of late.

First, on Snider: Bettman is calling the report completely fictional, but if you closely examine what's really at play here, there's very little reason for the Flyers to be on-board with what's left of this fight.

Think about it. Why would Snider, whose franchise is one of the richest in the league and has inked more of those front-loaded, back-diving deals than anyone, want to extend this fight over the relatively limited contracting rights that remain at issue?

For a team like the Flyers, they've won what they needed to in negotiations. Players have agreed to end up at 50-50 over time, giving Snider additional profits every year, and the additional revenue sharing the NHL has put on the table shouldn't be a huge negative factor.

The longer these talks go, the more the NHLPA pushes for additional revenue sharing from the wealthier teams and the more the Flyers would lose their advantages over other markets in terms of front-loading deals.

So, no, Snider shouldn't (and likely isn't) be on board with this fight stretching into January – especially given the fact his network is dying for hockey content. This is a fight being pursued by the militant owners of weaker franchises as well as a few hardliners like Jeremy Jacobs of the Boston Bruins.

It's also worth noting that Snider has rarely been present at negotiations, which is a change from the 2004-05 lockout.

That said, even if the Flyers are moderates and can find some company there, Bettman really only needs seven or eight backers to continue this fight and there are at least that many whose teams couldn't dream of signing those heavily frontloaded deals.

As long as there are enough owners who see all those contracting rights as worth taking a stand on, the lockout will continue.

All along, those I've talked to on the players side didn't think anything beyond the 50-50 split would, in the bitter end, hold up a deal. Their reasoning was that, with linkage, the league as a whole will receive its money regardless of who becomes a free agent when.

What they didn't count on was some franchises standing this strongly against deals they feel circumvent the salary cap.

My sense is this ends with some form of a contract term limit, as I don't see the NHLPA conceding on the other issues (later free agency, year-to-year variance limits, later arbitration, etc.).

But the players remain adamant their only positives with having a cap and linkage is increased freedom of movement, and they don't intend to give that up. (A term limit of six or seven years is something that affects very few players – less than 5 per cent – and might be palatable on that basis.)

That comes back to Bettman's interview with the Free Press.

There are some interesting tidbits in there, especially where he is asked about Ian White calling him an idiot and responds with "I love the players."

More telling is his response to why the players should give more than simply getting down to 50-50 over time.

"One, we want to make sure the system works well and continues to work well," Bettman said. "There are certain trends and issues that have arisen that we believe need to be adjusted in order for us to have the competitive balance that we want and need to enable us to continue to grow the game. What's in this deal for the players? Give or take \$14-billion over the next seven years."

And that, in a nutshell, is why we are where we are right now: The owners' apparent belief that they don't need to concede anything to the players in negotiations.

That's a tough thing to negotiate around.

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.20.2012

644526 New Jersey Devils

Little Progress as N.H.L. Labor Talks Resume in New York

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

Negotiations between the N.H.L. and the players union resumed Monday night in New York after an eight-day layoff, but both sides reported that little progress was made.

The session at the league office lasted about 90 minutes and dealt mainly with player contract rights, one of the biggest areas of contention dividing the league and the union. The deputy commissioner Bill Daly told reporters afterward, "I don't think we got any more clarity" on that or other key issues.

Daly said the league asked the union to come back with a "comprehensive proposal" on Tuesday.

Donald Fehr, the executive director of the union, said the union entered the meeting hoping to discuss contract rights. But he said, "At least tonight they were unwilling to do that."

Fehr confirmed that the union expected to be in touch with the league on Tuesday.

With 327 games already canceled and the cancellation of the first half of the December schedule expected soon, players have increasingly lashed out against Commissioner Gary Bettman and Daly in recent days for what they perceive as the pair's intransigence.

"You've got to cut out the cancers," Florida forward Kris Versteeg said on Toronto radio Monday, calling for the dismissal of Bettman and Daly.

Last week, Detroit defenseman Ian White called Bettman an "idiot" who has "done nothing but damage the game."

On Sunday, Bettman told The Winnipeg Free Press that such rhetoric is a "fact of life" in labor disputes. "Most of it is just noise" and "misinformed propaganda," Bettman said, but he added that "I love the players."

"I don't think either Gary or I take those things personally," Daly said after Monday's meeting. "There's a lot of frustration. That's just human nature."

New York Times LOADED: 11.20.2012

644527 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout links: Commissioner Gary Bettman calls lockout 'horrific'; Kris Versteeg says Bettman, Bill Daly are 'looting this game'

Charles Curtis, NJ.com By Charles Curtis, NJ.com

A meeting between the NHL and NHLPA is scheduled for tonight, which should be the news making headlines today.

Instead, it's a set of interviews that are making the rounds, starting with the Q&A Gary Lawless of the Winnipeg Free Press did with Gary Bettman about a variety of lockout topics.

"There seems to be a fundamental disagreement on many of the core issues. We have proposed a 50-50 split of HRR (hockey-related revenue)

which has not been agreed to," Bettman told Lawless. "We have raised issues with respect to how the system works and the adjustments we think need to be made, and there doesn't seem to be agreement or even a willingness to agree on them."

He went on to say that he's not focused on canceling the season and said the ongoing lockout is "horrific for the simple reason that we as a business are in business to put on our game and engage with our fans and to grow our game." He also said the league is going to make things right with everyone -- sponsors and fans -- when the NHL comes back.

Most notably, he spoke about a Philadelphia Daily News report from Frank Seravalli that said Flyers chairman Ed Snider had "soured" on the lockout. Bettman said the piece was "a fabrication. Ed Snider is the one who told me about the article when he found out about it and he was terribly upset. He's in Europe and it was his idea to put out a statement. Anyone who doubts the resolve of ownership is either uninformed or (being) intentionally misleading."

Meanwhile, Florida Panthers winger Kris Versteeg also raised some eyebrows. He spoke to TSN 1050, according to Harrison Mooney of Puck Daddy, and made some scathing statements.

"You do try to look at the best-case scenarios moving forward once the CBA does get done, and you gotta look for the cancers and you gotta cut out the cancers and I think that when you look at Bill Daly and Bettman, they've been looting this game for far too long," Versteeg said.

There's more where that came from: according to Louis Jean of TVA Sports, there were NHL players skating in Montreal wearing hats that read "Puck Gary," which weren't sanctioned by the players association.

In other lockout news:

- John Shannon of Sportsnet isn't optimistic about the fact that the owners and players are finally meeting again. "There is nothing to indicate that either side has had an epiphany," he wrote. "I have been told the NHL has made its final offer. And despite claims by the Players' Association, that the two sides are actually closer than most realize, it's hard to imagine an agreement with the league gaining so much on the issues of contracting ... is possible. I certainly can't imagine the Fehr brothers caving now after losing more than 300 games of the schedule."

- The Sporting News' Jesse Spector came up with a good solution to begin the season: start it without a collective bargaining agreement to get some money coming in and fans back in the seats. How would the finances work? "Pay all players according to their current contracts, which already are tied to the NHLPA's share of hockey-related revenue, and put everything into escrow above the 50 percent threshold of HRR that is the NHL's baseline in negotiations. Once a new deal is negotiated, pay the players what they are owed, including 'make-whole' shares, out of that escrow pool."

Star Ledger LOADED: 11.20.2012

644528 New Jersey Devils

Brodeur, Lundqvist, other NHLers playing in Atlantic City charity game for Sandy relief

By TOM GULITTI

STAFF WRITER

The Record

The last time Devils goaltender Martin Brodeur and Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist played against each other in May a berth in the Stanley Cup Finals was at stake.

They will meet again Saturday night when a group of locked out players face off at Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall in the Operation Hat Trick charity game to benefit superstorm Sandy relief efforts.

Brodeur confirmed via email Monday that he committed to play in the game. Lundqvist, who will fly back from Sweden, committed last week.

Brodeur and Devils' teammates Andy Greene and David Clarkson will play for the Philly Team, which is made up mostly of players with Flyers' connections, including Scott Hartnell and Middletown native James van

Riemsdyk, who was traded by the Flyers to Toronto in June. Lundqvist and Rangers' teammates Brad Richards, Dan Girardi, Marc Staal, Steve Eminger, Jeff Halpern, Brian Boyle and Taylor Pyatt make up the core of the New York Team.

Devils defenseman Mark Fayne may be added to one of the rosters in the coming days.

Proceeds from the game will go to the Hurricane Sandy New Jersey Relief Fund, the Empire State Relief Fund and the American Red Cross.

Faceoff is scheduled for 7 p.m.

Tickets can be purchased at the Boardwalk Hall box office, ticketmaster.com, all Ticketmaster locations, or by calling 800-736-1420. Prices range from \$20 to \$100.

Operation Hat Trick rosters

Philly Team

G: Martin Brodeur (Devils); D: Andy Greene (Devils), Kimmo Timonen (Philadelphia), John Carlson (Washington), Braydon Coburn (Philadelphia); F: Steven Stamkos (Tampa Bay), Wayne Simmonds (Philadelphia), Daniel Carcillo (Chicago), Scott Hartnell (Philadelphia), Simon Gagne (Los Angeles), Justin Williams (Los Angeles), David Clarkson (Devils), James van Riemsdyk (Toronto), Jody Shelley (Philadelphia), Steve Downie (Colorado).

New York Team

G: Henrik Lundqvist (Rangers); D: Dan Girardi (Rangers), Steve Eminger (Rangers), Marc Staal (Rangers); F: Brad Richards (Rangers), Bobby Ryan (Anaheim), Corey Perry (Anaheim), Ville Leino (Buffalo), Jeff Halpern (Rangers), James Neal (Pittsburgh), Brian Boyle (Rangers), Matt Martin (Islanders), Taylor Pyatt (Rangers).

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.20.2012

644529 New Jersey Devils

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly, players' union continue negotiations

The NHL already shot down three union proposals in an hour on Oct. 18, and their previous meeting on Nov. 11 led to the recent eight-day shutdown in negotiations.

By Pat Leonard / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Three days before Thanksgiving, Monday night's NHL labor meeting in Manhattan set the table for a crucial exchange.

Deputy commissioner Bill Daly said after an unproductive 90-minute session that the league has asked its players' union to put together a "comprehensive proposal for us to consider," rather than addressing the core revenue and player-contract issues piecemeal, as the union had attempted Monday night.

The NHL already shot down three union proposals in an hour on Oct. 18, and their previous meeting on Nov. 11 led to the recent eight-day shutdown in negotiations. So assuming the union returns with a full document, the next few meetings should confirm prior to the holiday whether December's hockey schedule is out the window or the owners see a deal in the details.

"The (union) went over their positions on player contracting issues, suggested they have moved in our direction significantly on economics," Daly said. "We pushed them a little bit on that, to understand where they are on economics, and I don't think we got any more clarity on that."

Clearly, the NHL and union had different expectations entering Monday's meeting.

Union executive director Don Fehr opened his comments with: "We talked about various things, no new proposals were made -- they were not expected to be made." But Daly and the owners, joined by Toronto Maple Leafs president and GM Brian Burke, were "unwilling" to discuss player

contracting issues, according to Fehr, without addressing the core economics, as well.

The union brought new faces among 18 players present – including Rangers Brad Richards, Ryan Callahan, Marc Staal and Marian Gaborik – but was not able to convince the NHL that the sides actually are close on the dollars and cents. The players did not stop to talk to the media.

"If their proposal continues to be a guaranteed amount of player share dollars," Daly said of the union's most recent offer that de-linked players' share from overall revenue, "we have told them that sitting here on Nov. 19, that's not a proposal that's acceptable to us."

This all happened hours after Florida Panthers forward Kris Versteeg created some controversy by labeling commissioner Gary Bettman and Daly as "cancers" who have been "polluting this game for far too long" in an interview with TSN Radio 1050 in Toronto.

New York Daily News LOADED: 11.20.2012

644530 New York Rangers

Too much talk: Kris Versteeg rips Gary Bettman, Bill Daly in radio interview; NHL commish calls Ed Snider report a 'fabrication'

By Pat Leonard

The definition of NHL news has deteriorated from hockey to labor negotiations to inflammatory soundbytes.

Various players have criticized Gary Bettman openly during the commissioner's third lockout since 1994, but on Monday in an interview with TSN Radio 1050 in Toronto, Florida Panthers forward Kris Versteeg went a bit further, calling Bettman and NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly "cancers" that had to be removed from their posts once this latest standoff is resolved.

"You do try to look at the best-case scenario moving forward once a CBA (collective bargaining agreement) does get done, and you've got to look for the cancers, and you've got to cut out the cancers, and I think when you look at Bill Daly and (Gary) Bettman, they've been polluting this game for far too long," Versteeg told TSN1050. "So I think in order to get a good taste in the (fans') mouth going forward, I think you've got to look at that, especially once the CBA's (done)."

Versteeg's rhetoric filled time as the players' association traveled south from Toronto for a critical Monday evening meeting at the NHL's Manhattan offices that many hoped could create momentum toward a deal. The NHL is expected to cancel at least half of its December schedule if a deal is not in place by Wednesday.

Versteeg's comments also came on the heels of Red Wings defenseman Ian White calling Bettman an "idiot" in an interview with USA Today last Friday. "I gotta be honest: I personally think he's an idiot," White told USA Today. "Since he's come in, I think he's done nothing but damage the game."

This latest round of public player frustrations was a response to Bettman's suggestion last week in a phone conversation with NHLPA executive director Don Fehr that the parties take a two-week break from negotiations. Fehr said he didn't think that was a good idea, and Bettman's comment became another rallying point for players.

Bettman also ruffled feathers in an interview published Monday in the Winnipeg Free Press. The commissioner called Saturday's Philadelphia Daily News report that Flyers chairman Ed Snider had soured on the lockout a "fabrication." Snider is a firm Bettman supporter who, if he flipped his opinion, could force change in the owners' ranks.

Snider issued his own statement calling the report "absolutely erroneous," words that also could have described the NHL's description of its first CBA proposal in July as a 53-47 revenue split offer, when in fact – due to recommended changes in Hockey Related Revenue's definition – actually had been a 57-43 deal.

New York Daily News LOADED: 11.20.2012

644531 New York Rangers

Gross: NHL stars paying in forward for Sandy relief

The Record

The frequently used "greedy athlete" designation is often a misnomer that, sadly, only is challenged in times of great tragedy. For instance, the destructive wake of superstorm Sandy.

Yes, athletes are well paid. But many seek out opportunities to pay it forward.

"At some point in everybody's life, they're going to be beaten down," Rangers center Brian Boyle said Monday. "On the flip side, you want to give back whenever you can."

Boyle will be part of an All-Star roster for the Operation Hat Trick charity game Saturday night at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City to benefit relief efforts for Sandy. Rangers teammates Brad Richards, Henrik Lundqvist, Marc Staal, Dan Girardi, Steve Eminger, Jeff Halpern and Taylor Pyatt, and Devils' Martin Brodeur, David Clarkson and Andy Greene along with New Jersey natives James van Riemsdyk and Bobby Ryan also are among the participants.

"It's kind of like a trickle effect," Eminger said. "We help and then other people help and get involved and everyone kind of is coming together. It goes a long way for the people affected that they're getting all this help from a whole group in general, not just us players."

Shortly after Sandy, Eminger, Richards and Marian Gaborik went to Breezy Point, the Queens neighborhood where more than 100 homes were ravaged by fire during the superstorm, to help a firefighter acquaintance gut his destroyed home.

On Friday, Richards organized a Sandy fundraiser on Staten Island.

There is no obligation here, just a sense of wanting to help.

"There's so much damage," Boyle said. "There's so much to be done."

An optimistic person by nature, Boyle now has even more reason to try to be positive despite being told for the first time in his life he can't play hockey because of the NHL lockout.

"I try not to look at it like that," Boyle said. "With the tragedy resulting from the storm, I look at it as I can go to Thanksgiving dinner with my family for the first time in a long time."

"The bottom line is it's upsetting and hard to train and motivate without an end in sight," Boyle added. "But I'm very lucky to be with my family and to have power and turkey and gravy. Those are things I can't take for granted after the things I've seen with Sandy."

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.20.2012

644532 Ottawa Senators

Ottawa Senators prospect Mika Zibanejad scores shot of confidence along with his first pro goal in North America

By Don Brennan ,Ottawa Sun

It took him more than 13 months and a total of 22 games, but Mika Zibanejad finally scored his first goal in North America as a professional hockey player.

If you're wondering how they say "getting the monkey off your back" in Sweden, well, they don't.

"I got a text from my agent ... I've never heard of it," Zibanejad said with a chuckle over the phone from Binghamton. "I guess you always learn something new every day."

The 19-year-old Senators prospect learned how to beat an AHL goalie Friday when he bulged the twine in a 5-2 victory over Adirondack. The goal was described as "gritty," not a replica of the one he scored using his

quick burst, speed and soft hands to win his home country the gold medal at the 2012 world junior championship

But in his 13th game for the B-Sens — combined with the nine-game NHL trial at the start of last season which saw him produce just one assist — Zibanejad wasn't concerned about artistry.

"Obviously, it's a big relief at the moment," said the sixth pick of the 2011 draft. "It was good for my confidence to know that I can score, I can see the puck go in. I'm going to just keep working, and make sure I'm there, where everything happens, in front of the net. Make sure I battle and work hard every day, like I'm trying to do. It was fun."

Zibanejad is expected to score a lot more of those gritty goals in the days ahead. He's a strong, 6-foot-2, 200-pounder who should mature into a power forward rather than a fancy European. Whether he winds up as a winger or a centre, however, is still to be determined.

Ottawa GM Bryan Murray wanted him to play the flank in Bingo, but injuries have forced Zibanejad back to his natural position. Most recently, he has centred Mike Hoffman and Andre Petersson on what could be called the ZHP (pronounced zip) Line.

"We have two speedsters on the wings, it's perfect for me, just to give it to them and make sure I skate in the middle," said Zibanejad. "They're both really good skaters, so (we) use that advantage against opponents."

Zibanejad doesn't care what position he plays, only that he keeps improving. And even though he also has just four assists on a team that now has won three games in a row to move into a second-place tie with Wilkes-Barre Scranton in the East Division, he believes his overall game is getting better.

"It's a bit new, the whole game, the whole system outside of the rink and on the ice," he said. "I feel like I'm getting used to it more and more, and I feel like I just have to work for the confidence to come back."

"Faceoffs have actually been really good this year, compared to last year in the (Swedish) Elite League. So I'm really happy with that. Small details ... you try as well as you can. Even though you don't score or get the assist and stuff, you just try to work hard every day. It's a bit different maybe to play wing here than at home, where you get more space and it's a bigger ice surface. Maybe you get to work more in the D-zone as a centre than compared to a winger, but I think it's good to have an opportunity to play different positions."

Zibanejad is living in an apartment near Broome County Veterans Memorial Arena with Fredrik Claesson, his road roomie now for three years, including two with Djurgardens IF Stockholm. Away from the rink, they relax and eat well so they're ready for the next game or practice.

In down time, they try to create "house music" on the computer. They're also working on expanding their culinary skills beyond the favoured Swedish pancakes.

"I don't know if I'd say I'm good, but I'm getting there," he said of his cooking. "I was staying by myself last year a little, but I was really close to my parents' house. I'd just sneak in and take some food."

"It's not that hard. It's just a matter of getting used to staying in and making yourself some food. I'm getting better, I guess, but it's a new thing for me, for sure."

Just like the game he plays.

Zibanejad is earning about \$80,000 in Bingo. When he cracks Ottawa's lineup, his salary will be \$925,000. He'll surely be able to dine in all the finest restaurants on that.

And his chances of getting to the NHL are better now that he's not "gripping his stick so tight" — or however they say it in Sweden.

"You try not to think about it too much obviously, but at the same time, whenever a game goes by and you don't score, you don't get that confidence boost," said Zibanejad. "It's hard, but I just try to work hard and make sure I come to the next game and try to score. If I can't score that night, I try to help the team by working hard."

"It's been a tough start, statistic wise, but I feel like it's getting better and better. Like, my whole game, and hopefully (the scoring) can turn out to better now."

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 11.20.2012

644533 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL, union work on solution to labor strife

Representatives from the NHL and the players' union met Monday night in New York, trying to find common ground that will end their labor war.

Bill Daly, the NHL's deputy commissioner, said the league asked the NHL Players' Association to submit a full proposal on how to divide hockey-related revenue. That could be done Tuesday.

"We are going to think about what was said and think about our next step," said Donald Fehr, executive director of the players' union.

Daly told reporters that owners would not accept a proposal that guarantees an amount of revenue to players, compared to a percentage of the pie.

The league wants to settle the revenue split before tackling player-contract issues.

The lockout reached its 65th day on Monday; games have been canceled through Nov. 30.

- Sam Carchidi

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 11.20.2012

644534 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL union brings nothing to the table

Frank Seravalli , Daily News Sports Columnist

Posted: Tuesday, November 20, 2012, 1:15 AM

NEW YORK - Flanked by fresh faces like Vincent Lecavalier, Marty St. Louis and Brad Richards, NHL Players Association executive director Donald Fehr strutted into the league offices on Monday night with a tan, leather briefcase in tow.

The only problem was that there was nothing in it.

After an 8-day hiatus in negotiations, the NHLPA requested a meeting with the NHL but did not present a concrete, new proposal to give the league's policy makers anything to even think about.

Without anything new to discuss, it must have been an awkward 90-minute meeting, with 18 players staring down Monday's negotiating committee of commissioner Gary Bettman, deputy commissioner Bill Daly, Toronto general manager Brian Burke and owners Murray Edwards (Calgary), Jeremy Jacobs (Boston) and owner Ted Leonsis (Washington).

You don't have to be Copernicus to gather that no progress was made on Monday. Instead, it was more of the same - with the same tired spin. The NHL says it's not interested in making another proposal; the NHLPA wants to negotiate each issue individually.

"It's our position that we've made a couple comprehensive proposals in a row," Daly said. "We'd like to know where they are on all of the issues. We asked that they put together a comprehensive proposal for us to consider."

The only positive is that Fehr said that it was "more likely than not" that the two sides would meet again on Tuesday in New York.

Fehr, however, said he was "not in the prediction business" when asked whether Monday's discussion would lead to a detailed proposal presentation by his union on Tuesday.

My question is: What the heck does the NHLPA have to lose by making a full presentation?

After both sides presented their spin on Monday, an NHLPA spokesman reiterated that the union has "made it clear" as to exactly where it stands on each issue. Yet, the spokesman also did not deny that the NHLPA has failed to put it all down on paper.

It couldn't possibly hurt.

For the last week, the biggest complaint out of NHL headquarters is that the league doesn't know what exactly will please Fehr and the players. All it knows is that the NHLPA wants to protect players as much as possible from revenue-share reductions and contracting changes. Those in Bettman's camp claim they don't have the slightest clue as to what numbers will get the job done.

So, after false reports on Monday said the NHLPA would return to the table armed with something to pore over, the discussion was about player contracting issues - like term limits and the elimination of frontloaded deals that the Flyers have so favored. The only problem is that the two sides remain far apart on the far more important core economic issues, like the revenue share among clubs.

"Our position all along on the player-contracting issues is that they become considerably more important to players as the cap becomes limited," Fehr said. "We've made proposals in a couple of areas in this regard which move toward them, but we wanted to talk about the rest of these to see where we are. We had hoped to engage them in a discussion about the player-contracting issues - at least tonight they were unwilling to do that."

Without the economics settled, Daly said, the contracting issues really shouldn't be in play yet.

"They suggested they moved significantly in our direction on economics, so we pushed them a little bit on that to understand where they are on economics," Daly said. "I don't think we got any more clarity on that. Until we know exactly where they stand on economics . . . we think it's all tied together. We'd like to hear it all together."

Even if a proposal is presented on Tuesday, linking player salaries to a fixed dollar amount in a locked-out season with decreased revenues would make for a slippery slope.

The Flyers were not represented in the meeting on either side.

Daly did acknowledge that Fehr presented a "piece of paper," which outlined the NHLPA's proposal for how to handle frontloaded contracts on the salary cap. That's one of the biggest issues facing the Flyers - the league has made it clear it wants to close the loophole on those type of cap-circumventing deals.

Previously, all contracts - regardless of length - were counted against the cap based on salary divided by years. Fehr's idea, which the NHL acknowledged it understood, would create some flexibility as to how teams decided to count those type of deals. The NHLPA vowed to make more information on that proposal available on Tuesday.

Maybe the whole process would move forward if they could just present more information on an entire proposal. The worst the NHL can do is say no. Without any progress, the league could cancel games up through Dec. 15 as early as Tuesday.

"I think from our perspective, we need a kind of broader understanding as to where we are," Daly said. "I don't really know what to expect. We want to see if they can wrap something up and give it to us."

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 11.20.2012

644535 Philadelphia Flyers

Former Flyer Laperriere Crosses Philly Marathon Off Bucket List

By Rob Senior

Talk about a long shift.

Former Flyers forward and current Director of Player Development Ian Laperriere took to the local streets to run his first marathon yesterday in 3:42:23—a little more than two minutes under his targeted finishing time of 3 hours, 45 minutes.

Wearing a purple jersey—the race's designated color for pancreatic cancer—Laperriere dedicated the race to his late father, who succumbed to the disease years ago.

Laperriere, who officially retired from the NHL earlier this year, said he'd initially planned to run the Los Angeles Marathon in March, but was forced

to withdraw due to an Achilles tendon injury. "I figured, this is it, I'm not going to be able to run again—but then I started to improve," he recalls. "And I said, 'Hey, I've got to do it. It was on my bucket list.'"

Asked about surpassing his goal in terms of finishing time, Laperriere gave credit to everyone who helped him along the way. "It's one thing to have that time in your head as a goal, but once you're out on that course, you find out what you really can do. During my hockey career, we did sprints all the time, but I'd never been on my feet running that long. I was lucky to have some great training partners who are also my neighbors."

One such partner was Matt Pasco of Haddonfield, N.J. who ran yesterday's race with Laperriere. "I've never done this before," says Laperriere. "It's good to be surrounded by people with experience."

For a guy who made a living in a sport based on short bursts of intense activity—35-45 seconds on the ice, followed by a few minutes on the bench before the next shift—Laperriere has made an impressive transition into the ultimate test of endurance.

"It's totally different," he agrees. "If you don't pace yourself, if you don't save anything, you'll have nothing left for those last few miles."

Laperriere hasn't played in the NHL since the Flyers made the 2010 Stanley Cup Finals. During training camp for the following season, Ian experienced symptoms of post-concussion syndrome (he was struck twice in the face by pucks the previous season). Further testing revealed nerve damage in his right eye. Laperriere fought to return to the ice, but decided to call it a career this past summer.

"When I'm running, I feel fine," he says. "On the ice, it's a different story. But out here? I don't have any dizziness."

Ultimately, 'Lappy' played only one season with the Flyers, but it took just that long for him to become a fan favorite. Sunday's race showed his time away from hockey has done little to quell Philadelphia's fondness for him.

"This crowd was unbelievable," he says. "From the first mile, they're everywhere, and they're cheering, screaming my name. When you get to mile 16 or so, believe me, you need that. I'm sure some of them are big Flyers fans, but this was totally different. On the ice it's 40 seconds at a time—these fans cheered for 3 hours, 42 minutes."

Whether it's a Stanley Cup Final or an item on a bucket list, a 40-second shift or a 3-hour, 42 minute race—Philadelphia fans admire Ian Laperriere. "It says a lot about this town," Laperriere says. "I'm glad I did my first run in Philly."

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 11.20.2012

644536 Philadelphia Flyers

Bettman calls Daily News report 'fabrication'

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman called the Philadelphia Daily News' report on Saturday about the Flyers' private change in lockout stance a 'fabrication,' in an interview with the Winnipeg Free Press.

Winnipeg Free Press columnist Gary Lawless asked Bettman: "There was a report out of Philadelphia on Saturday that says you are losing the support of owners."

Bettman replied: "It was a fabrication. Ed Snider is the one who told me about the article when he found out about it and he was terribly upset. He's in Europe and it was his idea to put out a statement. Anyone who doubts the resolve of ownership is either uninformed or (being) intentionally misleading."

Snider, 79, the NHL's longest-serving governor and a member of the executive committee, broke the league's lockout silence mandate to issue a statement about the story:

"An article appearing in today's Philadelphia Daily News is absolutely erroneous," Snider said. "I am a solid supporter of National Hockey League Commissioner Gary Bettman and the League in this unfortunate situation. Like all fans, players, owners and League officials, I am extremely hopeful that an agreement can be reached and we can eventually be playing hockey again soon. League rules prevent me and all owners from making any comments on the labor negotiations. I will continue to honor that and not make any further comments."

Daily News executive sports editor Chuck Bausman reiterated his support for the story on Monday, saying the paper will continue to stand by its reporting.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 11.20.2012

644537 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL, union briefly resume labor talks

Staff Report

Talks aimed at ending the 65-day NHL lockout resumed Monday night in Manhattan but lasted less than two hours.

The league and NHLPA last met on Nov. 11. Both sides will speak on Tuesday morning to resume CBA negotiations that night.

Monday's session began shortly after 7 p.m. and ended around 8:45 p.m.

"We are going to think about what was said and think about our next step," union executive director Donald Fehr told reporters.

Deputy league commissioner Bill Daly he was "frustrated," adding he has not seen a full proposal from the union with its positions clearly defined on all topics.

"We want a new proposal," Daly told reporters. "We think it's all tied together and we'd like to hear it all together."

There is no guarantee such will come this week.

Was there progress?

"We'll see," Daly told CSNPhilly.com in an email.

Eighteen players represented the union at the session. However, there was no representation from the Flyers.

There were many new union faces: Marty St. Louis, Vinny Lecavalier, Marc Staal, Brooks Orpik and Jeff Halpern among them.

The league once again was represented by Board of Governors chairman Jeremy Jacobs, the hardliner from Boston, along with Washington's Ted Leonsis, Calgary's Murray Edwards and attorney Bob Batterman from Proskauer Rose, who advised the NBA and NFL during their lockouts.

Also sitting in was Toronto general manager Brian Burke, who complained loudly at a sports symposium last week during the Hockey Hall of Fame ceremonies that he very much wanted to have his say on CBA matters but couldn't afford the fine (\$1 million) from NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman.

Going into the meetings, a union source said the intent was to "bridge the gaps" between the two sides on core economics and player contracts.

Fehr later said the league was "unwilling" to discuss player contract issues. The league has made it clear that until there is agreement on revenues across the board, player contract issues will be tabled.

"If their proposal continues to be a guaranteed amount of players' share dollars, we have told them that sitting here on Nov. 19, that's not a proposal that is acceptable to us or would ever be acceptable to our owners right now," Daly said.

The union, as expected, did not bring a new proposal.

In recent weeks, negotiations have begun in the late afternoon or early evening, much to the angst of the NHL, which feels it has wasted much time in recent weeks waiting for the union to appear at scheduled meetings.

The NHLPA contingent didn't leave Toronto headed for New York City until the afternoon.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 11.20.2012

644538 Philadelphia Flyers

'Operation Hat Trick' pits Team Philly vs. Team N.Y.

Staff Report

Anyone who ever wondered what it might have been like to have Marty Brodeur in net for the Flyers might want to head to Atlantic City, N.J., this weekend.

Brodeur will be net for Team Philly in Saturday's "Operation Hat Trick" Hurricane Sandy benefit game at Broadwalk Hall in Atlantic City.

Here's the Philly lineup so far:

Steven Stamkos-Wayne Simmonds-Dan Carcillo

Scott Hartnell-Simon Gagne-Justin Williams

David Clarkson-JVR-Jody Shelley/Steve Downie

Kimmo Timonen-John Carlson

Braydon Coburn-Andy Greene

Brodeur in goal. Rick Tocchet is expected to coach Team Philly.

Team New York's lineup so far:

Bobby Ryan-Brad Richards-Corey Perry

Ville Leino-Jeff Halpern-James Neal

Brian Boyle-Matt Martin-Taylor Pyatt

Dan Girardi-Steve Eminger

Marc Staal-TBA

Henrik Lundqvist in net for New York.

Game time is 7 p.m.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 11.20.2012

644539 Phoenix Coyotes

Lockout negotiations resume Monday

By SARAH MCLELLAN

Mon, Nov 19 2012 10:36 AM

Instead of taking a two-week hiatus as was expected last week, the NHL and Players' Association will continue negotiations on Monday.

Beside the usual cast of characters, a group of owners and possibly some players will join in on the meeting. USA Today's Kevin Allen has the details here.

Over the weekend, a few interesting tidbits emerged as the lockout eclipsed the 60-day mark.

First, a report from the Philadelphia Daily News suggested Flyers chairman Ed Snider was growing tired of the process and could start instigating headway to a resolution. The story, from Frank Seravalli, also said the Flyers proposed the use of a mediator and President Bill Clinton's name had been mentioned.

Why is this important? Well, many believe Snider to be firmly in Commissioner Gary Bettman's corner. If he's ready for results, in-house support for Bettman could definitely shift.

Snider is on the executive committee and is the league's longest-serving governor. He issued a statement after the story was published, calling it "absolutely erroneous" and adding that he backs Bettman.

Owners are prohibited from commenting on the lockout and could be fined \$1 million if they do.

Furthermore, Bettman did a one-on-one interview with the Winnipeg Free Press and he said the Daily News report was a "fabrication."

The rest of the interview is pretty standard but still a worthwhile read. Find it here.

Another noteworthy piece is courtesy of Larry Brooks and the New York Post. Brooks wrote that the possibility of decertifying the union was presented to players but it gained little traction.

With that option, the NHLPA would essentially dissolve and players could pursue antitrust action. But, according to the story, most players seem committed to continue on the current path of negotiating with the NHL.

But whether or not that course of action will save the 2012-13 season has yet to be determined.

Arizona Republic LOADED: 11.20.2012

644540 Pittsburgh Penguins

NHLPA doesn't make new offer; talks to resume Tuesday

By Josh Yohe

The NHL and its Players' Association met Monday night in New York, but no new proposals were made.

Donald Fehr, the executive director of the Players' Association, initiated the meeting with the league. The NHL was not pleased that Fehr, who called for the meeting, did not offer a new proposal.

"I'm frustrated," said NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly, who maintains that the league never has received a complete proposal from Fehr.

Although no proposals were made and nothing was decided, the sides agreed to meet Tuesday in New York.

Penguins player representative Craig Adams and defenseman Brooks Orpik were among 18 players at the meeting. Adams told the Tribune-Review on Monday night that, although negotiations broke off, the players and other members of the NHLPA team decided to meet internally to discuss the latest developments.

The NHL brought aboard two high-profile figures to the meeting. Brendan Shanahan — the NHL's head disciplinarian and a favorite of many players — and Toronto Maple Leafs general manager Brian Burke were present, along with NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and Daly.

Earlier in the day, Penguins captain Sidney Crosby was unsure how to feel about the latest round of meetings.

"I'm trying not to get too optimistic," Crosby said. "When that's happened, it hasn't really developed into anything. I'm just waiting to see. Hopefully, we'll get good news from New York."

The most pressing issues in the labor dispute — namely core economic issues like the splitting of league revenue, a decision regarding payments of previously signed contracts, a maximum length of new deals and free agency — were on the agenda Monday.

Should the labor dispute be settled in the near future, time remains for a partial season. As far as the players are concerned, a shortened season is better than no season.

"Anything that would get decided by early next month would allow us to play a good chunk of games," Crosby said.

That the sides are meeting gave some of the Penguins working out Monday at Southpointe a glimmer of hope.

"There's always a cautious optimism when they meet," Penguins defenseman Ben Lovejoy said. "We're hoping to hear good news."

Tribune Review LOADED: 11.20.2012

644541 San Jose Sharks

Greiss signs in Germany

Kevin Kurz

Yet another Sharks player is headed abroad, as goaltender Thomas Greiss has signed in Germany.

Greiss, a German native, will join the Hannover Scorpions according to the official team website. He's expected to arrive there later this week.

Greiss, 26, was one of the few Sharks players still in the Bay Area, skating regularly at Sharks Ice with Dan Boyle, Brad Stuart, Patrick Marleau and the Islanders' Evgeni Nabokov. He becomes the 10th Sharks player to sign a deal overseas and second goaltender, as Antti Niemi is currently playing in his native Finland.

In 38 career NHL games, all with the Sharks, Greiss is 16-12-3 with a 2.52 goals-against average and .911 save percentage. He's due to become an unrestricted free agent after the 2012-13 season.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 11.20.2012

644542 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Maple Leafs GM Brian Burke new face at talks

Kevin McGran

Sports Reporter

They spoke, but didn't agree on anything other than to meet again.

Donald Fehr, backed by 18 players, emerged from Monday evening's meetings in New York saying the NHL Players' Association wanted to discuss player contracting issues but the league was unwilling.

"We are going to think about what was said and think about our next step," Fehr told RDS.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly, meanwhile, said the league has requested a formal proposal from the union.

"I'm frustrated," Daly told Canadian Press.

Meetings were expected to resume Tuesday.

It was a different crew at the bargaining table. Leafs general manager Brian Burke and Tampa Bay Lightning players Vincent Lecavalier and Martin St. Louis were on hand on day 65 of the lockout as the sides resumed negotiations in an attempt to save the season.

Adding fresh perspectives might be a good idea given the bad blood that's been boiling as the lockout continues — longer than perhaps either side expected — costing untold millions on both sides. "It's horrific for the simple reason that we, as a business, are in business to put on our game and engage with our fans and to grow our game," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman told the Winnipeg Free Press. "This entire process is absolutely inconsistent with that. Having said that, any sports league needs a system that works and makes the game and the business of the game healthy."

Bettman has been an easy target for the players' frustration. A pair of ex-Leafs had harsh words for Bettman in the past few days.

On TSN Radio, Kris Versteeg, now with the Florida Panthers, called Bettman and deputy Bill Daly "cancers" who have "been polluting this game far too long." That was on the heels of Ian White, now of the Detroit Red Wings, calling Bettman an "idiot."

In a rarity during these contentious talks, Bettman allowed himself to be interviewed by Gary Lawless of the Winnipeg Free Press. Winnipeg, thanks to the return of the Jets, may have been the only city in Canada where Bettman heard cheers last year.

"I work for the owners, but I work for the game," said Bettman. "What I do transcends what I do for the owners. I do work for the game and I try to do the best I can for the game. You'll find in the course of labour disputes, there's always a lot of rhetoric. Most of it is just noise. Most of it is misinformed. There's propaganda."

"It's just a fact of life that you live with. By the way, I love the players. Nobody should think for a moment that I don't. If I didn't I wouldn't do this job. I couldn't do this job. I believe in the players. I don't believe in what's going on right now. It's part of the business of the game, the least attractive part of the game."

In the interview, Bettman also said there was no rift with Flyers owner Ed Snider, a hardliner in the last lockout and a moderate this time around. He also defended the league's last offer of a 50-50 split on revenue as well as enhanced revenue sharing. Bettman said the league has agreed with the union on 13 of 17 issues, but they remained apart on contract restrictions.

"The fact of the matter is, everybody ultimately does what is best and what they think is right," said Bettman. "Everybody has to make their own judgments. It's very easy to critique what the union is doing or what we're doing.

"I assure myself on a daily basis that whatever the union is doing, they think (it) is the right thing. I hope the fans can respect that what we're doing, we believe, is ultimately the best thing for the game long term."

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.20.2012

644543 Toronto Maple Leafs

Toronto Marlies: Maple Leafs farm team adopts You Can Play pledge

Kevin McGran

The Toronto Marlies are being hailed as trailblazers by the city's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community.

The top farm team of the Toronto Maple Leafs has pledged that "racist, sexist, and homophobic language have no place in our arena" as part of the You Can Play program pioneered by Patrick Burke, son of Maple Leafs general manager Brian Burke.

"Head coach and his players deserve a ton of credit for making this pledge a reality," said Patrick Burke.

Xtra!, a publication catering to the gay and lesbian community, calls the Marlies the "first team to sign a pledge declaring support and respect for all players, regardless of their sexuality."

The You Can Play movement began after the death of Brendan Burke, Patrick's brother and Brian's son, who was openly gay and worked as the student manager of the men's hockey team at the University of Miami (Ohio).

The Marlies' pledge airs in a video during games.

"I think it's a wonderful step toward true equality in sports," said Brian Burke.

The You Can Play Pledge:

"The Toronto Marlies pledge to support all of our coaches, teammates, and fans — gay or straight. We stand for the idea that athletes should be judged for their character, work ethic, and talent. Not their sexual orientation. Racist, homophobic, and sexist language have no place in our arena.

Everyone contributes. Everyone is valued. Everyone matters.

We pledge: To make our locker room a place of unity.

We pledge: To support and encourage each other on and off the ice.

We pledge: To make Toronto proud to have us represent them.

On behalf of the Toronto Marlies, We Pledge: If you can cheer, you can cheer. If you can coach, you can coach. If you can play, You Can Play."

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.20.2012

644544 Vancouver Canucks

Schneider: 'We need to stop this cycle of them not giving up anything to get everything they want'

By Ben Kuzma

VANCOUVER — It wasn't surprising the NHL Players' Association didn't table a proposal Monday in New York to help end the lingering lockout. Cory Schneider believes that's all his peers have done during the collective bargaining impasse with league owners. Give and then give them some more.

"They haven't even given us a pension plan that would cost them \$5 million US over the course of the deal and that would actually be a concession, but they refused to do so," said the Vancouver Canucks goaltender. "To us, we need to stop this cycle of them not giving up anything to get everything they want. In five or six years, we don't want to see another lockout and we want to solve future labour problems."

The NHLPA knows the league's proposal of reducing entry-level deals from three to two years, altering arbitration eligibility from four to five years of pro experience and moving unrestricted free agency from seven to eight years of service, is designed to put a significant drag on salaries until the third contract. But if there's room to move on those issues, nobody is budging yet.

"It's their lockout and they know exactly what they want and what they need," added Schneider. "For us to guess, it's tough. Contractual issues seem a little redundant. Do you really need everything on that list? As players, we can't accept that. If it was one we could live with, we would. History has shown we've very reluctant to give them that because they just put it in their back pocket and kind of say what else you got? And then they squeeze us for more."

At least there was pizza at the New York meeting. Not sure who bought.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 11.20.2012

644545 Vancouver Canucks

Free-agent Vandermeer sees a fine fit in Vancouver, but do the Canucks?

By Ben Kuzma

VANCOUVER — Jim Vandermeer was making final wedding plans in Vancouver three years ago when he learned of his trade from Calgary to Phoenix. When the NHL lockout ends, the unrestricted free agent defenceman would like to learn the Canucks believe the well-travelled blueliner is the right replacement for the departed Aaron Rome.

Judging by how Vandermeer warmed to the prospect of being a depth blueliner at a reasonable salary in order to play for a Stanley Cup contender, the \$1 million US he earned last season in a one-year deal with San Jose could attract some local attention. There was a pre-lockout discussion between Vandermeer's agent Brad Devine and the Canucks, but that doesn't mean the Presidents' Trophy winners would necessarily lean his way should a shortened season commence next month.

Kevin Connauton, Derek Joslin and Patrick Mullen are skating with the Chicago Wolves and may merit roster consideration on the back end with the loss of the skilled Sami Salo. So would unsigned AHL blueliners. The Canucks may also take a defenceman back in an eventual Roberto Luongo trade package, too, so different dynamics could play out. Vandermeer hopes the experience and toughness he brings will play out in his favour.

"It would be very attractive and work out great," Vandermeer said Monday after skating with NHL peers and the Thunderbirds at UBC. "We've talked a little bit to Vancouver when we could and it was the same as when we talked to other teams. We picked the ones who would have a need for a guy like me. Hopefully, when we start talking they [Canucks] feel the same way."

The Canucks are set with the pairings of Kevin Bieksa-Dan Hamhuis, Alex Edler-Jason Garrison, Keith Ballard-Chris Tanev and Andrew Alberts as the seventh defenceman. However, with Edler and Garrison nursing back and groin injuries respectively, there's always the need for depth and that's where the 32-year-old Vandermeer believes his stay-at-home game and physical play are of value. The Canucks could land a 10-year veteran in their narrowing window to win it all and the 22-year-old Connauton, who has an offensive upside but needs to play better in his own zone, would get another year to mature.

"One of the big reasons I went to San Jose was they're right on the edge and I thought I might be a guy to help push them, but we fell short last

year," added the 6-foot-1, 214 pound Vandermeer. "The Canucks have been consistently good for a long time with the parity in the league where a power play or a blocked shot might turn the whole game around."

Vandermeer missed 20 games last season with a broken hand after blocking a shot and played just 25 games. His 25 career goals and 105 points in 461 games with six teams are overshadowed by 664 penalty minutes. The Canucks could use that toughness, especially in the postseason. And if Vandermeer is willing to accept a one-year deal at a reasonable rate that is salary cap friendly, the Canucks will have to at least kick the tires on the Caroline, Alta, native.

"Who wouldn't want more than a one-year deal?," asked Vandermeer. "But sometimes, that's just the way it is and you just work hard and play hard so they want to bring you back. I like to think I can play all aspects of the game. I can be a little offensive and be good defensively and stand up for the guys.

"I try to make it harder on the other team's top-end guys and whoever needs a guy like that, I'll be ready."

Whether it's the Canucks or not, remains to be seen. They have options. So does Vandermeer.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 11.20.2012

644546 Vancouver Canucks

Canucks goalie Schneider tired of NHLPA just giving and giving and seeing nothing in return

By Ben Kuzma, The Province November 19, 2012

It wasn't surprising the NHL Players' Association didn't table a proposal Monday in New York to help end the lingering lockout. Cory Schneider believes that's all his peers have done during the collective bargaining impasse with league owners. Give and then give them some more.

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Vancouver Province: LOADED: 11.20.2012

644547 Winnipeg Jets

Hitting his Mark, paying the price Burmi, Scheif game-ready if NHL season begins

Scheifele learning the hard lessons about how to move up to the bigs, Hawerchuk says

By: Tim Campbell

BARRIE, Ont. -- None of this is new, that Mark Scheifele is a first-round draft pick, an impact player in the Ontario Hockey League and a target.

What is fascinating, though, is how Item No. 3 reveals the development of the Winnipeg Jets' first choice from 2011, a centreman who embodies a fair amount of hope for the NHL franchise.

Saturday night at Barrie Molson Centre was like many other nights this season and last in the OHL. Scheifele, now 19, is the top centre on a good Barrie Colts team, one that's first overall in the league as of Monday.

The edgy Windsor Spitfires were in town, and by the second period, there was a nasty tone and Scheifele and his Colts teammates fell for just about every trap set, turning a 3-3 deadlock into a two-goal deficit thanks to penalties and distractions.

Scheifele himself was a temporary liability, taking a penalty to put his team two men short in the second period and helping the visitors to a power-play goal to tie the game Barrie had led three times.

Such distractions continued to the mid-point of the third period, when the Colts realized settling scores wasn't going to help them even a 5-3 Windsor lead.

And a new focus sparked two late power-play goals and then Scheifele's game-winning snapper from 30 feet at 41 seconds of overtime to enhance yet another lesson.

"The big thing is when you get results, or when you don't because you didn't pay that price," said Scheifele's coach, Jets legend Dale Hawerchuk, asked to discuss his centre's mental progress. "Tonight we got lucky because we did it for about 10 minutes. Now you need another game when you do it right from the get-go and you have your way with the game. then you start to learn how it pays off."

Scheifele, the Kitchener native, said after the game he knows very well what's going in most games, the top players are always in the cross-hairs.

"I think the biggest thing is that some teams do it in a respectful way," Scheifele said. "I felt like Windsor wasn't doing it very respectfully."

"They throw a lot of cheap shots out there and at our whole team. We knew it was going to be a rough game. But for the most part, it's something you've just got to take, take it as a challenge and deal with it."

As well as working at his skating (improved), his hockey sense (very good) and game presence (rising), Scheifele said he's definitely eager to be better mentally against what's happening and what's to come.

"That's one thing I am working on," he said. "You just have to know what you have to do. You have to be a leader. You have to know when to shut your mouth, know when to speak in the room. It's a big thing."

"I've talked to a lot of people about it. I learned from being with pros last year, learned from other guys that I know. It's just something that will come as you mature and that's what I'm trying to do, mature as a hockey player, mature as a person."

Hawerchuk is well-qualified to guide the Jets' blue-chip prospect in this area.

"Any time you're a top-notch player like that, they're going to try to get you off your game," he said. "It's no different than Crosby at the NHL level. Teams are trying to get him off his game. Or Ovechkin, all the big names. Scouting reports, talking about the team you're playing against, there's always a part about who we've got to be hard against."

"Once you're a good player, well, these guys make millions of dollars for sure but there's a price to be paid and not everybody's willing to do that."

"There's a lot of discipline needed that way. I tell these guys all the time that I run into a million guys out and about who say they could have made it but that's part of the reason they didn't make it."

"There's a price to be paid here. I think these guys learn it all the time here. I'm always re-iterating all the things you have to do to pay the price."

BARRIE, Ont. -- If the NHL is to have a season, it's not unreasonable to suggest they'll have two young players with a leg up on their teammates at the start.

One is third-year pro Alex Burmistrov, who is a full-time member of the AHL's St. John's IceCaps during the lockout.

The other is 19-year-old centre Mark Scheifele, who has been made eligible for a unique mid-season NHL recall, a wise decision by the Jets based on his performance in the Ontario Hockey League so far this season.

Scheifele is the only OHL player so far this season with more than one overtime goal. He delivered his second in an emotional comeback win over Windsor on Saturday night.

And he is currently on a nine-game points-scoring streak (10 goals, 17 points) and is fourth in OHL scoring with 17 goals and 37 points in 22 games. The three players ahead of him on that chart have all played more games.

"Obviously I've thought about that," Scheifele said over the weekend, as he continued his production for the Barrie Colts. "I want the NHL to get going but it's out of your hands and there's nothing I can do about it especially.

"I'm just focusing on getting better now and obviously the World Junior is in my sights and I want to be on that team and go for gold this year. I want to focus on my game right now, though, develop as a player."

The World Junior selection camp begins in mid-December, only a few weeks off now.

It will be an interesting dilemma for the Jets if the NHL were to find a solution to its labour impasse around that time. Should Scheifele play for Team Canada, or be in the NHL team's camp or lineup?

The answer is unknown today, but Scheifele continues to show Jets management that he's not a content, satisfied prospect and that he's come some distance from 14 months ago, when he was good enough at training camp to stick around for the first seven regular-season NHL games.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 11.20.2012

644548 Websites

ESPN / Avs' Johnson staying busy in Minny

By Scott Burnside

Family, a good skate, lots of hunting and at least a modicum of optimism have kept former No. 1 draft pick Erik Johnson in North America.

And while family, a strong clutch of Minnesota-based NHLers and plentiful wild game aren't likely to disappear any time soon, the optimism is another thing entirely.

With the NHL and its players set to head back to the table Monday in New York amid significant pessimism that that two sides can forge a new labor agreement and save at least a portion of the season, Johnson, like many peers, waits to see how these pivotal days will unfold.

The Colorado Avalanche defenseman has been skating with many of the Minnesota Wild and a large group of local NHLers who have for years gathered in the offseason to skate and hang out in the State of Hockey.

"It's probably one of the best skates in the NHL," Johnson told ESPN.com in a recent conversation.

That would be lockout skates, of course. But his point is well taken.

With dozens of NHLers playing in Europe and others gathered in smaller groups in their respective NHL cities trying to stay sharp while the lockout sorts itself out, the Minnesota gang has established a highly evolved routine.

The group gathers on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays at Mariucci Arena at the University of Minnesota. Johnson, a Bloomington, Minn., native who played one year with the Golden Gophers before the St. Louis Blues made him the first overall pick in the 2006 draft, works out at the facility five days a week before he dons his skates for the on-ice sessions.

Local college coaches run the workouts and drills for an hour before breaking for a 45-minute scrimmage for which the guys have brought in referees to create more of a game atmosphere.

"It's a great skate," Johnson said. "We try to make it as competitive as possible."

Early in the proceedings, the group was broken into two squads by randomly handing out NHLPA jerseys, and the squads have remained intact ever since, with the losing side having to pay for that day's ice rental. Johnson's squad is built more to the energy side of things, while the other team "is really stacked," Johnson admitted.

Still, at the time of this conversation, Johnson's plucky crew that includes netminder Niklas Backstrom, Cal Clutterbuck, Matt Hendricks, Kyle Brodziak and Keith Ballard managed to sneak in a win over the big boys.

"It was nice not to have to pay for the ice," Johnson acknowledged.

There is something to be said for the comfort of a big group like the Minnesota one given the ebbs and flows of the current labor dispute.

In May 2011, Johnson bought a place just down the road from his parents' home in Bloomington. He enjoys hunting and was set to do some goose and duck hunting in western Minnesota this week with fellow Minnesotan Dustin Byfuglien.

"I don't know what I would do if I was from a small town without a lot of guys," Johnson said. "I think it helps that basically we're a group of guys going through the same thing."

The group recently held a charity game at the University of Minnesota to support Defending the Blue Line, a group that helps children of military personnel enjoy the game of hockey, and raised close to \$50,000.

David Backes, captain of the St. Louis Blues and a frequent attendee at bargaining sessions in New York and Toronto, is part of the Minnesota group and has provided insight into what is going on behind the conference room doors. There is, said Johnson, a lot of discussion about the process and a frank exchange of views.

"It's an open discussion in the room. There are a lot of different opinions," Johnson said.

As for the recently floated notion that the players don't have all the information at their fingertips, Johnson insisted that simply isn't true. The players in the meetings and executive director Don Fehr "have done a great job of keeping us all informed," Johnson said.

"If you want to go to the meetings, you have the right to do that. There's nothing to hide on our side," he added.

Like many players, the well-spoken former U.S. Olympian doesn't like how the owners have approached the process.

"It's disappointing," he said. "We are ready to make a deal. I think it's a lot of posturing on their part. There has not been a lot of give and take."

At some point, though, the reality of the situation is going to intrude on the comfort that Johnson and many of his colleagues enjoy in the familiar confines of Minnesota, and he will more vigorously pursue opportunities in Europe, likely in Sweden or Switzerland.

"I really want to play," Johnson said, echoing a refrain heard across the hockey world.

The big defenseman had opportunities to play in Sweden in October but held off, hoping for a different outcome to the labor talks.

"I thought it would be squared away by now," he said.

ESPN LOADED: 11.20.2012

644549 Websites

ESPN / McElhinney enjoying second chance

By Scott Burnside

Nothing suggested things were about to go awry for Curtis McElhinney.

In fact, the netminder played the night before against the Springfield Falcons, just to add a wry twist to the proceedings. But there he was, guarding the Portland Pirates' net, moving this way and that when suddenly ... Ow.

That's not good, he thought.

"I knew right away something wasn't right," he said. "I was, 'Oh, there goes the abdominals.'"

Doctors were candid. They wouldn't know what McElhinney's hockey future would be until they opened him up and started poking around his core muscular structure.

"I basically went in not knowing whether I was going to be able to play again," he told ESPN.com this week. "It changes your perspective."

Curtis McElhinney is dominating in the AHL, with a 9-2-1 record, a 1.41 GAA and .953 save percentage.

The 29-year-old, who makes his home in Colorado Springs, where he met his wife while attending Colorado College, admitted he thought about how that one moment, that one awkward movement, might mean putting together a résumé and exploring life outside of the game.

"I was pretty much sitting on a couch for the next four weeks [after the injury] and then a couple of more weeks after the surgery," McElhinney said. "It was very slow, very slow recovery for me."

At some point, McElhinney will have to address those seismic life and career decisions. What's next? What about life after hockey?

But not yet.

While he was recovering from surgery, McElhinney was dealt by the Phoenix Coyotes with two draft picks to the Columbus Blue Jackets for center Antoine Vermette. McElhinney signed a two-way deal with Columbus in July and reported to its top farm team, the Springfield Falcons of the American Hockey League, for training camp in September.

All McElhinney has done since the start of the AHL season is lead the league in every major goaltending statistical category. He is 9-2-1 with four shutouts and a 1.41 GAA and .953 save percentage.

More importantly for the Falcons, Springfield is off to a roaring start and holding down first place in the AHL's Northeast Division with the top point total in the conference.

What makes McElhinney's stats even more impressive is that the Falcons remain one of the most penalized teams in the AHL, giving up far too many 5-on-4 and 5-on-3 opportunities for head coach Brad Larsen's liking.

"You take that into account and it tells you how good he's been," said Larsen, a former NHLer who is in his first season as head coach after serving as a Falcons assistant the previous two seasons.

"From a coaching standpoint, he makes all the saves you want him to make and plus he usually makes a couple of special ones every game."

Columbus' goaltending coach, Ian Clark, said several factors are contributing to McElhinney's strong start.

"One thing that jumps out at me right out of the gate is just how professional his preparation is," Clark said.

Sometimes when you have a serious injury as a netminder "it can tend to sharpen your preparation habits because you don't want to fall back into [the injury]," Clark explained.

Having worked extensively with Roberto Luongo in Vancouver, Clark likened McElhinney's "almost religious" dedication to preparing for games and practices to that of Luongo.

And when Clark suggested a few tweaks to McElhinney's positional game, the netminder adapted.

"He absorbed them incredibly quickly," Clark said. "The template of his game is a very consistent template."

The changes, subtle though they might have been, have made a world of difference to the netminder.

"I've never felt so good in my net," said McElhinney, who was named goaltender of the month in the AHL for October. "I feel 10 times different than before the injury."

"This is one of the most enjoyable starts to a season I've ever had, obviously," added McElhinney, who was a sixth-round pick by the Calgary Flames in 2002 and whose NHL career has included stops in Anaheim,

Ottawa and Phoenix. At one point, he was acquired by Tampa but never played for the Lightning.

Who knows how this all turns out, for McElhinney or the Blue Jackets?

When he signed with the organization, McElhinney was penciled in as the third guy behind Sergei Bobrovsky, acquired from Philadelphia, and former rookie of the year Steve Mason, who has lost his way since his sensational rookie campaign.

Could his strong start mean a jump up the depth chart? Does his play give him an opportunity to get some NHL starts if there is a shortened NHL campaign with a shortened training camp?

One thing is certain, McElhinney and his wife are enjoying every moment of this ride, however long it lasts, whether it takes them back to the NHL or not.

The couple's children, 3 and 1, are starting to understand what their father does for a living. And all the stuffed animals and stuff that comes with two toddlers has arrived and been set up in Springfield.

"Now, for me, it's just about having fun," McElhinney said. "I'm just thankful to be playing and not sitting on my butt."

ESPN LOADED: 11.20.2012