

# SPORT-SCAN DAILY BRIEF

NHL 11/23/2012

## Anaheim Ducks

644700 NHL follows the NBA only so far in its labor negotiations

## Buffalo Sabres

644701 Rochester Amerks want to ramp up goal production

## Calgary Flames

644702 Alzner frustrated as NHL lockout drags on

## Columbus Blue Jackets

644703 NHL lockout: All-Star Game expected to be axed today

## Dallas Stars

644704 Stardate: Nov. 23, 2011 - Ott in OT helps Stars top eventual Cup winner

## Detroit Red Wings

644705 Gustav Nyquist scoring points with Red Wings thanks to his strong play in AHL

## Edmonton Oilers

644706 Meet the Assembly Line: Nugent-Hopkins, Eberle and Hall are scoring chance machines

## Florida Panthers

644707 Miami Marlins, Florida Panthers cannot get out of their adolescent phase

## Montreal Canadiens

644708 Habs' owner Molson optimistic about season  
644709 Habs owner Molson remains a glass-half-full guy  
644710 Geoffrion happy to be home; Bulldogs sign Commodore

## Nashville Predators

644711 Nashville Predators prospects are slow to play in AHL

## New Jersey Devils

644712 N.H.L. Players to Play to Benefit Hurricane Relief Efforts  
644713 Devils' Andy Greene has number retired by Michigan high school  
644714 Bettman's message delivers player unity

## New York Rangers

644715 N.H.L. Players to Play to Benefit Hurricane Relief Efforts  
644716 A Ranger Rolls Up His Sleeves and Takes a Big Role in Hurricane Relief

## NHL

644717 Exasperated Ryan Miller heartily endorses decertification of union  
644718 Hamrlik's comments put him in middle of NHL lockout firestorm

## Ottawa Senators

644719 Lehner leading Ottawa goalie race  
644720 NHL, youth players team up as northern tour wraps in Whitehorse  
644721 NHLers to play in charity game for Hurricane Sandy victims  
644722 Dark days for hockey at Scotiabank Place

## Philadelphia Flyers

644723 Reason for hope in NHL talks

## Pittsburgh Penguins

644724 Commissioner: NHL will cancel more of its schedule  
644725 Penguins Q&A: Chris Kunitz

## Toronto Maple Leafs

644726 NHL lockout: Cracks appear in players' armour after Hamrlik comments  
644727 NHL lockout: Old-timers caught in cross-fire don't resent today's money: Cox  
644728 NHL old-timers caught in the crossfire of lockout: Cox

## Vancouver Canucks

644729 When NHL lockout ends, Vigneault begins a tough test at helm of Canucks  
644730 Garrison prepared to play when lockout ends, groin pain finally going away  
644731 Ten issues facing the post-lockout Canucks  
644732 Canucks: Vigneault stands as others fall  
644733 Vancouver Canucks: D-man Garrison focuses on stronger core

## Websites

644734 ESPN / Tune out the noise, we're closer to a deal  
SPORT-SCAN, INC. 941-284-4129  
644700 Anaheim Ducks

NHL follows the NBA only so far in its labor negotiations

Helene Elliott

The NBA season was slipping away as Thanksgiving 2011 approached.

The league and the National Basketball Players Assn. were so far apart in labor negotiations that players took the drastic step of dissolving their union by filing a disclaimer of interest, allowing them to initiate class-action antitrust lawsuits against the league. Based on Commissioner David Stern's insistence that the NBA would need 30 days from the time a handshake deal was reached until the season could start, prospects were bleak for preserving the showcase Christmas Day schedule.

After more than a week without talks, negotiators met on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. By the early hours of Saturday, Nov. 26, they had forged a new collective bargaining agreement. The NBA tipped off a shortened season on Dec. 25 before TV audiences that were substantially larger than those of the year before.

The NHL has followed the NBA's path in many ways: by adopting a salary cap, turning its All-Star game into a weekend gala, and in hiring former NBA executive Gary Bettman as its commissioner. But it won't also be announcing a Thanksgiving weekend labor agreement.

The two sides are expected to speak by phone on Friday, but if anything, the NHL's self-destruction is expected to continue with the cancellations of games into mid-December and the Jan. 27 All-Star game. And the NHL Players' Assn. is said to be considering decertifying the union, according to people who are familiar with the situation but aren't authorized to speak about it publicly.

Buffalo Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller told Canada's Globe and Mail on Thursday he favors decertification after seeing NFL and NBA players apply pressure by using that option in their labor disputes last year.

"It is apparent that until decertification is filed, there will not be any real movement or negotiation," Miller said. "Decertification becomes part of the script because Gary Bettman and the owners are trying to get a sense of how far they can push us and at some point we have to say, 'Enough.'"

"They want to see if we will take a bad deal because we get desperate or if we have the strength to push back. Decertification is a push back and should show we want a negotiation and a fair deal on at least some of our terms."

Mathematically, the NHL and the union don't seem far apart. Philosophically, they're facing off across the Grand Canyon.

After negotiations that halted Wednesday for Thanksgiving, NHLPA Executive Director Donald Fehr put the gap at \$182 million over a five-year deal. In addition to a 50-50 split of hockey-related revenues the NHLPA proposed that players get \$393 million to "make whole" salaries that will be denoted by escrow payments as they go to a 50% share after getting 57% last season. The NHL has proposed \$211 million in "make whole" payments over a seven-year agreement.

The NHL's objection is that those payments would likely put players' share of hockey-related revenues over 50% in the first four years of the deal based on projections of revenues decreasing from last season's \$3.3 billion because of damage inflicted by the lockout. The NHL wants to hold firm at 50%.

In addition, the NHL dislikes the union's proposal that "beginning with the second year of the Agreement, players' share, expressed in dollars, may not fall below its value for the prior season." The league read that as saying it would shoulder the whole burden if revenues decline and it wants players to share any pain.

There are other differences. The NHL wants a maximum of five years for players' contracts to avoid long, salary cap-circumventing deals and would delay salary arbitration and unrestricted free agency a year. The union opposes those concepts, feeling it has conceded enough financially and shouldn't concede more.

And so Thanksgiving weekend will pass without any reason to believe pucks will drop in NHL rinks anytime soon. If that's still true when Christmas rolls around, the NHL can say goodbye to a meaningful season and the dwindling number of fans and advertisers who care about its future.

LA Times: LOADED: 11.23.2012

644701 Buffalo Sabres

Rochester Amerks want to ramp up goal production

Kevin Oklobzija

The matchup: Amerks vs. Albany Devils (affiliate of the NHL's New Jersey Devils).

Time/place: 7:05 Friday/Blue Cross Arena at the Rochester Community War Memorial.

Tickets: \$16, \$19, \$21.

Records: The Amerks are 8-6-1-0 and rank 8th in the AHL's Western Conference with a .567 points-earned percentage. Albany is 4-5-0-4 and ranks 14th in the East with a .462.

Broadcasts: Time Warner Cable Channel 98, WHTK-AM (1280).

Team website: amerks.com.

When goals suddenly become an elusive entity and losses come with unexpected regularity, the players counted on to fuel the offense need to do just that.

Rochester Americans coach Ron Rolston, however, wasn't necessarily pointing the finger of expectations at guys like Mark Mancari, Phil Varone or Kevin Porter.

"I'll take anybody scoring, I don't care who it is," Rolston said after a Thanksgiving morning practice at Blue Cross Arena at the Rochester Community War Memorial, where his team plays the Albany Devils at 7:05 p.m. Friday.

If it sounds as though there is just a slight sense of urgency in Rolston's voice, it's because there is. The Amerks have dropped two straight 3-2 decisions (to Abbotsford at home and at Binghamton), and are just 2-4 in the past six games.

All four losses are by one goal, and the Amerks scored a total of just eight goals in those games.

That's why their record has dipped to 8-6-1-0 and why they have tumbled to fourth place in the North Division and eighth in the Western Conference.

Mancari has been one of the American Hockey League's most consistent scorers in the past four seasons, averaging 30 goals and barely under a point a game. However, he has gone eight games without a goal and has just one assist in the past six games.

Varone led the Amerks in scoring last season as a rookie (11 goals, 41 assists, 52 points in 76 games), and all but six assists came over the final four months (11-35-46 in 53 games). He has 2-3-5 in 13 games this season (1-0-1 in five games this month).

Porter scored a goal in Binghamton but that was his first in six games (5-6-11 on the season).

"There's a lot of players that probably aren't happy with their production," Rolston said.

What won't spur goals is worrying more about it, though.

"As soon as you start panicking there's going to be a snowball effect," Varone said. "There are a lot of talented guys on this team."

The Amerks were given credit for 51 shots in Saturday's loss at Binghamton, and while that number may have been a bit inflated, they did have plenty of goal-mouth pressure in front of goalie Robin Lehner.

They also had good chances against Abbotsford, like when Marcus Foligno was shooting at an empty net to give the Amerks a 2-0 lead but somehow didn't score. Goalie Leland Irving made a desperation lunge and stopped the shot, but Rolston was quite clear that Foligno can't give the goalie a chance to get to it.

"We need to finish better," Rolston said.

That's especially true on the power play. The Amerks were 10-for-33 (30.3 percent) in the first five games but are just 6-for-45 (13.3 percent) over the past 10 games.

"Teams Watch video so we need to adjust too," Porter said. "We just have to start moving the puck quicker and get shots to the net."

Rolston would say they need to get more of those shots in the net.

Democrat and Chronicle LOADED: 11.23.2012

644702 Calgary Flames

Alzner frustrated as NHL lockout drags on

By Scott Cruickshank,

This is something Karl Alzner has previously experienced, only on a smaller scale.

"You ever tried selling something on Craigslist and the guy doesn't want to bargain with you?" he says. "I had a guy offer me 700 bucks for a \$1,300 bike one time. I said, 'Are you kidding me? How am I supposed to bargain with you? No sale.'"

Alzner's point being, negotiations are impossible unless both sides are willing to dicker.

And, in the mind of the Washington Capitals defenceman, the National Hockey League is refusing to meaningfully participate in any of its dealings with the NHL Players' Association.

"The only part that bugs me? The whole (perception) of give-and-take, give-and-take, on both sides," says Alzner. "It's mainly just us that's giving, and owners taking. We think that it's fair in our eyes. There's not a whole lot else that we can do if they're not willing to accept an offer that we think is good. You have to say, 'Oh well, let us know when you want to.'"

So here they are, stalemated.

The former Calgary Hitman is asked for his thoughts about Wednesday's proposal by the NHLPA — and the NHL's subsequent underwhelming response.

"Honestly? I don't even have thoughts anymore," says Alzner, with a chuckle. "I kind of let it happen. I'm kind of like a lot of the reporters and radio guys now — 'Let me know when it's done.' I know the right thing's going to get done in the end. I'm just waiting for it to happen, I guess."

So it was, on Day 68 of the NHL's latest lockout, Alzner and a still-significant contingent of players were dashing around WinSport's Ice Complex.

Half of the 20 or so in attendance Thursday morning were members of the Calgary Flames. But after the on-ice session, Jarome Iginla and Michael Cammalleri, simultaneously playing the nothing-positive-to-say card, declined interview requests.

Unhappiness appears to be membership-wide these days.

You have active players referring to NHL leaders as "idiots" and as "cancers."

"I think it's mainly frustration," says Alzner. "After a while, you just start saying things off the cuff. You don't necessarily think them through. Whether that's something you say in your basement with your buddies or out in the media, it's what you feel. Guys are getting frustrated on both sides, and we're the only ones who are allowed to speak. The owners aren't.

"You won't hear me call anyone names. At least, not in the media."

You have Roman Hamrlik griping about the lack of a deal, about the salary lost, about the leadership of Donald Fehr — and you have Erik Cole hotly firing back.

"The first thought that came into my head is knowing Roman and knowing what he's like," Alzner says of his Caps teammate. "I just had to laugh. Roman's the kind of guy that just takes it as it comes. He says what's on his mind. Whether he thinks it through all the time is another story. He just says it. If he doesn't like practice, he lets you know. If he doesn't like what you did in the game, he lets you know. I think it's just frustration setting in."

You have the word "decertification" poking up its head.

"Before anything like that happens, we have to be well aware of what it means for us and for the union," says Alzner. "I can't comment too much on it. I don't know enough about it to say it's good or bad.

"But you know what? I like the union."

C-NOTES: Friday, the QMJHL Gatineau Olympiques are retiring the (No. 20) jersey of Martin Gelin, currently assistant coach of the Flames. In 132 games with the Olympiques, Gelin managed to pile up 250 points.

Calgary Herald: LOADED: 11.23.2012

644703 Columbus Blue Jackets

NHL lockout: All-Star Game expected to be axed today

Staff

The NHL came to the Blue Jackets' rescue on Jan. 28 when it awarded Columbus the 2013 All-Star Game. On the very day the league awarded it, scores of fans were gathered outside Nationwide Arena to protest the direction of the franchise, which was mired in last place and on the verge of a major roster overhaul.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 11.23.2012

644704 Dallas Stars

Stardate: Nov. 23, 2011 - Ott in OT helps Stars top eventual Cup winner

SportsDayDFW.com

A series of Stars games and moments that happened on a specific date. The following appeared in the Nov. 24, 2011 editions of The Dallas Morning News.

The Stars were 30 seconds from losing some positive momentum Wednesday when a concerted effort stole a 3-2 overtime victory against the Los Angeles Kings.

Stars associate coach Willie Desjardins designed the perfect power-play chance with less than half a minute left in regulation, allowing the Stars to tie it. Steve Ott then scored the game-winner in overtime.

Dallas called a timeout before a faceoff at the offensive blue line with time running down in regulation, and Desjardins drew up the play. Ott won a faceoff forward to Jamie Benn. Benn then found Loui Eriksson with a perfect pass going to the net, and Eriksson flipped in his 10th goal of the season to tie it 2-2 with 20.3 seconds remaining.

In overtime, overtime, Mike Ribeiro then took a huge hit to get a puck to Stephane Robidas. Robidas rushed up ice and found Ott charging the net, and Ott popped in his fourth goal of the season.

The victory was huge for the Stars, who had lost two previous games to the Kings this season. Dallas moves to 13-8-0 with 26 points, while the Kings are 11-7-4, also good for 26 points.

The Stars carried momentum from Monday's 4-1 win over Edmonton into Wednesday's game and tried to build on it. Despite missing captain Brenden Morrow with an upper body injury, Dallas had a physical and well-planned effort.

If not for Kings goalie Jonathan Quick and a few well-placed posts, the Stars might have taken a first period lead and changed how the game was played. As it was, though, they came out on fire in the second period, threw everything they could at Quick and the Kings, and then let it all slip a way in a few key moments.

Ott turned the puck over and, just like that, Mike Richards was open in the slot for the Kings. The red-hot center somehow willed a puck under Kari Lehtonen, and picked up his 10th goal of the season for a 1-0 lead at the 4:53 mark.

That would have been a forgivable transgression, especially since Dallas was playing with confidence. However, during the next shift, the Stars again made a dangerous play that ended up in their net. As the checking line was tracking back, Radek Dvorak tried to swipe a puck out of the slot. Instead, he sent it straight to Kings grinder Kevin Westgarth, and Westgarth snapped a shot over Lehtonen's glove. In a span of 38 seconds, the game completely turned around.

The Stars then put on a fantastic push in the third period. Benn scored his sixth goal of the season at the 2:07 mark to make it 2-1 and get the crowd back into the game. Eric Nystrom had a huge role in the goal as the gritty winger was holding the puck against the offensive boards and waiting for a line change. Nystrom beat a couple of Kings and carried the puck around the boards, then found Benn charging into the offensive zone. Benn unleashed a shot that was stopped. He then collected the rebound and lifted a second shot over Quick.

That set up a huge push by the Stars for the remainder of the game.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 11.23.2012

644705 Detroit Red Wings

Gustav Nyquist scoring points with Red Wings thanks to his strong play in AHL

By Helene St. James

Gustav Nyquist enters this weekend's games ranked sixth in American Hockey League scoring, reinforcing why Red Wings management thinks so highly of him.

Nyquist dominated in the league last season as well, when he wasn't impressing at the NHL level, but this season he's pitted against exceptional talent in the scoring race. The lockout that's shuttered the NHL since Sept. 16 has prompted every club to place every skilled, waiver-exempt young

player in the minors, meaning Nyquist is competing against guys like Justin Schultz, Jordan Eberle, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Brayden Schenn.

As the Grand Rapids Griffins prepare for three games in three nights, Nyquist is tied for sixth in the scoring race with 17 points in 14 games. Nyquist's eight goals and 17 points rank first on the Griffins, who have won six straight games.

Nyquist, 23, would be with the Wings were they playing, but the NHL already has wiped out games through November and is expected to cancel games through mid-December today.

What's encouraging for the Wings is that Nyquist is following up a stellar rookie season with the Griffins, which came after three standout years at the University of Maine.

"The thing that I like about Gus, he seems to do it year in and year out," general manager Ken Holland said.

Nyquist finished his freshman season as Hockey East's rookie of the year runner-up, led his team in scoring each of his three seasons and then produced 58 points in 56 games last season in his first full year with Grand Rapids. Many players can shine once, but only the true talents deliver season after season.

"He produces points consistently, year in and year out," Holland said. "He plays hard. He's got high hockey IQ. The team we've got in Grand Rapids, it's a young league, but we have a real young team. Looking at the guys who make it go, it's guys in early 20s, and Gus is one of those guys."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 11.23.2012

644706 Edmonton Oilers

Meet the Assembly Line: Nugent-Hopkins, Eberle and Hall are scoring chance machines

David Staples

Trio cranks it up once again in Oklahoma City Barons win in Texas on Wednesday

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle are all scoring chance machines, cranking out excellent opportunities to score at a rapid rate, first in the National Hockey League and now during the lock-out in the American Hockey League.

They were in fine from against Texas in a 6-4 Oklahoma City Barons win on Wednesday night, RNH chipping in on nine scoring chances, Hall and Eberle seven each.

With so many chances to score, it's little wonder that Eberle is second in AHL scoring, with 21 points in 16 games. RNH is fourth, with 19 points in 15 games. Hall, having missed half the team's games due to injury, has 9 points in 8 games, and is shooting up the rankings.

Their production is so consistent and efficient, I'm going to suggest this trio be known as the Assembly Line.

Last season, Hall and Eberle each put up more than five scoring chances per game in Edmonton, RNH a touch less than that. This year, not unexpectedly, they are even getting more chances as they play weaker competition in the American Hockey League.

The slick Justin Schultz leads the Barons in scoring chances per game, with 115 contributions to chances in 16 games, 7.2 per game. Eberle and RNH are next best with 6.8 chances per game each, then Hall, 6.5 chances per game.

Now I know that my colleague Bruce McCurdy has often called this line the Pipe Line, and maybe that's going to stick. But I'm going to go with this Assembly Line moniker for a bit. Maybe it'll catch, though my record in this regard isn't the best, having called Dustin Penner the Flying Fridge for years, with little take-up.

Oh well.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 11.23.2012

644707 Florida Panthers

Miami Marlins, Florida Panthers cannot get out of their adolescent phase

By DAVID J. NEAL

The Marlins and Panthers remind me of a line from sports mogul and lifelong rich guy Lamar Hunt.

Hunt, who eschewed extravagance, said he owned only one pair of shoes because, "You can only wear a single pair at a time. The rest sit there, depreciating."

That's the Marlins and Panthers.

They sit on the sidelines, literally for the moment and in the South Florida sports scene now, depreciating in interest (if not value).

If I need to recount the Marlins' most recent kneecapping of trust, you're probably reading this only because you flipped to the wrong section and thought the balding dark head above was Leonard Pitts (I apologize for your disappointment).

The NHL lockout has stalled the Panthers' momentum from last spring's first playoff berth since 2000 and plucky seven-game loss to eventual Stanley Cup finalist New Jersey.

This period, which should be their adulthood, epitomizes the perpetual adolescence in which these franchises arrest themselves.

To call either franchise "young" or to say "It still feels weird for there to be Marlins/Panthers," brands you as middle-aged or old.

The Marlins just finished their 20th season.

The Panthers would be playing their 20th season if not for the current NHL lockout.

And the NHL lockout that eliminated the 2004-05 season.

That means to those 20 and under, here and everywhere, the Marlins and Panthers have existed for as much of their lives as Red Sox and Red Wings.

Especially in the latter case, the only way they know differently is musty media types repeating, "It still feels weird ..."

Their fandom should be flowering.

The 20-to-30 set who were taken to Marlins and Panthers games as kids should now be going on their own, perhaps taking their own young children.

Fandom should be being passed down.

In South Florida, our wavering passion for our local teams isn't that we have too many transplants.

It's that, with one exception, our franchises have just hit the stage upon which they can call upon tradition.

The Dolphins benefitted from being the only pro game in town, getting very good relatively quickly (Super Bowl appearance in season No. 6), historically great soon after (Perfect Season followed by a second consecutive Super Bowl win) and staying consistently good for all but a few years of the 26-season Shula Era.

That built a mighty fan foundation cracked only by the current decade of failure.

By every measure, we have been a terrible basketball market, NBA and college.

Our most consistently successful franchise of the past 15 seasons on the record, the Heat, dropped the tarp over its upper deck for many games in 2002-03 and 2003-04.

Even the Shaq Era, the omnipresence of activist/center Alonzo Mourning and iconic figure Pat Riley couldn't cultivate a fan base that would sustain interest through dark years (or year — see, 2007-08).

It has taken more success and the buzz of combining two of this NBA generations biggest stars, Dwyane Wade and LeBron James, for the Heat to build what it would have long before had in most other cities.

But the Heat did it.

Meanwhile, the other team in town that has won two "world" championships damaged itself with two eras of uncompetitive austerity, 1998-2002 and 2006-2011.

marlins don't care

That first run of years, in the wake of the 1997 World Series team sell-off, began with the 1998 Mark McGwire/Sammy Sosa/record Yankees season that brought baseball almost a full recovery from killing the 1994 World Series.

The Marlins couldn't drink of that elixir.

Two stretches of playing it cheap while hustling for a new home held the line on Marlins fans.

How do you maintain a love for a team that doesn't seem to care about repaying your love by making you happy with wins?

At some point, even kids shake their heads and say, "Can't hang with you."

And, now, whether they have abused fan trust again, it feels like it.

How many years for this stunting of growth?

Cats can't be embraced

The Panthers did theirs through sheer ineptitude — bad drafts and bad trades, leading to an NHL-record 10 consecutive seasons out of the playoffs.

Ice rinks were built, expanded. Travel teams win tournaments around North America.

High schools added hockey.

Some kids and adults who didn't play learned the rules and NHL stars via video games.

Yet the Panthers repeatedly stumbled away from that generation's embrace.

Now, the NHL and NHL players' association are doing the stumbling for them.

Only two franchises in our so-called major leagues, the Chicago Cubs and the NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs, can have extended runs of abysmal play without hurting attendance or local status.

Everyone else is three to six losing seasons from humility.

The Marlins and Panthers are well past that, just as they should be well past being South Florida sports problem children.

This failure to launch stuff is tired.

Miami Herald LOADED: 11.23.2012

644708 Montreal Canadiens

Habs' owner Molson optimistic about season

By Dave Stubbs,

MONTREAL — In a manner of speaking, Canadiens owner Geoff Molson was locked out of his own arena on Thursday.

Or at least from giving blood at his hockey club's 31st annual clinic, run in concert with Héma-Québec.

Molson's extended stay in France more than 20 years ago still disqualifies him from donating blood based on long-standing caution about the transmission through transfusion of Variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease, also known as mad cow.

So Molson walked the floor of the Bell Centre on Thursday morning, chatting with donors while unable to roll up his own sleeve. It's not as though he wasn't in the middle of a bloody mess anyway, his Canadiens and 29 other NHL teams in their 68th day of a lockout that's shut down the league.

Before Molson strolled the covered ice surface of his arena and then was scrummed by reporters, the clinic continuing throughout the day with visits by team alumni and management staff, we spoke alone for 15 minutes within view of the Canadiens dressing room. On a wall that should feature his team's 2012-13 team photo was his marketing department's illustration of a huge flaming torch.

"I'm a glass-half-full guy and I try to be that way all the time," Molson said. "I'm not in the room negotiating and I won't comment on that anyway. But I believe that we'll get back to playing and I'm looking forward to that day."

"In my heart, I hope we are. There's no question, it's difficult for everybody. More than half the people who work at the Bell Centre are on a four-day week and to some people, every day matters. This impacts everyone. It's part of our life and culture, especially in Montreal and other big markets. Everybody wants us to be on the ice."

I tell Molson that every Canadiens player I've spoken with since the lockout began Sept. 15 believes that the Habs owner isn't one of the hawks who has had no problem padlocking the game, but rather is one who wants to be playing hockey.

"Of course, yes," he replied with a thin smile, and the answer wouldn't go a syllable further.

It's not written as much as understood that Canadiens management is not in contact with players during the lockout. Not long ago, Molson said, he saw a few Canadiens at the Montreal premiere of the hockey film *The Last Gladiators*.

"We said hello," he recalled. "You could read (their thoughts) in their eyes, and they could read (mine) in my eyes, too."

"You stay away. I respect all of our players greatly and I can't wait to see them get back on the ice together. But out of respect for them, and I think they have the same respect for me, we just keep our distance for now."

That said, Molson follows many of his players "from a distance" through Twitter social media and, despite some intensely spirited bursts by a few, "I'm pretty proud of the fact they're staying together. They're a group of people who like to be together, and that's a good sign for a team."

It's also from at least arm's length that Molson is watching the league's turching negotiations with the NHLPA, a glacial charge toward a new collective bargaining agreement. He is not part of commissioner Gary Bettman's inner circle, a small group of owners who form the committee in talks with the players.

But Molson wants Canadiens fans to know this, saying that every owner has input in negotiations:

"I am there behind the scenes and I'm very well informed and very much in touch with people at the NHL as well as the people on the committee," he said. "And I feel comfortable with the involvement. By interfering in the process (by speaking publicly), it might prolong it or make it even worse."

"Gary's in charge of our league, he's doing a good job and it's a process that is underway that I'm not going to get involved with publicly."

Of course, there is no shortage of advice Molson hears from fans, the owner seated in arena stands for his three sons' hockey games and the father of a figure-skating daughter. Further, he plays beer-league hockey himself as often as a few times a week as a spare for three teams; those dressing rooms are hardly demure places.

"I have a stock answer because I need to respect the (negotiation) process, but I have a good sense of how people are feeling right now, based on conversations at rinks," he said.

"The exciting thing for me when we do get on the ice is that I've got a brand new management team and coaching staff, some new players and some young kids coming up who are pretty exciting. Like every fan, we're all anxious for it."

As owner of the third-busiest arena in North America, Molson is luckier than some of his counterparts, his own building not as dark as some. His Evenko concert-promotion arm is working furiously to plug in if not the monstrous touring shows that are scheduled many months in advance, then smaller acts.

"It's not like you call up Madonna and say: 'Two weeks of the hockey schedule has been cancelled, can you come put on a show for us?' " he said lightly.

There are a million things Molson seems to want to say, and he stops after about a dozen.

But he does accept an offer to speak here directly to fans, pausing a full 15 seconds to consider his thoughts.

Finally:

"If there are fans out there who think for a moment that I don't respect them, hopefully they understand that I do. I look forward to bringing this team back on the ice for them as much as they look forward to watching our team.

"And I'll do everything I can to make sure we come back in style and the right way."

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 11.23.2012

644709 Montreal Canadiens

Habs owner Molson remains a glass-half-full guy

Posted by Stu Cowan

Canadiens owner Geoff Molson attended the Canadiens' 31st annual blood-donor clinic on Thursday morning at the Bell Centre and spoke alone with The Gazette's Dave Stubbs for 15 minutes before he circulated among donors and was scammed by the media at large. While Molson wouldn't comment directly about the ongoing lockout and labour discussions, he did have some interesting things to say.

"I'm a glass-half-full guy and I try to be that way all the time," Molson told Stubbs. "I'm not in the room negotiating and I won't comment on that anyway. But I believe that we'll get back to playing and I'm looking forward to that day.

"In my heart, I hope we are. There's no question, it's difficult for everybody. More than half the people who work at the Bell Centre are on a four-day week and to some people, every day matters. This impacts everyone. It's part of our life and culture, especially in Montreal and other big markets. Everybody wants us to be on the ice."

Molson added that every NHL owner has input in the labour negotiations and had a message for frustrated Canadiens fans on Day 68 of the lockout.

"If there are fans out there who think for a moment that I don't respect them, hopefully they understand that I do. I look forward to bringing this team back on the ice for them as much as they look forward to watching our team.

"And I'll do everything I can to make sure we come back in style and the right way."

- Stubbs's full column.
- Pierre Obendrauf video of Geoff Molson at Habs blood-donor clinic today

Meanwhile, Thomas Boswell of the Washington Post wrote an interesting column about the NHL lockout under the headline: "Owners shouldn't underestimate the Fehr factor". You can read the column by clicking here.

And Roman Hamlik talked with James Mirtle of The Globe and Mail about his controversial lockout comments, saying he wasn't taking his comments back but will support whatever the players decide.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 11.23.2012

644710 Montreal Canadiens

Geoffrion happy to be home; Bulldogs sign Commodore

Posted by Stu Cowan

The Canadiens sent out a press release on Thursday with a statement from Blake Geoffrion, who suffered a serious head injury while playing for the Hamilton Bulldogs in an AHL game against the Syracuse Crunch on Nov. 9 at the Bell Centre. Geoffrion was rushed to hospital and had surgery that night for a depressed skull fracture.

"I want to sincerely thank all fans, friends, family members and everyone from the hockey world for the incredible support I have received," Geoffrion said. "I was cleared by the neurosurgeon and the club's medical staff to return home for a three-week period of complete rest. I am very happy to be home for (U.S.) Thanksgiving.

"I would like to thank Dr. Mulder and the club's medical staff, as well as the entire medical personnel at the Montreal General Hospital for their extraordinary care. I am very grateful to Geoff Molson and Marc Bergevin for the unrelenting support they have shown myself and the members of my family. I also wish to thank all members of the media for respecting this healing period."

Meanwhile, the Bulldogs announced on Thursday that they have signed veteran defenceman Mike Commodore to a professional tryout contract. As per club policy, financial terms were not disclosed.

Commodore, 33, has spent parts of 11 seasons in the NHL with the New Jersey Devils, Calgary Flames, Carolina Hurricanes, Ottawa Senators, Columbus Blue Jackets, Detroit Red Wings and Tampa Bay Lightning. In 484 regular-season games, the 6-foot-4, 225-pound defenceman has registered 106 points (23 goals, 83 assists) and 683 penalty minutes.

In 2004, Commodore was part of the Flames team that advanced to the Stanley Cup final before losing in seven games to the Lightning. In 2006, the Fort Saskatchewan, Alta., native won the Cup with the Hurricanes when they beat the Edmonton Oilers in seven games.

Commodore could provide some veteran leadership and toughness to a young Bulldogs defence corps. The Bulldogs' next game is Sunday at 4 p.m. against the Lake Erie Monsters at Hamilton's Copps Coliseum.

The Bulldogs (6-7-2) are coming off a 2-1 win over the St. John's IceCaps Wednesday night in St. John's, N.L. Goalie Cedrick Desjardins made 29 saves for the victory. The Bulldogs managed only two shots on goal in the first period, and didn't get their third shot until midway through the second. Michael Blunden and Steve Quailer scored for Hamilton.

In Toronto this week, a Maple Leafs fan paid \$5,300 for an old toilet from the team's locker room at Maple Leaf Gardens. This should give hockey fans who dislike Toronto more ammunition for Maple Leafs jokes.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 11.23.2012

644711 Nashville Predators

Nashville Predators prospects are slow to play in AHL

Josh Cooper

When the Predators asked Gabriel Bourque to play for the Milwaukee Admirals during the NHL lockout, the hope was the forward could work on his offense.

When the Predators asked defenseman Ryan Ellis to spend the work stoppage with their American Hockey League affiliate, they hoped he could hone his defensive game.

Through a confluence of injuries and suspensions, both have yet to be on the ice at the same time with the Admirals. Now they're simply looking to get some game action in before the lockout ends and the NHL season starts.

As rookies with the Predators last season, Bourque had 19 points in 43 games while Ellis notched 11 points in 32 games.

"I was coming here with a good attitude and play my game and be in good shape so when the lockout ends I can go to Nashville," Bourque said. "I have to stay focused and stay in good shape and be ready."

The NHL is such a bottom-line league that young players don't have time to improve specific skills. If there was a silver lining to the lockout, it was that some of the younger Predators could go to the AHL and get better.

The 22-year-old Bourque, however, suffered a lower-body injury two games into the season. Ellis, 21, has been on the shelf for all but one game with a broken wrist suffered in the offseason. He made his season debut Tuesday against the Chicago Wolves.

Bourque returned to action last weekend but was suspended two games for an illegal check to the head in Milwaukee's loss to Oklahoma City on Saturday. He has four points in four games.

With the Predators, Bourque sometimes played penalty kill, but was mostly a five-on-five energy-type player. The Admirals have used him on the power play, offensive situations and defensive situations.

The Predators believe that as Bourque develops, they can use him in more roles at the NHL level.

"He still continues to do the things he did from playing in the NHL, kill penalties, work ethic, finishing checks, competing. Now he's on the power play, first line, playing lots of minutes," Admirals coach Dean Evason said. "We want him to develop some scoring ability as a pro."

For Ellis, it's more about returning to full health.

"You ask anyone who has to deal with an injury, they're pretty upset and rattled about it," Ellis said. "I mean, I take it in stride."

Evason said Ellis has gone above and beyond what was asked of him as he recovered.

"Ryan Ellis has been the consummate pro since he got here," Evason said. "You can tell his leadership qualities are tremendous. He has worked hard every day in practice, trains hard off the ice. He's a real good teammate, so we've had absolutely no issues."

The Predators picked Ellis in the first round of the 2009 draft for his puck-moving ability and on-ice vision. Once he returns to full strength, the Predators hope that he can round out the defensive side of his game to go with his various offensive gifts.

"No question, with his size, he will have to work at that end of his game," Evason said. "He knows how to defend. It's now a matter of defending against bigger, stronger men."

Geoffrion says thanks: Former Predators forward Blake Geoffrion, who suffered a skull fracture in a game for the Hamilton Bulldogs in Montreal on Nov. 9, continues to recover from surgery.

Now a prospect with the Montreal Canadiens, Geoffrion, who grew up in Brentwood, issued a statement this week:

"I want to sincerely thank all fans, friends, family members and everyone from the hockey world for the incredible support I have received. I was cleared by the neurosurgeon and the Club's medical staff to return home for a 3-week period of complete rest. I am very happy to be home for Thanksgiving."

Tennessean LOADED: 11.23.2012

644712 New Jersey Devils

N.H.L. Players to Play to Benefit Hurricane Relief Efforts

Staff

The Operation Hat Trick charity game at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City on Saturday night will have a star-laden lineup. All proceeds go to families affected by Hurricane Sandy. The captains, Brad Richards of the Rangers and Scott Hartnell of the Philadelphia Flyers, will lead teams expected to include the following locked-out N.H.L. players who have committed to appear.

"It'll be a real, 60-minute game," Richards said. "The focus will probably be more on the offensive side. But we'll put on a good show for the fans."

New York Times LOADED: 11.23.2012

644713 New Jersey Devils

Devils' Andy Greene has number retired by Michigan high school

Rich Chere/

Devils defenseman Andy Greene had his old high school No. 8 retired yesterday when he returned to Trenton, Mich.

A former captain of the Trenton High hockey team, which won the state championship in 1998, Greene wore No. 8 as opposed to his current No. 6 for the Devils.

Greene was able to attend the ceremony at the Kennedy Recreation Center in Trenton because of the NHL lockout, which entered its 68th day today.

"That's the only positive about the lockout," Greene told those in attendance last night. "Being able to come here tonight and do this and (for everyone to) show the appreciation that they do."

Family members and friends attended the event.

Star Ledger LOADED: 11.23.2012

644714 New Jersey Devils

Bettman's message delivers player unity

By LARRY BROOKS

To hear it from his sympathizers, Gary Bettman is not to blame for the third lockout of his regime. The NHL commissioner, we're supposed to believe, is nothing more than an extraordinarily well-paid messenger for the owners.

If the Board of Governors' intent is to reach a negotiated settlement of the lockout, then either a different message or a different messenger to deliver the message should be on the agenda.

Because, we're told, nothing infuriated the union rank-and-file more on Wednesday when the league rejected the NHL Players' Association's proposal in short order than the commissioner's insinuation the players have been unwilling to engage in serious bargaining.

FACING FEHR: NHLPA chief Donald Fehr looks bemused as he arrives Wednesday for another unproductive meeting with the league, which continues to lock players out.

AP

FACING FEHR: NHLPA chief Donald Fehr looks bemused as he arrives Wednesday for another unproductive meeting with the league, which continues to lock players out.

And nothing through this lockout — in which everyone understands the outcome will be measured only by the scope of player concessions — has united the players more dramatically in support of Don Fehr than the way in which the league two days ago dismissed the union's proposal out of hand.

This was the league essentially confirming Fehr's prophecy. The executive director had told the moderates within the union — of which there are many simply waiting for an offer they can accept so they can return to work and resume their careers — that offering further compromise would not be reciprocated.

The NHLPA proposal reduced the difference in make-whole to \$182 million over five years. That amounts to \$1.213 million a year per team. The difference would be reduced by \$40 million to \$50 million if make-whole for this season is pro-rated.

A million a team and it's non-negotiable on the league side, yet the Canceled-in-Chief's message is that it's the union that is unwilling to negotiate.

The league isn't giving on money, or on contracting issues, either. The moderates on a PA conference call early in the week suggested to Fehr that yielding on economic issues would prompt the league to drop, or at least significantly modify, its requests relating to systemic matters.

The PA leader told the athletes that though that's what everyone but everyone had been telling him, not once had the league signaled its willingness at the bargaining table to relent on those issues.

Fehr is not an "I told you so" guy, but if he were, those are exactly the words he would have used in Wednesday night's conference call with the players. But then, there was no need for him to state the obvious.

There is a growing sense that the union will decertify and file suit against the league in order to force an end to the lockout. Preparation to decertify, as PA leaders have informed the players — and again on Wednesday, with the subject moved to the front-burner — is not mutually exclusive from pursuing a negotiated settlement with the league.

Decertification and going to court is risky business. The situation is not analogous to the 1994 baseball strike that bled into 1995. Some months after cancelation of the 1994 World Series, the owners opted to open spring training with replacement players — scabs by any other name — while unilaterally imposing work rules that would have centralized contract negotiations with the commissioner's office and would have abolished an agreement not to collude on salaries.

That led to an unfair labor practices complaint filed by the National Labor Relations Board that eventually was heard in Federal District Court — in the Southern District of New York — by current Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

Justice Sotomayor's ruling in favor of the players in granting the NLRB injunction against the owners' attempt to institute their own work rules and in ordering reinstatement of the expired collective bargaining agreement led to a quick resolution of that strike.

The NHL is not there yet. The owners have not unilaterally imposed their own work rules. But they sure are trying. And the players don't need Fehr to see that or tell them that.

They can see it and hear it for themselves every time Bettman delivers the league message.

New York Post LOADED: 11.23.2012

644715 New York Rangers

#### N.H.L. Players to Play to Benefit Hurricane Relief Efforts

Staff

The Operation Hat Trick charity game at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City on Saturday night will have a star-laden lineup. All proceeds go to families affected by Hurricane Sandy. The captains, Brad Richards of the Rangers and Scott Hartnell of the Philadelphia Flyers, will lead teams expected to include the following locked-out N.H.L. players who have committed to appear.

"It'll be a real, 60-minute game," Richards said. "The focus will probably be more on the offensive side. But we'll put on a good show for the fans."

New York Times LOADED: 11.23.2012

644716 New York Rangers

#### A Ranger Rolls Up His Sleeves and Takes a Big Role in Hurricane Relief

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

Brad Richards, the son of lobster fishers in Prince Edward Island, joined the Rangers just 17 months ago, but he is definitely a New Yorker now. In the days after Hurricane Sandy, he has been a frequent volunteer in hard-hit parts of the city, gutting flood-damaged homes in Queens and helping to organize a benefit hockey clinic on Staten Island.

It is work he has let others speak for, work he has not wanted treated like a celebrity photo opportunity. On Saturday, Richards will help make a public contribution, serving as a team captain in a charity game in Atlantic City to benefit families affected by the hurricane. Called Operation Hat Trick, it will feature a star-studded lineup that includes Martin Brodeur, Henrik Lundqvist, Daniel Alfredsson and Steven Stamkos.

In terms of talent, it will almost certainly be the best hockey game played in North America during the N.H.L. lockout. The proceeds will go to the Empire State Relief Fund, New Jersey Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund and the American Red Cross.

Several local professional teams have raised money for Hurricane Sandy relief, through donations, auctions, community events or volunteer work. But with the N.H.L. lockout separating teams and their players, Richards, his teammates and others are doing relief work and organizing events without the operational support of a club or league.

The game in Atlantic City was organized by Todd Fedoruk, a former Flyer, and Richards was a natural fit.

Richards, whose apartment in TriBeCa escaped damage from the storm, said this was "what anyone in my position should do."

"We're using what we do to help," he added. "People are coming in from all over North America and even from Europe to play, to do something that really matters."

A coveted free agent in 2011, Richards signed with the Rangers for nine years and \$60 million, saying he wanted to prove himself in a big market and to play closer to his family in eastern Canada. "I love being in New York, and I love the whole area," said Richards, who previously played in Tampa Bay and Dallas. "And to be able to help out, that's just perfect."

Though he has used his Twitter feed as a platform to promote the needs of the affected communities, he is reluctant to draw attention to his own work. He agreed to an interview this week to talk about the Atlantic City game on condition that he not be asked about his other volunteer work.

The Rangers were looking for that type of leadership when they pursued him. Those who have worked alongside Richards are less reserved. Matthew Long, a retired New York firefighter, lost his Breezy Point home in a fire and learned that Richards wanted to help. Long told Richards that his own home was beyond repair, but others could be salvaged.

"Brad told me, 'I just want to come down there and work,'" Long said. "He said, 'I don't want any Rangers paraphernalia, I'm not going to have any media follow me. If someone knows who I am and I bring a smile to their face, great. If not, I'd rather make them smile just helping people.'"

Richards was joined by his Rangers teammates Marian Gaborik, whose TriBeCa home is still a month or more from being habitable because of storm damage, and Steve Eminger in gutting flood-damaged houses on a crew that included a pharmaceutical salesman, a policeman, a fireman and a financial worker. Using sledgehammers and crowbars, they spent a day earlier this month gutting two Breezy Point homes submerged in three to four feet of water down to the frame.

Richards asked to come back another day, so Long organized a similar expedition to clean up two more homes in Belle Harbor in the Rockaways.

"We talked about living in New York and how much he loves it and wants to stay here after his playing days are over," Long said.

Last week Richards helped on Staten Island, thanks to a suggestion from Steve Rose, a policeman he knows from Lower Manhattan whose son plays on the St. Joseph by-the-Sea hockey team in the borough.

They organized a skating clinic at a rink in Staten Island's Tottenville section, and Richards brought along his teammates Gaborik, Eminger, Ryan Callahan, Brian Boyle, Carl Hagelin, Dan Girardi, Marc Staal, Anton Stralman, Jeff Halpern and Taylor Pyatt.

"The response we got from the people of Staten Island was just incredible," Rose said. "We raised over \$14,000 in a four-hour span. It was just phenomenal."

After the clinic, Richards, Eminger, Gaborik, Hagelin, Girardi and Callahan went to the Yellow Hook Grille in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, which is owned by Long's brother, to serve as bartenders at another Hurricane Sandy benefit. The bar was packed, and the players stayed until midnight, raising \$15,000.

"To be honest, it was unbelievable," Long said. "The place was so crowded, and the guys worked alongside the bartenders the whole time, signing autographs, shaking hands. The chants — 'Let's go, Rangers,' 'We want the Cup' — it was so loud. It was a night to remember."

New York Times LOADED: 11.23.2012

644717 NHL

Exasperated Ryan Miller heartily endorses decertification of union

JAMES MIRTLE

Ryan Miller wanted to make it clear he was speaking only for himself.

But the Buffalo Sabres' goaltender also wanted his name attached to his comments and to take a stand on the controversial subject of decertifying the National Hockey League Players' Association as the next step in the lockout.

He is for it, and he doesn't mind explaining why.

"After watching the other sport leagues go through labour disputes last year, it is apparent that until decertification is filed, there will not be any real movement or negotiation," Miller wrote in an e-mail to The Globe and Mail. "Many things in our negotiation are very consistent with the NFL and NBA negotiations, and both of those leagues filed papers necessary to decertify.

"It seems like the players in any league are going to be subjected to the same scripted labour dispute developed by [NHL and NBA law firm] Proskauer Rose in all collective bargaining discussions now and in the future. Decertification becomes part of the script because Gary Bettman and the owners are trying to get a sense of how far they can push us and at some point we have to say 'enough.'

"They want to see if we will take a bad deal because we get desperate or if we have the strength to push back. Decertification is a push back and should show we want a negotiation and a fair deal on at least some of our terms."

Decertification – essentially the dissolution of the union – has been discussed by NHLPA members under executive director Donald Fehr going back to at least September, but it was believed to be a last resort.

The move would open the door to either push for an injunction to end the lockout, or an antitrust lawsuit, avenues the NFL and NBA players pursued last year during their labour stoppages.

But NHL players, in general, have been defensive of their union. The notion of tearing the PA down has struck about half of the membership as too militant an option. At least, it did until the owners summarily rejected what the players believed was a significant proposal on Wednesday in New York.

"This is going to galvanize them," one member on the players' side said.

Outside observers of the lockout are surprised the players didn't contemplate decertification earlier than this week. Nathaniel Grow, a sports labour law expert from the University of Georgia, has written extensively on the process, including an article this year titled Decertifying Players' Unions: Lessons from the NFL and NBA Lockouts.

He explained that NHL players would gain multiple options after decertifying, whether short term (an injunction to end the lockout or even just better their negotiating position) or long term (financial damages as the result of an antitrust suit).

"Unless the NHLPA really think they're going to get a deal here in the next two weeks, the downside to dissolving the union isn't that great," Grow said. "It seems like they're at the point where they're about to exhaust the benefits of unionism. You have to start more seriously questioning if you need a game changer here to reshape the balance of power in negotiations."

The case law resulting from professional athletes pushing for injunctions or antitrust claims remains up for debate, Grow added, and the uncharted areas could be where NHL players – who would then be led by legal counsel instead of a union – find leverage.

Whether it makes sense for professional athletes to have a union at all is also now a point for debate after the mess negotiations have become in the NFL, NBA and NHL in the past 18 months.

"A lot of academic commentators would tell you it's the leagues that really want the unions," Grow said. "Because under U.S. law ... they can violate federal antitrust laws in ways that they couldn't if the players weren't unionized. Normally, under antitrust laws principles, a salary cap would be illegal."

Despite increasing talk of decertification, there remains room for the NHL and its players to negotiate to save what would be a roughly 65-game season.

The NHLPA's latest proposal put the two sides only \$182-million (U.S.) apart over the next five years, and in their meeting, Fehr indicated to Bettman that there was room to negotiate off their concepts. So if the league makes the next offering and there are aspects the players can get behind, there may yet be hope for all involved.

Miller, however, is skeptical, and he has some company among his fellow veteran players, many of whom lived through the full season lockout in 2004-05. They don't see a willing negotiating partner on the other side – players at Wednesday's meeting complained that the owners in attendance showed little interest in their proposal – or a just resolution without more drastic action.

Despite the fact that every day without an agreement is another chunk off his substantial contract, Miller said this week he wants to fight the good fight, one that can strengthen the players' ability to bargain long term and eliminate the lockouts and ultimatums from ownership every seven years.

If decertification is the way to do that, then so be it.

"I am tired of the disregard and the ego," Miller said. "Our fans and sponsors are alienated, and this is hurting the game. This process has more of the appearance of brand suicide than a negotiation."

Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.23.2012

644718 NHL

Hamrlik's comments put him in middle of NHL lockout firestorm

JAMES MIRTLE

He has become the latest player at the centre of the NHL's nasty lockout, now in nearly its 70th day.

Roman Hamrlik. Former first overall pick. Current 38-year-old Washington Capitals defenceman watching the last year of his contract fritter away in the third lockout of his career.

A Czech language interview with Hamrlik published by Greg Wyshynski of Yahoo! Sports on Wednesday became the story of the day, as the veteran NHLer said he was "disgusted," called out union leader Donald Fehr and wanted to put the league's proposal to a vote.

"If half of players say let's play, then they should sign new CBA," Hamrlik said. "If there is no season he should leave and we will find someone new. Time is our enemy."

The comments sparked widespread outrage from his fellow NHLPA members, with the most prominent of that coming from Erik Cole, who called it "The most selfish thing I've heard during the lockout."

On Thursday, Hamrlik said in an interview with The Globe and Mail that while he wasn't taking back his comments, he also wants it made known he will support whatever the players decide.

His frustration, however, is over the 130 or so games (and counting) he has lost in his 20-year career to labour disputes.

"This is nothing against any of the players," Hamrlik said. "I stand with them. We are all together in this. And we want a great deal. A fair deal. Everybody's losing in this right now. Owners, players, fans."

"The fans are the reason for hockey. Some cities won't be able to recover their fans for future seasons. I just want to say I've been in the league for 20 years and faced three lockouts and there's only 14 other guys that have done that. I believe I've earned the right to say what I think."

"If someone thinks I'm selfish, I may be, but it's selfish to play hockey. Like everybody else, I want to win the Cup with the Capitals, or at least have a chance."

As for his comments on Fehr, Hamrlik recanted slightly, saying that for now he backed the NHLPA leader but that he wished negotiations had started in January instead of July.

"About Fehr, I just think time is against us," he said. "We need the solution. I think this is a fight between two groups that have too much pride.

"I still support Fehr, but we the players we need to push him more to get the best deal possible, as soon as possible. That's what I think... How many more weeks, how many more months can we wait?"

Hamrlik has apparently been a bit of a lone wolf throughout this lockout. Several players and agents pointed out Thursday that he has been making similar comments about taking a deal in private the past few months.

One said that he explained to Hamrlik how the 2004-05 lockout led almost directly to him signing a \$22-million, four-year deal in 2007, a contract that likely would not have been available had the league's early offer of a very low salary cap been accepted early in negotiations.

While his comments haven't made Hamrlik many friends on the players' side of things, many fans have taken them up to mean at least one player has come to his senses and is willing to settle.

It remains to be seen if those on the ownership side view them as evidence of the players potentially "cracking" with negotiations at a critical point.

Here are a few more of Hamrlik's thoughts on the situation:

- On Cole's comments: "I don't have anything against Cole. I mean he's a good guy. He has his opinion like everybody else, but I'm a little bit disappointed about what he said. I think he's got three years left on his contract and I'm sure he got a nice signing bonus this summer so he didn't sacrifice anything. I've been in the league for 20 years."

- On other players feeling like he does: "They should. Like I said, I'm standing behind Fehr, but we want to play hockey. Everybody should be mad. I'm frustrated. I'm disappointed. We signed Fehr because he's the best and we believed him so get the deal done. In 2004, there was some dirty politics, I would say, people went behind Bob Goodenow's back and everybody lost. Now we're in almost the same situation."

- On if he's worried he may have played his last game in the NHL: "In 2004, 241 players were lost to the lockout. I mean, I can sacrifice. But like I said, this is my third lockout. I think I've sacrificed a lot. We're all lucky. We're hockey players playing professionally... I'm grateful to play the game. I still have some energy and want to play one or two more years and that's it. But this is for my future. I could be done. I mean, who knows? If I can sign one more year, I'll be lucky."

- On Gary Bettman: "Bettman, he is who he is. I don't like him. But there's no time. We're losing time. If we started in January, we have six, seven months to make a deal... I'm not going against the players. I am with the players. But I'm just talking from my experience. That's all."

Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.23.2012

644719 Ottawa Senators

Lehner leading Ottawa goalie race

by Allen Panzeri

BINGHAMTON, N.Y. — The real test of Robin Lehner's new-found maturity will come when the NHL lockout ends and the Ottawa Senators install Ben Bishop as Craig Anderson's backup.

Because that's what's going to happen.

Statistics matter but money talks: The 26-year-old Bishop has a one-way contract that pays him \$650,000 wherever he plays and Lehner has a two-way contract that pays him \$67,500 in the AHL.

So Bishop will be Anderson's No. 2 and Lehner will remain in Binghamton.

Then we'll see whether the 21-year-old Lehner falls into a pout or stays determined to show the Senators that he deserves, one day, to be their No. 1 goalie.

So far, he has talked a good game and played an even better one, posting a 6-2-1 record with a .945 save percentage and a 1.77 goals-against average, good for fifth in the American Hockey League.

Pretty good on a team that, going into Thursday's game against the Toronto Marlies, had scored as many goals as it had allowed: 34.

That has earned him high praise from Binghamton head coach Luke Richardson, who has had a ringside seat to Lehner's ups-and-downs over the last two seasons, from the high of a Calder Cup win in 2010-11 to the low of a 13-22-1 record last season.

"This year, I think right from the start, he's had a great attitude," said Richardson.

"He's said, 'I don't care if there is a lockout or not, I'm just going to be solid for the whole year, just going to be consistent,' and he's been that.

"And even with his good start, he recognizes that he has a long way to go to have that full, complete season to show everybody that he is a star.

"That's a sign of maturity that he's trying to stay with it.

"It's not, 'Oh, I got off to a great start,' and then try to glide through the season."

Lehner, always forthright and honest, admits that last season was a wake-up call. The positive is that he turned it into a motivation.

"During the summer, I recognized my mistakes last year," he said

"So I worked hard last summer to be in better shape. I tried to learn and grow up a little bit and go forward.

"Yeah, people here were disappointed about last year, but it was a learning experience for a lot of guys, and for me, too.

"You have to go through seasons like that sometimes. A lot of stuff did not go my way. But I've tried to build off that.

"It's all part of a process, and I'm just trying to be calm with it, and take it day by day."

Lehner has also looked good by comparison with Bishop's start, but Richardson says that's misleading.

Bishop arrived here late, just at the start of the season, so he was already behind.

Then, just as he was going to get his first start, he came down with a strep throat. That set him back even more.

Then he unluckily happened to be in net when the Senators were in a scoring drought and playing some of their worst games.

His first start was a 4-0 loss to Manchester on Oct. 28, followed by a 4-2 loss to Norfolk on Nov. 3 that Richardson says should have been 6-0 after the first period.

By his third game, though, Bishop was back to normal, beating Adirondack 5-2 and keeping them off balance all night by handling the puck and firing it back up ice.

He was to make his fourth start Thursday night against the Toronto Marlies (Lehner will start against Syracuse on Friday).

"I feel really good," said Bishop. "In fact, I feel great."

"I've had some good practices and been doing some good conditioning with (goalie coach Rick Wamsley), so hopefully I'll be a step up when the season does start."

If Lehner has to bide his time behind Bishop, it won't be for long. Bishop's contract expires after this season and he'll be a restricted free agent next summer.

That'll give the Senators a chance to rejig their goaltending future, so whatever the two goalies do this season will be very important when report cards are handed out.

Richardson gave Lehner the message when training camp started and he has embraced it.

"When he got to camp, we said to him that we want you to be the guy, but you have to earn it," said Richardson. "Sometimes being a highly touted young star, a prospect, sometimes you maybe take your foot off the pedal.

"I think it's just not knowing that. He's had some ups-and-downs over the first few years. Probably the best of the best was the Calder Cup final and winning the MVP.

"But then there have also been some times when it hasn't gone well, and he probably wasn't in the best shape at that time, and then he had some injury problems, and that takes away from your development. But he's been great this season. He's working hard every day and he's been a leader, too."

And if the lockout doesn't end, Binghamton could end up with one of the better goaltending tandems in the AHL.

"They work well together, they push each other, and they have a good relationship, so it's a nice luxury to have, especially when you have a team that's younger and trying to find its way offensively," said Richardson.

"It gives you a little bit of time to do that."

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 11.23.2012

644720 Ottawa Senators

NHL, youth players team up as northern tour wraps in Whitehorse

by Ken Warren

WHITEHORSE, Yukon – It ended Thursday morning the way it began last Saturday, in the airport of a snow-covered capital of a northern Canadian territory, the temperature outside hovering around the -20 C mark.

After playing the third and final game in the Northern Lights Dream charity tour in Whitehorse Wednesday night – with about 1,800 standing-room only screaming fans jammed into the pine-paneled Takhini Arena – the NHL players on the Northern Lights Dream Tour flew home early Thursday.

Ottawa Senators Chris Phillips, Chris Neil, Marc Methot and Peter Regin, along with Grant Clitsome of the Winnipeg Jets and Dartmouth College grad Jody O'Neil, were expected to make it back to Ottawa around midnight, following layovers in Vancouver and Calgary. Jordan Tootoo went to Kelowna, B.C. Guillaume Latendresse was scheduled to land in Montreal, via Vancouver and Toronto, around 9 p.m.

Senators goaltender Craig Anderson, meanwhile, was preparing for a 24-hour odyssey. After the 8 a.m. flight from Whitehorse to Vancouver, he had a six-hour layover before a flight to Los Angeles. The final leg, to Ft. Lauderdale, was scheduled to leave Los Angeles at midnight, arriving in Florida for breakfast.

On the way to Yellowknife to start the trip Saturday, Anderson flew from Ft. Lauderdale to Washington to Ottawa — cabbage to and from his home "to pick up some winter clothes" — then to Ottawa, Calgary and finally Edmonton, where he joined the rest of the crew.

In Anderson's case, the three-game charity tour was also a three Ocean tour, kissing the Atlantic, the Arctic and the Pacific.

"It is exhausting," Anderson said, as he took off his equipment following Wednesday's game. "You gain three hours or lose three hours (on the way home), however you want to look at it. We did travel a lot of miles getting up this way and getting back, but quite honestly, I wouldn't trade it for the world.

"For anyone who has never experienced (the North), it's worthwhile to do something like this, to see the sights you don't normally see."

That was a common refrain among the players.

"What a great experience for us, the guys are happy," said Latendresse. "I have so much good memories from that trip. If there's ever another one, I will put my name in for sure to come back again. All the travel makes you busy, that's the toughest part, but it was not too bad. The people are so generous."

As was the case at the previous stops in the Northwest Territory communities of Yellowknife, Delina, Norman Wells and Inuvik, children and adults in Whitehorse were clamouring to get a glimpse of NHL players.

Two hours before game time, Charlotte Aube, Jessica Pumphrey and Andrea St. Amand were bundled up against the minus-25 degree weather, standing at the front of the line and waiting to get inside the arena. Aube was holding up a hand-made sign: SENS ARMY, YUKON CHAPTER.

"I want to see the guys from Ottawa," she said. "I'm from Ottawa, our family is from Ottawa and we've had season tickets since Day 1 and we still have

them, even though we've lived up here for the past five years. We're super stoked to see these guys right now."

The line of people behind her extended more than 100 deep. "It's amazing, it's huge, fantastic," said Richard Kosan, who was sporting a Senators toque. "It's great that some of the kids will get to skate with the players on the ice."

As the opening ceremonies concluded, fans in the lounge overlooking the arena were well into the spirit, loudly and proudly singing O Canada.

In the first period, Whitehorse Mustangs peewees and bantams played with the touring NHLers. Midget players shared the big stage in the second period, followed by players from the top level of Whitehorse's adult recreational league in the third. The second intermission included a colourful display of Timbits hockey: A game of nine-on-nine hockey featuring newcomers to the sport, wearing an assortment of bright sweaters.

"You see them on TV and it's like, man, you always kind of wonder 'could I, how would I, do against them?'" said Nigel Sinclair-Eckert, 17, who made small talk with Jordin Tootoo as he was taping his stick before the game and then joined the players on the ice. "It's very cool."

After taking his turn on the ice, 14-year-old Caleb Marsh, standing in the hallway between dressing rooms with his shirt off, was signing an autograph for an eight-year-old girl. "Yup, that's my first one," Marsh said, smiling widely.

Before the game and during the intermissions, the players opened up the dressing room for waves of young autograph seekers, the same routine that played out at the other tour stops.

"For me, it accomplished everything I wanted it to accomplish," said John Chabot, the former NHL player and coach who organized the journey in order to raise money for his First Assist charity and to showcase northern life to the players. "There was no complaining. They knew there would be a lot asked of them and they delivered ten fold."

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 11.23.2012

644721 Ottawa Senators

NHLers to play in charity game for Hurricane Sandy victims

By Don Brennan

Daniel Alfredsson is going to play in another all-star game.

Only this one isn't NHL-sanctioned.

Alfredsson is part of a star-studded cast listed to participate in Operation Hat Trick at Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall Saturday night. The game is a fundraiser in support of families and communities shattered by Hurricane Sandy.

Alfredsson last played three weeks ago, in a charity game held at the Cornwall Civic Complex. He did not accompany the John Chabot-led tour for locked-out NHLers to the Northwest Territories this week, electing to go on a family vacation instead.

While visiting the "World's Favorite Playground," Alfredsson will have some strong playmates.

On Team New York, he'll be reunited with Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist, his assistant captain at the 2012 NHL all-star game in Ottawa.

Other Rangers on his side will be Brad Richards, Marc Staal, Dan Girardi, Bryan Boyle, Jeff Halpern, Steve Eminger and Arron Asham.

Corey Perry and Bobby Ryan (Ducks), James Neal (Penguins), Ville Leino (Sabres), Matt Martin (Islanders) and Mike Komisarek (Leafs) will also represent Team New York.

Headlining Team New Jersey/Philadelphia will be Steven Stamkos (Lightning), Scott Hartnell (Flyers), Martin Brodeur (Devils) and P.K. Subban (Canadiens).

Other members of the squad will be Simon Gagner, Wayne Simmonds, Jody Shelley, Andy Greene, Kimmo Timonen and Braydon Coburn of the

Flyers, David Clarkson of the Devils, Daniel Carcillo of the Blackhawks, James van Riemsdyk of the Leafs, Justin Williams of the Kings, Steve Downie of the Avalanche and John Carlson of the Capitals.

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644722 Ottawa Senators

Dark days for hockey at Scotiabank Place

By Aedan Helmer

Unless the warring NHL and players' union pull a sudden about-face over the U.S. Thanksgiving weekend, hockey-starved fans in the capital won't be getting their fix any time soon.

Scotiabank Place has gone dark on NHL game nights, and will remain that way until Dec. 12 when Senators' top prospect Cody Ceci and the 67's return from nine games on the road.

For those fans who want to keep tabs on the rest of the team's future, options are limited.

Call it a case of bad timing, but for the first time in three years, the Binghamton Senators will not be travelling north across the border for their annual "home" date at Scotiabank Place.

Last November, when the B-Sens hosted the Montreal-affiliate Hamilton Bulldogs for the third straight year, Senators assistant GM Tim Murray said the event "is quickly becoming a tradition that we look forward to hosting yearly for the benefit of both the organization's prospects and our fans in Ottawa."

But a B-Sens news release issued in the summer stated that "due to circumstances unique to this season," the show would not go on.

"Logistically, we decided not to bring a Binghamton game (to SBP) this year because the 67's are here. It wasn't fair play with them," explained Senators president Cyril Leeder Wednesday at a news conference announcing the arena's newest tenant, the new National Basketball League franchise that will share the calendar with both hockey teams next fall.

"We are running a bus trip down (to Binghamton) this weekend for fans, and we are promoting that now where fans get on a bus and go down Saturday and get back after the game."

Leeder poured cold water on the hope of getting B-Sens broadcasts on local TV.

"The broadcasts are up to the TV broadcasters and their schedules, and they're still holding dates for NHL games. It's unlikely that would happen beyond maybe the occasional game a little further on in the season, but for a full-season schedule it likely won't happen," he said.

If all goes according to plan, next year promises to be a busy one for Leeder and The Bank, with nearly 100 dates already confirmed, with 44 NHL games (including pre-season), 34 OHL games and 20 NBL games, all vying for a primetime share.

That, of course, doesn't include concerts and other events. The venue's fall schedule has 20 concerts listed between September and the end of 2012.

The Senators will still hold the scheduling trump card, with the 67's getting dibs on seconds before moving back to their familiar haunt at the Civic Centre for 2014. The NBL franchise, whose schedule will align closely with hockey's, will be third in line.

"They'll all prefer to play on the weekends, so it'll be a bit of a challenge to juggle dates, but we've been able to do a reasonably good job with (67's owner Jeff Hunt) and we still have dates left over, so we should be able to accommodate (basketball) and get as many weekend dates as we can," Leeder said.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 11.23.2012

644723 Philadelphia Flyers

Reason for hope in NHL talks

Frank Seravalli ,

NEW YORK - Walking away from the NHL's latest round of bargaining sessions on Wednesday, it would be easy to remain pessimistic about this 69-day labor standoff between the league and its players association by simply listening to the leaders.

"We're still far apart," commissioner Gary Bettman said.

"The players did an awful lot here," NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr said.

Believe it or not, I'm actually more optimistic about some sort of season being played, after letting this week's meetings marinate a bit. They are not close to a deal by any means, but there are positives.

For me, the biggest positive was in the way the NHL treated the NHLPA's latest proposal.

Only a few weeks ago, player after player groveled about Bettman walking out on NHLPA proposals after only 10 minutes. He didn't do that this time.

In fact, Fehr and nine players presented the NHLPA's latest offer on Wednesday, spoke for less than an hour, and then broke for lunch. Fehr addressed the media and said that the two sides are \$182 million apart. The NHL didn't run downstairs to the lobby of its building to dispute that.

Instead, Bettman later said he "appreciated" the movement on some issues by the players.

With that, two important things happened: Bettman improved his awful bedside manner, which has served as more of a rallying cry for the players than anything Fehr has done or said, by not immediately rejecting the deal - and the NHLPA's offer actually gave the league something to think about during the lunch break.

Even if the NHL thought the proposal was a joke, at least it was willing to handle it diplomatically in public.

Bettman also acknowledged that the NHLPA put a full, soup-to-nuts proposal on the table outlining all of its wishes for the first time since bargaining began in July. Up until this point, the NHLPA had tried to negotiate everything in piecemeal. That's a start.

Most important, the war of calculators seems to be over. The NHL did not once dispute the NHLPA's \$182 million number. And the union also moved away from guaranteeing its share with a specific dollar number and instead asked for a percent of revenue. It's just that the percents during this 5-year offer are unrealistic at this point.

The NHL has offered a straight 50-50 split of revenue between players and owners, with \$211 million given to the players in order to make their current contracts "whole." The players are seeking \$393 million. According to the Toronto-based Globe and Mail, which ran some interesting numbers in charts, the NHLPA's offer doesn't get down to 50 percent until Year 5.

The Globe pegs the NHLPA's offer as starting the players at 56.3 percent in Year 1 - off from 57 percent that they earned last season - making their average take during the 5 years a full 52 percent. Their proposed salary cap would be \$67.3 million next year; the NHL's was somewhere around \$59 million.

Now, with its latest offer rejected, the NHLPA is considering decertifying its union, according to multiple reports. It's all part of this MAD - not as angry or insane, even though this process is both of these things - but rather Mutual Assured Destruction game theory.

The NHLPA has two nuclear options: decertifying to allow players to fight this lockout through courts, and trying to fight the salary cap that the owners won in 2004-05. The NHL has the nuclear option of canceling the entire season; it already has taken down the Winter Classic.

The NHLPA knows that decertifying would likely blow up the entire season, which is a good reason why it won't do it. Continue the threats, continue the stalemate.

On a Black Friday usually reserved for an afternoon home game, the NHL is expected to cancel January's All-Star Game in Columbus and all games through Dec. 15. An additional 108 games canceled would bring the total to 435 regular-season contests.

As painful as it might be to hear, it's still somewhat early in the process. There's probably just about a month left to save the season. I take Bettman at his word when he says the NHL has made its best offer. Canceled games means less revenue, and he has made big promises to hungry owners.

Fehr said the NHLPA's "effort was about as good as we can do to try and see if an agreement can be reached." Any lawyer worth his salt knows that "about" leaves wiggle room. It would be a good place to start.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 11.23.2012

644724 Pittsburgh Penguins

Commissioner: NHL will cancel more of its schedule

By Josh Yohe

NEW YORK — The 2012-13 NHL season is in jeopardy, with another batch of games along with the NHL All-Star Game in Columbus set to be canceled soon.

What has become clear is that Bettman, who said that more games being canceled shortly is "inevitable," isn't interested in letting the lockout drag on much longer. Soon, the hockey world will know if there will be a season, or if a second campaign in eight years will be lost.

Bettman said Wednesday that the league is losing between \$18-20 million per day during the lockout. He also shed some light on a possible timetable for a season cancellation.

"You can go look at the timetable from other leagues and other seasons to do it," Bettman said.

This was a clear reference to last season's NBA lockout. Bettman was NBA commissioner David Stern's right hand man before coming to the NHL in 1993 and still models aspects of the NHL after methods the NBA uses.

Last year, the NBA and its Players' Association engaged themselves in a nasty dispute that wasn't resolved until Nov. 26. The season started a month later on Christmas Day.

There is little reason to believe Bettman will permit the season start should this dispute rage into the New Year.

The NHL started the 1994-95 season Jan. 11 and the regular season began nine days later. That season saw each team play 48 regular-season games.

There remains time for this NHL season to see 60 games.

"That would be fine," Penguins player representative Craig Adams said. "We know they aren't going to let this thing go on forever. But there's still time to get a deal done."

Bettman did express optimism because the NHLPA and league grew closer on certain issues Wednesday. Still, he and NHLPA executive director Don Fehr remain combative with one another.

"I'm not focused on anything right now other than trying to make a deal," Bettman said. "Once we make a deal, we'll see what we can do with the schedule. I'm focused on that. I'd like to have a deal yesterday."

Tribune Review LOADED: 11.23.2012

644725 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins Q&A: Chris Kunitz

By Shelly Anderson

The NHL lockout has wiped out training camp and early games in the 2012-13 season, but the Post-Gazette will help you catch up with the Penguins with an occasional Q&A. Today, we check in with Chris Kunitz, who has spent most of his Penguins career -- dating to a February 2009 trade with Anaheim -- as the left winger for either Sidney Crosby or Evgeni Malkin.

Kunitz, 33, spent the 2004-05 season with Anaheim's minor-league club in Cincinnati as the NHL season was wiped out by a lockout. This time, he's a regular skating with teammates at Southpointe four days a week.

Question: Can you talk about the previous lockout and playing in the American Hockey League that season?

Answer: I had just played my first 21 games [in the NHL] the year before. [That lockout] was something that you were a part of, but not necessarily understanding what was going on until you started playing again. I later became a player [union] rep coming out of that. [Playing in the AHL] probably did help me. The quality of play was a little better because of the young guys who [otherwise] were going to play in the NHL. That team in Cincinnati, I think 20 guys ended up playing in the NHL. It was beneficial because you were just learning the game, and maybe you weren't thrown into it so quickly.

Q: As a player over 30 this time, is the clock ticking a little more as the lockout drags on?

A: It makes it tough. You get to champing at the bit. But you understand. I benefited from the last lockout, and now you want to help evolve the game for the guys coming in [to the league]. You want your fair take.

Q: You've been practicing mostly on a line with Crosby and Pascal Dupuis, a line that the Penguins have used a lot when Crosby has been healthy. Would you like to see the three of you stay together whenever the Penguins play again, even though you were primarily on Evgeni Malkin's line last season?

A: It's a lot of fun playing with Sid, and [Dupuis], too. We've had some success when we have gotten a chance to play together. We're familiar with each other, and it might be a benefit if that's the combination [the Penguins use]. But I try not to change my game to play with either one of these All-Star, elite centers.

Q: Can you compare Crosby and Malkin as centers?

A: Oh, man. [Malkin] has that unexpected movement up the ice, that skill to create things in a different sense. Sid has that power, nose for the net, can play with both sides of his stick. They create the same awe factor. They get to the same parts on the ice, but just in different ways. You can't compare their styles, but the elite talent and vision they have for places on the ice and where they are is very similar. I'll bet if you copied some tapes, they'd end up in the same spot the majority of the time.

Q: What are you doing in your spare time during the lockout?

A: I get to spend a lot of time with the kids -- swimming lessons, karate, soccer, a little bit of hockey, things like that. Just being home, cooking dinner, spending time with the family that you don't usually get to see. It's a lot of fun to be there every day.

Q: What's your favorite meal?

A: I enjoy the Thanksgiving [spread]. A lot to choose from, a lot of things you can pick at. Growing up [in western Canada], Thanksgiving was relatively the same [as American Thanksgiving]. Other than that, maybe some things you can get at restaurants that you can't get at home -- fresh pastas and things like that -- are pretty tasty.

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644726 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Cracks appear in players' armour after Hamrlik comments

Kevin McGran

The first true friction within the NHL Players Association turned up rather quickly after the NHL had rejected the union's latest proposal.

It was Roman Hamrlik, a 38-year-old defenceman scheduled to earn \$3.5 million, who called out for a vote in a Czech newspaper. Hamrlik is one of a handful of NHLers — like Teemu Selanne and Martin Brodeur — who is going through his third lockout.

"There should be voting between players," Hamrlik reporters in Czech on Wednesday. "If half of players say let's play, then they should sign new

CBA. If there is no season he (Donald Fehr) should leave and we will find someone new. Time is our enemy."

Time, indeed, is running out as the two sides were expected to talk but not negotiate on Friday.

The NHL is expected to cancel a few more games — maybe a week's worth or more — on Friday. And the all-star game in Columbus is at risk.

Hamrik was taken to task by other NHLers for breaking ranks including Erik Cole.

"I still support Fehr, but we as players we need to push him a little bit more and get the best deal possible," Hamrik told TSN on Thursday. "I'm a little bit disappointed in what he (Cole) said. What I do know is he has three years left on his contract and I'm sure he got a nice signing bonus this summer, so I don't think he didn't have to sacrifice anything."

The NHL Players Association had no comment on Hamrik.

A split in the players ranks is exactly what the NHL might well be waiting for. If the league interprets it as a sign of player weakness, it might embolden NHL commissioner Gary Bettman to hold firm on his last offer and not take another step toward the NHLPA's position.

But Fehr has tread this territory before. He is fond of telling the story of the 1981 baseball strike when a member of the Los Angeles Dodgers was reported to have said the players were ready to play. The report suggested the players were striking against their will and it emboldened baseball executives to hold a hard line and stop negotiating.

So a strike that should have been over in 41 days, says Fehr in his frequent anecdotes, lasted 50.

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.23.2012

644727 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Old-timers caught in cross-fire don't resent today's money: Cox

By Damien Cox

The amazing thing about talking to NHL pensioners about the way in which their interests are not being represented at the table in current CBA as described in the Star today is that none really have much negative to say about today's owners or players.

Milt Schmidt, who is in limbo along with hundreds of former players about important Senior Benefits that require a new agreement between the NHL and NHLPA, says he's "grateful" for the decision in 2005 that gave players those benefits and doesn't resent modern-day players for the money they make.

"More power to 'em!" says Schmidt, a member of Boston's famed Kraut Line along with Bobby Bauer and Woody Dumart.

"I can thank the good game of hockey for everything I have."

None express bitterness over the fact that current players — Erik Cole is the latest example — talk in grand, vague terms about fighting for the rights of future players, but don't seem to have the same regard for the rights and needs of players who skated in the NHL in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

Bob Nevin was one of six players in the Montreal hotel room back in 1967 when the NHLPA was first recognized by NHL owners.

"That union was hard fought for," he says. "But it ended up doing not as much as what we hoped for."

Nevin's pension for playing 1,128 NHL games is \$8,500 a year.

"I remember Clarence Campbell saying we had the best pension in sports," says Nevin. "I'll remember that until the day I die. What was he talking about?"

At issue today is the monies owed players 65 and older as part of the Senior Benefit Plan established in 2005 by a letter agreement accompanying that year's collective bargaining agreement. The Senior Benefit is funded by \$2 million annually from the NHLPA matched by the

NHL. It is not legally part of their pensions nor part of the actual CBA, but it expired when the old CBA did.

Ex-players over the age of 65, or their surviving widows, receive \$1,380 for every season played. Current NHL Alumni executive director Mark Napier is hoping to have the pool of money increased. Ex-players are owed their next payment in January, but without a new CBA, they may not get it.

Ex-Leaf Danny Lewicki says he hopes that today's players understand why they should support older players.

"I hope they realize what players went through for the love of the game," he says. "It wasn't for money, I can tell you that."

Lewicki remembers making his highest salary of \$12,500 while with the New York Rangers, and then approaching GM Muzz Patrick for a \$2,000 raise after a good season.

"Muzz threw me out of his office," says Lewicki.

Lewicki said he was pleased when the NHL and NHLPA agreed seven years ago to start jointly funding the Senior Benefit Plan, which expired when the current CBA expired Sept. 15.

"I was gratified, but surprised. Very surprised," he said.

Wally Stanowski, 93, says he used to "hate" the Leafs because of the "cheap" way in which the club dealt with its former players. He said he was approached by Ken Dryden to attend the closing of Maple Leaf Gardens, but he was in Mexico at the time and the offer quickly disappeared because he would have needed to have his flight expenses covered.

Stanowski said current Leaf GM Brian Burke has softened his view. He said when he was invited to drop the puck at a Leaf game two years ago, Burke gave him 12 tickets for his family and sent a chauffeured car to pick him up.

"Burke changed my mind," said Stanowski.

Stanowski won a Memorial Cup in 1938 with the St. Boniface Seals, a team that had only 10 players and a budget of \$800 to cover TWO seasons.

Stanowski, who played for the Leafs between 1939 and 1948, said the most he made with the Leafs was \$5,000 in a season, out of which \$900 was deducted for his pension and was supposed to be matched by the owners.

"But no team ever did it," he says. "They just washed their hands of it."

Schmidt, by the way, had a message for Stanowski when he heard that I was interviewing both for today's story.

"One night Bill Barilko hit me so hard that I did a complete somersault," said Schmidt. "I landed on top of Stanowski. So thank him for the soft landing, will you?"

Stanowski is a huge baseball fan, but says he rarely watches today's hockey.

"I think it's terrible," he said. "They keep shooting the puck in and going after it. What happened to possession?"

Dallas Smith, 71, says he worries that if the Senior Benefit Plan isn't renewed, that the Emergency Players Fund that helps players in desperate need might also be lost.

He cites the experience of the late Fern Flaman, who suffered from cancer at the same time his wife was dealing with dementia.

"He needed help," says Smith. "He got some, but not as much as he needed."

Like most, he doesn't really pick sides in the current lockout, although he says in his day he had to "fight for every nickle" he could get in salary.

"I don't really blame the owners," he says. "But I hope to God something happens with our benefits. I don't think that (Donald) Fehr cares."

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644728 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL old-timers caught in the crossfire of lockout: Cox

By Damien Cox

Forced to quit school at the age of 14 to work at a Kitchener shoe factory for 18 cents an hour during the Great Depression, Milt Schmidt knows something about hard times.

Somewhere between hard times and broken promises lives uncertainty, the kind of uncertainty in which the 94-year-old Schmidt, the second oldest former NHLer still living, finds himself as the current NHL lockout rages between the billionaires and millionaires.

It's an outrage, one that could be remedied by the stroke of a pen. Instead, players like Schmidt, Jean Beliveau, Johnny Bower and Gordie Howe who built the league and were already horribly shortchanged on their pensions are now being held hostage by the ongoing NHL labour squabble.

Seven years ago, the NHL and the NHL Players' Association finally eased that embarrassing pension burden by establishing a supplemental Senior Benefit Plan for players 65 years of age and older.

But when the current collective bargaining agreement with the league expired Sept. 15, so too did the Senior Benefit. Now, with the next payment due in January and no end in sight to the current lockout, more than 300 vulnerable former NHLers or their surviving widows have been left in limbo.

"There's not a helluva lot we can do about it," said former Leaf and Ranger Bob Nevin, 74. "There's no avenue for us at our age."

Schmidt, just six weeks younger than former Montreal star Elmer Lach, the oldest former NHL player, lives in a Boston-area seniors home and receives a pension of \$357 a month. On top of that, for the past seven years he has received \$12,000 annually through the Senior Benefit Plan.

"I can use it, although I'm doing OK," said Schmidt. "But I also know there are players who can use it a lot more."

Neither the NHL nor the NHLPA, when contacted by the Star, would commit to continuing the Senior Benefit Plan. When the NHLPA submitted a "comprehensive" new collective bargaining proposal to the league on Wednesday, there was no mention of it.

"The longer this goes, the more worried I get," said Mark Napier, executive director of the NHL Alumni Association.

Wally Stanowski, 93, played 10 years in the NHL, seven for the Leafs. Several weeks ago, he lost his wife of 70 years, Joyce, to cancer.

He figures he needs \$32,000 a year to continue to live in his modest two-story brick home in Etobicoke and cover his expenses, including a housekeeper who comes three times a week to help him. He struggles to get around and climb stairs.

His monthly pension is \$459. He was due two payments of \$5,343 as a Senior Benefit this year, one in January and one in August, but realized on Wednesday he only received one. That was two months late.

"I wouldn't like it if they stopped it," said Stanowski, rubbing his gnarled, arthritic hands. "I can get by, I guess. But it sure helps."

For every season played, former players over the age of 65 receive \$1,380 annually. The plan was conceived in 2004 by former players Pat Flatley, Ted Lindsay, Brian Conacher and Glenn Healy, and the league and players union agreed to each contribute \$1 million per year.

"I didn't know about the situation of many of these former players until I retired, and I'm quite disappointed in myself for not knowing," said Flatley. "The equity of every team in the league was built on their backs."

In 2008, then NHLPA boss Paul Kelly convinced both sides to increase their annual contributions to \$2 million each.

"Many of the older players and widows are reliant upon these monies as their sole source of support," said Kelly. "These were the trailblazers in our game who were paid very modest sums for their efforts."

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said the Senior Player Benefit "has to be sorted out."

"We intend to do the right thing," Bettman told the Star.

NHLPA spokesman Jonathan Weatherdon said in an email "no one on either side has suggested changing this provision, nor has it been discussed."

Those vague words resolve nothing. So hundreds of former players and widows wait, not knowing when the next cheque might arrive.

Former Leaf forward Danny Lewicki, 81, gets \$3,400 twice a year in addition to his monthly pension of about \$380.

"I don't know what's going to happen," he said. "It would be a hardship if it stopped."

Dallas Smith came out of Hamiota, Man., in 1959 to join the Boston Bruins and played 890 NHL games. He lives in Phoenix and uses \$18,000 in Senior Benefit payments to cover his \$15,000 annual medical insurance costs.

"If it doesn't come, I guess I've just got to scratch around a little bit more," said the 71-year-old former defenceman.

NHL owners and players don't have to wait for a new CBA to address this issue. They could call a temporary halt to hostilities, commit to these retired players and write a cheque.

Right now, however, both sides seem focused on other issues. Making sure those who built the game are treated fairly isn't on the agenda.

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644729 Vancouver Canucks

When NHL lockout ends, Vigneault begins a tough test at helm of Canucks

Ben Kuzma

VANCOUVER — After being eliminated in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs last spring, the sixth-seeded Chicago Blackhawks fired assistant Mike Haviland amid an air of dysfunction on coach Joel Quenneville's staff.

After suffering the same postseason fate, the seventh-seeded San Jose Sharks re-shaped their staff. Former New Jersey Devils assistant coach Larry Robinson is the new associate coach and former Washington Capitals assistant Jim Johnson takes over for assistant Matt Shaw to provide coach Todd McLellan a reprieve from further career uncertainty. As for Shaw, he replaces Devils assistant Adam Oates, the new bench boss of the Capitals, who succeeded Dale Hunter. Got all that? Good.

Meanwhile in Vancouver, amid speculation about the coaching future of Alain Vigneault and who should pay for a shocking first-round playoff exit by the Presidents' Trophy winners, there were no firings. In fact, Vigneault and general manager Mike Gillis received contract extensions and the coaching staff that includes Rick Bowness, Newell Brown and Darryl Williams remained intact. The prospect of a shortened NHL season and a one-week training camp if the lockout is resolved, will make familiarity a factor. But it has to go beyond camaraderie if the Canucks are going to go beyond a round or two in the playoffs.

"There have to be some challenges from within," Vigneault said Thursday. "I don't want to be surrounded by guys who just say what they would expect me to say. I want their opinion on strategy and personnel decisions and I get that from management, too. I would say 95 per cent of the time we're on the same wave length, but that five per cent where we don't totally agree, as the head coach I have to make that final decision."

"Most of the time we hash it out one way or another and reach a consensus of what the team needs."

A narrowing window to win with a veteran-laden roster, learning from the mulligan of poor postseason preparation and the continued support of ownership should be catalysts for urgency. As much as Vigneault allows veteran players to set the accountability bar, you could argue that he gives his club too much rope because in the end, the results weren't there. Is that Vigneault's fault? The winningest coach in franchise history is also a Jack Adams Award winner who occasionally shows a comedic side to overshadow a serious nature. Vigneault has to reach his core group on some level and push the right buttons without pushing them over the edge and risk losing the room.

Vigneault was an assistant to Bowness with Ottawa in the 1994-95 season that was shortened to 48 games because of a lockout. The Senators held a 10-day training camp and won just nine games. These Canucks are not those Senators and that has much to do with Vigneault giving his veterans a voice knowing that a brief training camp will demand more time in the video room than on the ice.

"I don't think we're going to change a lot with them," said Vigneault. "We're used to a demanding schedule, but we're going to have to get input from our players on how they feel energy wise and mentally. That's where the strong leadership in the room comes in. They all have a team-first attitude and that's what we're going to need. These guys want to win and it just makes them more motivated because they know how challenging it is."

A sobering five-game playoff series loss to the Los Angeles Kings proved the Canucks were ill-prepared. They tried to manufacture urgency with a high postseason secured and when leading scorer Daniel Sedin was sidelined for a dozen games following a March 21 concussion, it was like they lost their compass. They couldn't find their way.

"Experience sometimes hurts," admitted Vigneault. "But it's going to help our whole group be better."

A Stanley Cup hangover produced a 5-5-1 October, but the bigger concern was what occurred after a vengeful 4-3 win in Boston on Jan. 7. The Canucks relied on great goaltending and 15 of their final 25 regular-season wins were by one goal. The Canucks led the league with a 24.4 per cent power play after the Bruins triumph and then went 16-for-117 (13.6 per cent) and were blanked 13 times in their final 18 games. The power play became predictable and stagnant and was a paltry 3-for-21 (14.3 per cent) in the postseason.

As for the regular season, the Canucks finished fourth on the power play and fifth in goals. They were fourth in goals against and sixth in penalty killing, so when motivated the execution was exceptional. Keeping it there and elevating it to another level in the postseason is Vigneault's challenge. Maybe now more than ever.

"Not only do you have to get to know your players, it's the same thing with the staff," summed up Vigneault. "There has to be the trust factor there and start the right way right off the bat."

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644730 Vancouver Canucks

Garrison prepared to play when lockout ends, groin pain finally going away

Ben Kuzma

VANCOUVER — Jason Garrison has no doubt he'll play once the NHL lockout is resolved and that ongoing treatments and workouts will finally solve chronic groin problems for the Vancouver Canucks defenceman.

Roman Hamrlik has no doubt NHL Players' Association executive director Donald Fehr should be fired if the season is lost to a collective bargaining impasse. The Washington Capitals blueliner said he was "disgusted" by the lockout for good reason. He would lose the final year of his \$3.5 million US deal before becoming a 39-year-old unrestricted free agent next summer with an uncertain future. In that respect, Garrison understood the rant.

"Everybody has different views of what's going on at this point," Garrison said Thursday after skating with the UBC Thunderbirds. "He's been around a long time and has every right to be frustrated. Some are just speaking more freely about the situation, but the union is very intact and everybody is on the same page, from what I know. We have to stay focused."

Of course that's easier for Garrison. The 28-year-old White Rock native was paid a \$3 million signing bonus July 1 on his \$5.5 million salary this season — part of the six-year, \$27.6 million free-agent deal signed July 2 — and continues to draw cheques from the Canucks because he's injured and under their care. Garrison also works with noted local physiotherapist Rick Celebrini to strengthen core muscles and how they relate to his hips, legs and abdomen. Celebrini, a retired soccer defender, is head of sports medicine and science for the Vancouver Whitecaps. He has also worked with the Canadian men's alpine ski team and was chief therapist and medical manager for the 2010 Winter Olympics.

"I'm progressing and coming along real well because I'm putting the work in and it's showing," said Garrison, who's expected to be paired with Alex Edler, who is currently rehabbing a lower-back injury. "Each and every day it feels better and there's no doubt in my mind I'll be ready to go. It's good to get more of a game-like situation [with the T-Birds] and test it under those conditions."

Garrison will also have to quickly assimilate into a Canucks' system should a CBA be struck. A short training camp would follow and there won't be exhibition games to get up to speed for the former Florida Panthers blueliner.

"It's no different than a game where you've got to learn something about the opposing team," he said.

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644731 Vancouver Canucks

Ten issues facing the post-lockout Canucks

The Province

If and when the NHL returns to action, the Vancouver Canucks are facing a few issues.

After all, they were unexpectedly bounced from the first round of the playoffs last spring, and they'll return to the league with pretty much the same lineup that couldn't get the job done.

Over the course of 10 days, Jason Botchford and Ben Kuzma are examining 10 issues that might concern the Canucks and their fans. Follow the series here, where we'll add a new installment each day.

#### 9. The salary cap

The way CBA negotiations are shaping up, the Canucks could find themselves needing to sign 10 players with only \$4 million of cap space. One of them would be star defenceman Alex Edler, who will be looking for a raise. That puts a huge onus on youngsters Chris Tanev and Zack Kassian to perform while they are still among the club's lowest paid players. Read more from Jason Botchford.

#### 10. The window is closing

Last season, just seven teams were younger than the Canucks. Soon Dan Hamhuis will become the ninth Canucks over 30 years old. The Sedin twins may have a few good years left, but there's nobody of their quality in the system poised to take over when they're gone. Look no further than the 2007 Ottawa Senators to see how quickly a Stanley Cup contender can fall. Read Jason Back when the NHL still played games, the Ottawa Senators were saturated in confidence to start the 2007-08 campaign.

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644732 Vancouver Canucks

Canucks: Vigneault stands as others fall

By Ben Kuzma,

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After suffering the same post-season fate, the seventh-seeded San Jose Sharks reshaped their staff. Former New Jersey Devils assistant coach Larry Robinson is the new associate coach and former Washington Capitals assistant Jim Johnson takes over for assistant Matt Shaw to provide coach Todd McLellan a reprieve from further career uncertainty. As for Shaw, he replaces Devils assistant Adam Oates, the new bench boss of the Capitals, who succeeded Dale Hunter. Got all that? Good.

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644733 Vancouver Canucks

Vancouver Canucks: D-man Garrison focuses on stronger core

By Ben Kuzma,

Vancouver Canucks defenceman Jason Garrison has no doubt that he'll play once the NHL lockout is resolved, or that ongoing treatments and workouts will finally solve his chronic groin problems.

Roman Hamrlik has no doubt NHL Players' Association executive director Donald Fehr should be fired if the season is lost to a collective bargaining impasse. The Washington Capitals blueliner said he was "disgusted" by the lockout, for good reason. He would lose the final year of his \$3.5-million-US deal before becoming a 39-year-old unrestricted free agent next summer with an uncertain future.

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644734 Websites

ESPN / Tune out the noise, we're closer to a deal

By Pierre LeBrun

Ah, Thanksgiving Thursday in the U.S.

A chance for the NHL and NHL Players' Association to take a deep breath and exhale after all the drama that ensued Wednesday on the labor front.

For all the rhetoric and posturing from both sides Wednesday, and the anger belted out on Twitter by players, the reality is that both sides are closer to a deal now thanks to the NHLPA's newest proposal.

A lot closer? No. But closer nonetheless.

That might come as a shock to the players inside the bargaining room Wednesday who saw the NHL shred many elements of it, leaving them red-faced as they left the meeting.

Truth is, at least from my vantage point, the players' latest offer had a true impact Wednesday. I know it doesn't feel that way right now for the players, who believe they put their best foot forward only to have the league stomp on it. But in fact, the NHLPA's willingness for the first time to base a framework on the percentage of hockey-related revenue and not a guaranteed dollar amount was a monumental shift.

Sure, hell will freeze over before the owners ever pay out \$393 million on the "make-whole" provision, which the NHLPA asked for Wednesday, not to mention that little guarantee the union sneaked in there that the players'

share in total dollars can't go down less than the previous season in the next CBA. Yeah, that's going to be left on the cutting room floor, as well, when all is said and done.

But you see, this is the point of actual negotiation. You give and you take, you go back and forth.

There's a deal here, which is more clear than ever after the players moved to a percentage-based framework.

Somewhere between \$211 million and \$393 million is your magic number for "make-whole."

The league has to step down on more of its player contracting rights. The owners are still asking for too many and too much in that area. And although I give the union credit for a creative and clever back-diving formula, until it affects not just future contracts but also existing contracts, the league won't sign off on that, either.

There's a lot more to mend here in the sizable gap that remains on these matters and more. But it's there. I can see it. I can almost touch it.

If this deal doesn't get done, it's because the politics will have gotten in the way of measured thinking. And it's possible that could happen.

It's possible, for example, that hard-line owners will pressure Bettman into minimizing the \$211 million "make-whole" amount or taking it off the table altogether. That would be plain dumb. And a deal killer.

It's also possible the league's negative in-room reaction to the NHLPA's offer Wednesday will serve to only further galvanize the players, particularly after moderate players had won out over the hard-liners Tuesday in pushing for a proposal that went percentage-based -- i.e., a framework that spoke the league's language.

Now those moderate players who stuck their neck out in pushing for that might feel beyond enraged at how the league took to their efforts.

"They just united us," one NHL player told me Wednesday night, pointing to the way the league handled the players' offer.

That kind of players-wide anger could easily entrench their position and allow executive director Don Fehr to really drag this out if he feels that's the best course of action to get a better deal. And you likely will hear more talk about decertification as an option for the union.

That puts the onus on the league, I think, to come back sooner rather than later with ideas that embrace some of the NHLPA's proposal and continue to push this negotiation ahead.

And I think that will happen.

I don't buy all the doom and gloom that was out there Wednesday. It was not a wasted day at all.

If and when there's a new CBA to save a shortened season, I believe we'll look back at the NHLPA's offer from Wednesday and point to it as an important factor in eventually finding the path to concurrence.

Just maybe.

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