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645662 Boston Bruins

TD Garden, nearby businesses miss out on estimated \$4 million per game during NHL lockout

By Callum Borchers

York Islanders, for instance, are losing money but cannot receive assistance because they play in a large television market.

The Boston Bruins were scheduled to host the Phoenix Coyotes Monday night at TD Garden, but for the 15th time this season the arena was dark, costing the team another \$3 million in tickets and related spending.

The National Hockey League lockout also is inflicting collateral damage on nearby bars and restaurants — between \$850,000 and \$1 million per game, according to the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau. Eighty days into the off-ice fight, representatives of the NHL and its players union remain far apart on big-ticket issues, despite Commissioner Gary Bettman's estimate that players and owners are losing as much as \$10 million and \$20 million a day, respectively.

A group of owners and players are scheduled to meet Tuesday in New York to continue negotiations. Meantime, the league continues to bleed money. This is the third lockout in 19 years for the NHL, which has the dubious distinction of being the only major North American professional sports league to have scrapped an entire season — 2004-2005 — because of a work stoppage.

NHL revenues have grown by 50 percent over the past five years, to \$3.4 billion, but 13 of its 30 franchises suffered losses last season, according to Forbes magazine estimates. The Bruins, one of the "Original Six" teams, have historically turned a profit and made about \$14.2 million during the 2011-2012 season.

Analysts say the NHL's economic woes stem largely from its failure to practice smart growth. Nine of the clubs in the red are among the 13 that moved or were added between 1991 and 2000, when the league grew from 21 to 30 teams. But the new teams were established in cities such as Anaheim, Phoenix, Dallas, and Nashville, where hockey isn't a natural fit, and has failed to take root.

"The NHL made a mistake in overexpanding to bad markets, and now it's trying to make the players pay for that mistake," said Raymond D. Sauer, president of the North American Association of Sports Economists and chair of the economics department at Clemson University. "It's that simple."

The owners contend the underlying problem is not the location of teams but the bloated salaries of players. The salary cap in a collective bargaining agreement that expired on Sept. 15 gave players 57 percent of the league's hockey-related revenue. The owners' opening proposal in the current negotiations called for slashing that to 43 percent. The cap refers to the share of league revenue that can be spent on player salaries.

A 50-50 split appears to be the most likely compromise and would bring the NHL closely in line with the National Football League and National Basketball Association, both of which began new labor deals last year after lockouts of their own.

But each side rejected a proposal the other called an even split, because owners and players can't agree on what types of revenue should be included.

The players union, which fought the introduction of a salary cap during the 2004-2005 lockout, is willing to accept a smaller slice of league revenue, but wants to reduce its share gradually, setting aside \$393 million to honor existing contracts. The deal that ended the last lockout reduced the value of all signed deals with players by 24 percent.

"Over the summer, we negotiated business as usual, and I felt like managers and owners were negotiating in good faith," said agent Wade Arnott, whose top client, Zach Parise, signed a 13-year, \$98 million contract with the Minnesota Wild two months before the lockout began. "But my sense is that certainly concessions are being made by the players."

While club owners are trying to bolster their bottom lines by shrinking players' paychecks, the NHL Players Association is pushing for the league's richest teams, including the Bruins, to share more of their revenue so struggling teams remain solvent. The players union has hired Donald Fehr as its executive director and Fehr's brother, Steve, as special counsel — a tandem known for bringing increased revenue sharing to Major League Baseball as representatives of the MLB Players Association.

NHL owners currently share an estimated \$150 million per year with one another, or about 11 percent of their revenue. Baseball owners share more than 30 percent, and in the NFL, the nation's most popular pro sports league and a \$9 billion annual business, owners share roughly 80 percent.

Donald Fehr has said the NHL Players Association wants owners to increase revenue sharing to as much as \$250 million annually and drop some restrictions on which teams are eligible for subsidization. The New

Bettman, the commissioner, has countered with a proposed revenue-sharing increase to \$190 million a year.

Bruins owner Jeremy Jacobs will probably be an important figure in any agreement. Jacobs, who like all owners is subject to a gag order imposed by Bettman, chairs the NHL's board of governors and is reputedly a hard-line opponent of additional revenue sharing. He is the league's second-longest tenured owner, and his team is the NHL's fifth-most valuable franchise. He bought the Bruins in 1975 for \$10 million, and today the club is worth \$348 million, according to Forbes.

"The NFL has big, centralized TV deals, so the owners don't mind sharing as much, but in the NHL it's more about your team's ability to procure revenue in your specific market," said Justin Hunt, a sports attorney and revenue sharing specialist based in Columbus, Ohio.

The Bruins are better positioned than most NHL franchises to generate local TV money because Jacobs owns a 20 percent share of New England Sports Network, which broadcasts most of the team's games. That means the team will survive and probably do well, no matter what damage the current stoppage wreaks on the league's fan base.

When a club has a lucrative local television arrangement like Boston's, Hunt said, "Good luck prying that money away."

Boston Globe LOADED: 12.04.2012

645663 Boston Bruins

Bruins' Daniel Paille signs with Ilves in Finland

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Daniel Paille signed with Finland's Ilves Tampere, the 12th Bruins player to join a European team during the NHL lockout. Paille is the second Bruin to join the Finnish league. Rich Peverley had signed with JYP.

Paille, who had been skating in Boston with an ever-shrinking group of local players, is the team's NHLPA player representative. This would have been the first season of Paille's three-year, \$3.9 million extension, which the fourth-line left wing signed June 1.

The Bruins' originally scheduled game against Phoenix Monday night will mark their 24th game lost to the lockout.

Ilves was the former club of Tuukka Rask. Current NHLers on the Ilves roster include Anders Lindback and Max Talbot.

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Boston Globe LOADED: 12.04.2012

645664 Boston Bruins

Fresh faces could spark NHL talks

By Steve Conroy | Tuesday, December 4, 2012 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Boston Bruins

Is today the moment when progress finally is made in the NHL lockout? Or will the players' association simply call a public-relations bluff by the owners as the lockout drags on past this 80th day?

Whatever turns out to be the case, a group of players was scheduled to meet with six club owners in New York today hoping to jump-start the stagnated talks that proved impervious to federal mediation last week.

"I'd like to be optimistic, but with what's gone on over the last six months it's hard to be," a union source said yesterday.

The meeting sprang out of an offer from NHL commissioner Gary Bettman to the union to get a group of owners and a group of players into a room together without league or union representatives. After some wrangling over the parameters of the meeting, the union agreed to the sitdown. Neither Bettman nor NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr will attend. However, there will be staff from both sides in the room. Deputy commissioner Bill Daly will accompany the owners while the players' association is still deciding who will attend.

"I guess we'll see what happens. They have to try something different, don't they?" said one agent. "One thing I'd like to know is if the league plans to offer anything new. They're the ones who called for the meeting, so you'd think they'd have something new. But I don't think that's going to happen."

There will be new faces involved on the ownership side, though Bruins owner Jeremy Jacobs, who has come to represent the hardliners among the owners, will remain involved as he has been from the start. Same for Calgary's Murray Edwards. Both Edwards and Jacobs are on the league's negotiating committee.

Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, Winnipeg's Mark Chipman, Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik and Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum are the newcomers to the process.

"I think it will be good to have guys like (Burkle and Chipman) involved in the process, guys who (are) around their players on a more regular basis," said one union source.

Burkle reportedly has a strong relationship with his young star Sidney Crosby, who will be in New York today, as will Blackhawks star Jonathan Toews.

The players' association will huddle to decide which players will attend the meeting with the owners. It's not clear if any Bruins players will be involved.

Meanwhile, all the owners will meet for the annual Board of Governors meeting tomorrow in New York. If a change in direction by the owners materializes, chances are it happens then. The owners will at least have different input from Burkle, Chipman, Tanenbaum and Vinik.

Bruins notes

Three Bruins prospects were among the 37 players chosen for Canada's world junior championship selection camp yesterday. It was no surprise Niagara defenseman Dougie Hamilton, the B's top prospect and a returnee from last year's Canadian WJC team, and Belleville goalie Malcolm Subban, the team's first-round pick last June, were invited. But it was a nice feather in the cap for Barrie Colts forward Anthony Camara to get the call.

Camara, selected in the third round of the 2011 NHL draft, has had a breakout season for Barrie on a line with highly talented Winnipeg prospect Mark Scheifele. Camara has 19-15-34 totals and leads the team in penalty minutes with 39 in 28 games. . . .

Daniel Paille made it an even dozen Bruins playing in Europe during the lockout. Paille, who also happens to be the Bruins player representative, signed with Ilves Tampere of the Finnish SM-liga over the weekend. Rich Peverley is also playing in SM-liga, for the JYP club. . . .

Meanwhile, goalie Tuukka Rask has returned to Boston after playing well for Plzen of the Czech league.

Boston Herald LOADED: 12.04.2012

645665 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres' Miller: 'I can't make sense of what the owners truly need because they want everything'

Ryan Miller hopes he gets a chance to talk to six NHL owners Tuesday. It might give him a better idea of how the lockout will finally end.

"I can't make sense of what the owners truly need because they want everything," the Buffalo Sabres' goaltender wrote today during an exchange of text messages. "That is why it seems like the finish line is moving."

Miller is among a large group of players who will gather Tuesday in New York City when negotiations between the league and the NHL Players' Association resume. In a new dynamic, six owners and Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly will meet with six players and union special counsel Steve Fehr. The leaders of the respective sides, Commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA Executive Director Donald Fehr, will not take part.

"I don't entirely agree with leaving the heads of negotiation out of this because they are paid to make a deal," Miller wrote. "But if it gets more owners involved then so be it."

Owners Ronald Burkle of the Pittsburgh Penguins, Mark Chipman of the Winnipeg Jets, Jeffery Vinik of the Tampa Bay Lightning and Larry Tanenbaum of the Toronto Maple Leafs will join regular league negotiators Jeremy Jacobs of the Boston Bruins and Murray Edwards of the Calgary Flames at the table. The NHLPA has not announced which players will take part in talks and probably will not do so until Tuesday.

"A lot of guys want the opportunity," Miller wrote. "I hope we all get a better feel of what each side truly needs. On our side anyone can talk to the media or attend meetings, so I am hopeful that having more owners join the conversation we can get somewhere and break up this monopoly 4-5 owners have had on deal making.

"I am really disappointed that no moderate owners have stopped the madness. Hopefully they will after the board of governors convene."

This figures to be a big week for the labor stalemate. In addition to Tuesday's gathering, the NHL's board of governors meets Wednesday. Also, more games are expected to be canceled Friday if a collective bargaining agreement is not in place.

"There has been a deal available for months," Miller wrote. "We all expected things to fall into a negotiation after reaching 50/50 [in regards to splitting revenue] but it hasn't. The owners want too much from us and we have to make a stand. We appreciate the chance to play in the NHL but we have to protect our players."

The sides have gotten closer in terms of finances, but contracting rights have become a major roadblock. The NHL's most recent proposals would increase the age for free agency, limit contract lengths and control how much salaries fluctuate from year to year.

"I am confused by the hard line on contracting," Miller wrote. "My only guess is Gary wants to limit General Managers so he won't have anymore loophole type surprises in this CBA. I understand that position to the extent you don't want contracts to cripple a team, but they are really taking away team building as a skill. Skilled GMs will have to identify how to balance a budget instead of building a well balanced winner.

"What I haven't heard anyone talking about is the fact that under the NHL proposal the NHL becomes a 2 tier salary league. The middle class is gone and that means shorter careers and in my opinion mediocre hockey."

Last month, Miller told the Globe and Mail the lockout has been more about "brand suicide" than negotiating. He figures the NHL believes everyone will just forget about the lockout once games resume.

"I think they are counting on people to have short memories," Miller wrote. "Just like politicians who flip-flop on an issue, the owners believe the fans will return and be caught up in hockey... Everything forgiven or at least forgotten once pucks drop."

---John Vogl

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.04.2012

645666 Carolina Hurricanes

New group of NHL owners, players will try to break the ice

By Chip Alexander - calexander@newsobserver.com

The Los Angeles Kings' Kevin Westgarth, left, chats with the Carolina Hurricanes Cam Ward as some Canes and other NHL players practice at Raleigh Center Ice in Raleigh, NC on Oct. 19, 2012. The NHL season is still on hold as owners and players can't agree on how to split revenues.

The National Hockey League will try a new form of collective bargaining Tuesday in New York.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman won't be in the room. Neither will NHL Players Association executive director Donald Fehr.

Six NHL owners are invited to attend. A small group of players will be representing the union. Together they hope to find some common ground that can help end the stalemate in labor negotiations.

"There will be some owners who have not been there in the (negotiating) meetings and maybe that can help us get something done," Carolina Hurricanes forward Jussi Jokinen said Monday. "Obviously every time there's a meeting you kind of get your hopes up that something good will happen. In the situation we're in we need to try pretty much anything to get some new ideas to try and somehow get the deal done and hockey back."

The owners at the 2 p.m. meeting will be Jeremy Jacobs (Boston Bruins), Ron Burkle (Pittsburgh Penguins), Jeff Vinik (Tampa Bay Lightning), Murray Edwards (Calgary Flames), Larry Tanenbaum (Toronto Maple Leafs) and Mark Chipman (Winnipeg Jets).

Jacobs and Edwards have been a part of negotiating sessions. For the other four owners, this will be their first time in the room.

Several players are expected to be in New York, including Pittsburgh Penguins star Sidney Crosby. The NHLPA said the players will decide Tuesday morning on the group to meet with the owners.

"I think we have to go into it with some optimism," said Los Angeles Kings forward Kevin Westgarth, who has served on the players' negotiating committee. "The whole time we've tried to negotiate this deal we've gone at it in hopes that a deal can get done. The sooner, obviously, the better."

"We're far further along (in the lockout) than I thought we'd be. The fact it's December and we're not on the ice is ridiculous. Hopefully we can garner some good will and make sure the owners understand our point of view and we understand theirs, and we can go forward."

The NHL board of governors meets Wednesday in New York.

If the Tuesday confab of owners is not productive, the 2012-13 season will move another step closer to being canceled.

Westgarth, who lives in Raleigh in the offseason, said it could help to have new voices in the room – an owner such as Burkle, who has a reputation for being more receptive to the players' position than Jacobs, considered a hard-liner.

"I think that's important," Westgarth said. "We've gotten to something of a stalemate with those who are involved currently. It doesn't matter how it's done. The goal is to get a deal that's fair and equitable."

The NHL players have been locked out since Sept. 15, when the collective bargaining agreement expired. All regular-season games through Dec. 14 – as well as the 2013 Winter Classic and All-Star Weekend – have been canceled.

The league wants a 50-50 split of hockey-related revenue and has proposed a "make whole" provision to honor existing player contracts through deferred compensation.

The union wants the league to pay more than \$211 million from its HRR share in making whole the contracts, and there are contracting issues to be resolved.

"We're not trying to leave any legacy," Westgarth said. "We're not getting anything out of this contract – they're all concessions going in the owners' direction."

Last week, the NHL and NHLPA invited in federal mediators.

That didn't help. Bettman then proposed the players/owners meeting.

Hurricanes defenseman Jay Harrison said without Fehr and Bettman in the room, "I wouldn't expect anything more than dialogue. Hopefully some ideas. ... If it's an attempt in any way for (the owners) to try and make us see it their way again, they may not be happy with what they hear."

News Observer LOADED: 12.04.2012

645667 Chicago Blackhawks

Blackhawks' Toews to be at Tuesday's NHL meeting

By Chris Kuc, Tribune reporter

9:36 PM CST, December 3, 2012

Jonathan Toews has captured a Stanley Cup as well as an Olympic gold medal in his career. Now the Blackhawks captain is hoping to add another big victory to his resume.

Toews confirmed Monday that he will join a group of players in New York, where six of them will meet face to face with six owners Tuesday in an effort to jump-start negotiations to end the NHL lockout.

The players will decide before the meeting who will sit across the table from owners Jeremy Jacobs (Bruins), Murray Edwards (Flames), Ron Burkle (Penguins), Mark Chipman (Jets), Jeff Vinik (Lightning) and Larry Tanenbaum (Maple Leafs) during the session.

Reports indicate the Penguins' Sidney Crosby and the Sabres' Ryan Miller are also among the stars who could be selected to exchange ideas with the owners without the lead negotiators for each side -- NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr -- in the room.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 12.04.2012

645668 Chicago Blackhawks

Toews will be in NHL meetings today

By Tim Sassone

Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews is among the small group of players invited to be part of negotiations Tuesday in New York with six owners as the NHL and Players' Association try something different in an attempt to end the 80-day lockout.

Penguins star Sidney Crosby has also been invited to attend. The NHLPA still hadn't decided on which six specific players it wants in the meeting as of Monday night.

Both sides will meet without most of their NHL and union representatives in an attempt to continue talks towards reaching a new collective bargaining agreement.

The owners that will take part in the meeting are Jeremy Jacobs of the Boston Bruins, Ronald Burkle of the Pittsburgh Penguins, Mark Chipman of the Winnipeg Jets, Jeffery Vinik of the Tampa Bay Lightning, Murray Edwards of the Calgary Flames and Larry Tanenbaum of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Why Jacobs is involved is anyone's guess. Thought to be the leader of the lockout, Jacobs is the hardest of the hard liners and commissioner Gary Bettman's strongest ally.

Jacobs' participation already has insiders speculating this approach also will fail.

Rangers owner James Dolan, so instrumental in helping end last year's NBA lockout, wanted to be part of the session but was told no thanks.

It's not known if Hawks owner Rocky Wirtz was considered.

The NHLPA requested that a staff member from each side be present for the meeting. NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly will attend the meeting while the NHLPA is expected to be represented by No. 2 man Steve Fehr.

Bettman and NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr will not be involved.

Following the breakdown of talks between the two sides that involved federal mediators, Bettman proposed on Thursday that the leadership from both sides step aside for the next bargaining session, leaving a group of owners and players to try and break the stalemate.

"There will be owners attending this meeting who have not previously done so, which is encouraging and which we welcome," Fehr said in a statement. "We hope this meeting will be constructive and will lead to a dialog that will help us reach an agreement."

Jacobs, Edwards, Washington's Ted Leonsis and Minnesota's Craig Leipold are the only owners who previously have been permitted by Bettman to attend bargaining sessions that have been open to every player in the NHL.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 12.04.2012

645669 Columbus Blue Jackets

European leagues offer locked out NHL players a chance at competition

By Aaron Portzline

There are more than 200 NHL players getting paid to play in Europe while the NHL lockout drags on. That's roughly 30 percent of the NHL, strewn from Great Britain to Russia.

An even larger group is ready to head overseas depending on the outcome of this week's two main collective bargaining events — an owners/players face-to-face meeting today and the NHL Board of Governors' meeting on Wednesday, both in New York.

With 422 games already canceled and more likely to get axed this week, the NHL is drawing closer to canceling yet another entire season, as it did in 2004-05.

"If there's no end in sight by mid-December, guys will look at the best offer they have and they'll sign to go over in January, after the leagues in Europe are back from their holiday breaks," NHL agent Allan Walsh said. "You'll see a ton of guys lining up at that point to go over and play. They have to, really."

Nine Blue Jackets have signed contracts to play elsewhere, not including prospects with two-way contracts who are playing in the American Hockey League. There are five to eight other Blue Jackets who have said they will get serious after the holidays, seeking to join that second wave.

Blue Jackets forwards Derick Brassard and Derek Dorsett recently signed to play for EC Red Bull in Salzburg, Austria.

For the optimist, playing elsewhere while the NHL is on hiatus can be a chance to see the other side of the world, learn a new culture and try new cuisine.

"Yeah, yeah, it will be OK," Brassard said. "I'm going to go there and work hard and play hard and try to have fun with it. To me, playing hockey is the most fun, and I'll get that chance now."

"I don't really know what it's going to be like, but that's OK. That can be exciting, too. You can grow like that."

Because the NHL has had so much labor strife through the years — this is the second lockout in eight seasons, the fourth work stoppage in 20 — the thought of NHL players signing and playing overseas seems like a no-brainer.

But there are misconceptions surrounding the process; it's anything but routine for most players.

"Let's face it, guys don't really want to go," NHL agent Ken Robinson said. "They don't want to be in this situation. But what are you going to do? You have to make the most of it."

"People think you get to play wherever you may want to play, that the players are making big-time money, and that it's an easy way to play, almost like a mini-vacation. For some guys, maybe it's like that. For most players, exactly none of that is an accurate portrayal."

The first challenge is finding a roster spot. Right now, some clubs are holding on to "import cards" to use on star players in case the NHL cancels its season. Sidney Crosby is among the upper crust who are said to be considering going abroad.

Then there's the most expensive challenge: finding an underwriter who will insure players' NHL salaries in the event that they are injured during the lockout. Lloyd's of London is among only a handful of companies willing to take the risk.

The Dispatch was given access to an insurance offer from Lloyds for a player making \$1.9 million per season. To secure his NHL salary through 2014-15 — the length of his NHL deal — would cost between \$25,000 and \$30,000 a month.

Reportedly, Crosby's insurance would cost at least \$400,000 a month because of his lofty salary (\$8.7 million a season) and lengthy concussion history.

"In many cases, the player's entire pay (for a European team) is their insurance," one NHL agent said. "That's how they arrive at the figure. In some cases, they make a little more."

The insurance has come in handy for some players already. As many as 10 NHL players have been injured while playing for other clubs during the lockout, including Blue Jackets center Brandon Dubinsky (broken hand).

A handful of players have suffered in other ways. Former Blue Jacket Jason Chimera, now with the Washington Capitals, signed to play in the Czech Republic to keep his legs and lungs in shape. After five games, he called his agent, Walsh, looking for a ticket home.

"His kids called him crying every day," Walsh said. "He's got a family. They're used to road trips. They're not used to their dad being gone weeks at a time."

Blue Jackets veteran Vinny Prospal, who has older children, faced the same problem. At 38 and near the end of a long career, he figures he has to stay active.

"This was a very hard decision," Prospal said. "My time with my family is now very important. I'm not happy about this."

Prospal also noted the tender feelings on both sides of the pond, both eager for the lockout to end.

It's tough for some players to rationalize taking the job of a European player, but the NHL lockout is taking a toll across the hockey world.

"They make us feel welcome and we try to help them out with their season," said Prospal, who is playing in Budejovice, Czech Republic. "But deep down, there may be a few boys that are not happy about reduced ice time."

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 12.04.2012

645670 Columbus Blue Jackets

Michael Arace commentary: Setting scene for next act in NHL dispute

By Michael Arace

Today is day 80 of the NHL lockout and, to this point, 422 regular-season games have been canceled, the Winter Classic has been scuttled and All-Star Weekend in Columbus has vaporized. How long will it drag on? We will know more by Wednesday.

At the suggestion of NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, the league and union will attempt to shake their stalemate by altering their negotiating teams. Today, Bettman and union chief Donald Fehr will sit out as six owners and six players meet face-to-face. If these teams cannot form the basis for an agreement, it will not be long before the league moves to cancel the remainder of the season — and the union moves to decertify, which would turn the process into a series of court battles.

On the owners' team are Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, Winnipeg's Mark Chipman, Calgary's Murray Edwards, Boston's Jeremy Jacobs, Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum and Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik.

The union had yet to divulge its team, although Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby, Columbus' Adrian Aucoin and Chicago's Jonathan Toews are three names being bandied about.

Let us fill out their roster with Calgary's Jarome Iginla and Florida enforcer George Parros, who studied economics at Princeton and wrote his senior thesis on a longshoreman's labor dispute (seriously).

Let us attempt to guess how this meeting will go ...

Narrator: The scene is a meeting room in a posh New York hotel. Jacobs gets the ball rolling.

Jacobs: Gentlemen, we owners propose to keep the tax rate unchanged for the top 1 percent, to close loopholes in the federal tax code and to reform Social Security and Medicare. We will not budge!

Aucoin: We do not disagree. We are the 1 percent, as well. However, that is a different debate.

Jacobs: Oh, yeah. My bad.

Crosby: I think it's sort of weird having you, Mr. Jacobs, and you, Mr. Edwards, here in this room. You guys are on the league's negotiating committee. You're two noted hardliners who use the commissioner like a puppet. Wasn't the purpose of this to get new blood involved?

Edwards: You union guys. I hate ... um, I hate that we can't all just get along.

Toews: You owners have proposed a 50-50 split in hockey-related revenue and we're amenable as long as you can make good on our existing contracts. Our latest proposal leaves a gap of \$182 million between us, a fraction of the \$3.3 billion the business generated last year. We've made a number of concessions, and we'll make some more — but you have to give some, too. You can't keep negotiating off your original proposal, which was ridiculous. You have to loosen up here.

Tanenbaum: Jonathan, I did not know you were so eloquent. Please, know that the Leafs are worth \$1 billion and we will lose \$100 million if the whole season is canceled. I'll give you players whatever you want.

Vinik: Down in Tampa, we lose almost as much money as Columbus. I just want to play.

Burke: Sid, you know I'm a dealmaker. I'm ready to listen.

Jacobs: Larry, shut up before somebody makes you share more revenue. And Ronny, Mark, Jeff — never forget that Gary has either saved your franchise or hand-delivered it to you. Don't bite the hand that feeds you.

Iginla: Egad, what are we doing here? Seems to me that if you guys treated our union as an equal partner in negotiations we would not have to kill the entire season and alienate our fans — again. Do you care about your product? Do we have to decertify to get any leverage?

Parros: I have a better idea. Gary wanted this meeting, but he did not want the federal mediators in here. He wanted six players with high-school educations trying to hash out a solution with six seasoned businessmen. I have a proposal: Let's lace up the skates, put on the pads and we'll play a little hockey to decide the situation. No gloves required.

Narrator: Is this too cynical a portrait? Are the owners so intractable? Is the union headed for decertification, often called the "nuclear option"? Or, will cooler heads prevail. Tune in Wednesday, when the NHL Board of Governors is scheduled to convene.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 12.04.2012

645671 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings hope for productive meeting Tuesday between NHL owners, players

By Helene St. James

Detroit Red Wings players place some - but not much - hope on Tuesday's meeting that maybe the NHL lockout will end this month.

Select owners and players are scheduled to gather at 2 p.m. in an effort to end the labor dispute that's shuttered the NHL since Sept. 16. The NHLPA has not yet identified which players will attend, but no Wings are going.

The league has announced it will be represented by six members. Those are Ron Burke (Pittsburgh Penguins), Mark Chipman (Winnipeg Jets), Murray Edwards (Calgary Flames), Jeremy Jacobs (Boston Bruins), Larry Tanenbaum (Toronto Maple Leafs) and Jeff Vinik (Tampa Bay Lightning).

Speaking after a players-run practice Monday in Troy, Wings defenseman Ian White said, "I'm banking on it being productive," but expressed concern the owners' group includes well-known hardliners like Jacobs and Edwards.

"Obviously, we'd rather not have those guys in there," White said. "It remains to be seen how it's going to affect the meeting. These other guys, too, they're just as important as the hardliner guys. Their voices matter just as much. So it's a bit unfortunate to have those guys in there, because we do need new direction. But, we'll wait and see how it plays out.

"Most of the owners have been cut out to this point. I think a lot of them want to have their voices heard. It'll be interesting."

This is the first time several owners will meet face-to-face with several players since the lockout began. Meetings so far have been between NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and deputy Bill Daly, and NHLPA chief executive Don Fehr and his second-in-command, Steve Fehr. Steve Fehr and Daly will also be at Tuesday's meeting.

Mikael Samuelsson, who was around for the lockout that wiped out the entire 2004-05 NHL season, said it's hard to get excited about meetings when there have been so many and so little has been accomplished.

"I really hope so," he said, "but once again, you're almost not hoping anything any more, because you've done that at least five times, and nothing came out of it. Just take it as it comes. It's good with a different approach, and different faces. The guys who go into the meeting, hopefully want to accomplish something."

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645672 Detroit Red Wings

NHL lockout: Red Wings hope new approach will boost talks

By Helene St. James

Three weeks from Christmas, several Red Wings are finding the situation they're in miserable and miserly.

The lockout that has iced the NHL since Sept. 16 next hinges on what happens today when select owners and players meet face-to-face, aided by each side's executive second-in-command. No Wings are going to the gathering in New York, but there's some hope from players that the meeting will lead to a revolution from within when the Board of Governors gather Wednesday, also in New York.

Ian White, one of a handful of Wings faithfully skating in Troy, said "there's a little glint of optimism," shining on having people other than commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Don Fehr face off. The six owners who are going are from Boston, Calgary, Pittsburgh, Tampa Bay, Toronto and Winnipeg, and White's enthusiasm was tempered by the inclusion of the Bruins and Flames contingent, as both are known collective bargaining agreement hardliners.

White said "we'd rather not have those guys in there," but overall he struck a note that players meeting with any owners might help create a groundswell of support for getting the 2012-13 season underway.

"I've got to think for sure most of the owners want to play by now," White said. "What they need is an overwhelming majority to get going, because there's obviously a deal to be made if you look at the last offers. Hopefully, it gets done here in the next week, because if not, then we could be in dire straits."

The sides are at odds over how to divide what last season was a \$3.3 billion business. There wasn't a person in hockey who didn't know there would be a lockout this fall, but that it has gone on this long is testing many a patience. Players have missed four paychecks, and the window is closing on salvaging any kind of season at all.

"Time is definitely not on our side, for both sides," goaltender Jimmy Howard said. "I think a lot of us knew that this was going to drag out a little bit, but I don't think any of us believed that we'd be almost at Christmas with nothing in place."

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645673 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings have mix of hope, skepticism heading into players-owners meeting

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

TROY – Players are hopeful that having some different ownership representation at Tuesday's meeting will lead to traction in collective bargaining talks.

But they also are skeptical, since a couple of the same faces will be at the table.

Six players and six owners will meet in New York in an attempt to resolve the NHL lockout that began on Sept. 16.

The league announced that the owners group features Ron Burkle (Pittsburgh), Mark Chipman (Winnipeg), Larry Tanenbaum (Toronto) and Jeff Vinik (Tampa Bay), who haven't been involved in previous meeting. The other two, Jeremy Jacobs (Boston) and Murray Edwards (Calgary), have attended previous talks and are viewed by players as hard-liners, particularly Jacobs.

"Obviously, we'd rather not have those guys (Jacobs and Edwards) in there," Detroit Red Wings defenseman Ian White said Monday, after skating with several teammates. "It remains to be seen how it's going to affect the meeting. These other (four) guys, they're just as important as the hard-line guys. Their voices matter just as much.

"It's a bit unfortunate to have those (hard-line) guys in there because we do need new direction, but we'll wait and see how it plays out."

The NHL Players Association has not determined which players will attend. Several will travel to New York for the 2 p.m. meeting, before the union selects six to enter the room.

Red Wings forward Danny Cleary, who has sat in on several meetings, said in a text that he will not be in New York, so his club won't be represented.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Don Fehr will not be involved. However, NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly will sit in, and it is expected that union special counsel Steve Fehr will attend.

Detroit forward Mikael Samuelsson isn't getting his hopes up.

"You're almost not hoping anything anymore because you've done that at least five times and nothing came out of it," Samuelsson said. "It's good with a different approach and different faces, but the guys who go into the meeting hopefully want to accomplish something."

Star players Sidney Crosby and Jonathan Toews reportedly will be in New York, but the NHLPA hasn't confirmed if they will attend the meeting, which precedes Wednesday's board of governors meeting.

"It's a bit unfortunate to have those (hard-line) guys in there because we do need new direction." -- Ian White.

"I got to think that most of the owners want to play by now," White said. "So, hopefully out of this meeting and then going into the governors meeting they get enough guys to (get) what they need as an overwhelming majority to get going because there's obviously a deal to be made.

"Hopefully, it gets done in the next week because if not, then (the season) could be in dire straits."

Goaltender Jimmy Howard said time is not on their side.

"I think a lot of us knew this was going to drag on a little bit, but I don't think any of us believed that we would be almost to Christmas with nothing in place," Howard said.

Others echoed his sentiments.

"The first few weeks, almost month-and-a-half (of the lockout), I was still pretty optimistic and still had a lot of fire that the season was going to get going," center Darren Helm said. "Now it's just kind of draining away, and all we got is a little bit of hope. I don't really think or talk about it too much or it just gets me kind of frustrated and upset."

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645674 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings legend, union pioneer Ted Lindsay worries about damage lockout is doing to hockey

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

Ted Lindsay isn't surprised by fan resentment or growing apathy toward hockey in the U.S. due to an NHL lockout that reached 11 weeks on Sunday.

But, what the Detroit Red Wings legend and players union pioneer discovered during a recent trip to Toronto for the Hockey Hall of Fame festivities shocked him.

"When you see Canadians start to bad-mouth their national game, that tells you something is wrong," Lindsay said. "I never heard that before from any Canadians. Hockey is their game and they hate seeing what's happening to it.

"That bothered me a great deal."

Fans were angry at both sides, players and owners. So is Lindsay.

"I'm not happy with either party," Lindsay told MLive.com. "What they're doing to our game is an awful thing.

"It's the greatest game in the world. It's hard to see what's happening to it."

Lindsay, 87, maintains a strong bond with the NHL Players Association, a group he organized in the late 1950s, one that became a union in 1967. He also has a solid relationship with the Red Wings organization.

So, he is not taking sides. And he said he doesn't know enough about the issues to offer an informed opinion.

His main concern is the damage that is being done as the league moves dangerously close to having a second season scrapped in eight years.

"When this is settled, I'd like to see a survey of the damages done," Lindsay said. "I put the blame on both owners and players."

He said "turned off" would be a good way to describe how fans feel during the midst of the league's fourth work stoppage in 20 years, its third extended lockout since 1994-95.

"I know many season ticket holders," Lindsay said. "They're getting older. They'll keep their tickets because they like the game, but when they get this aggravation from players and owners, four times in 20 years, these people have money and can afford season tickets, but they don't want the aggravation in their life."

He said he doesn't understand why "two intelligent groups" can't come to an agreement.

Some, including Lindsay, wonder if there would have been an deal by now if the NHLPA allowed its 700-plus members to vote on the league's most recent proposal.

"That's maybe what the union doesn't want," Lindsay said. "There's lots of guys in the last year of their contract or the last year of their careers.

"If I was in the last year, I'd want to be playing. Even a (fringe player) who has one or two years on his contract can't afford to sit out a year."

The union has maintained its solidarity; Washington's Roman Hamrlik is one of the few players who has spoken out against the NHLPA's stance. But, Lindsay said players must ask themselves if this cause is worth it.

"Hockey players are the greatest athletes in the world, but they have to understand owners put up all the money so they (players) can make a beautiful living playing the greatest game in the world," Lindsay said. "Players have to look at, 'Am I making a good enough living playing the game I love?' "

By the same token, he questioned the motives of owners who signed players to lengthy, lucrative deals over the summer and now are seeking a new financial structure. The best example was the Minnesota Wild signing Ryan Suter and Zach Parise each to a 13-year, \$98 million contract, only to have their owner, Craig Leipold, involved in negotiating sessions that have taken a hard-line stance.

"They talk about how they're in trouble, then Minnesota signs those two guys," Lindsay said. "How can you be in trouble when you can afford that much money?"

Emotions run high and frustration is mounting, but Lindsay does not believe that excuses players from insulting NHL commissioner Gary Bettman.

"Gary Bettman is doing his job, just like (NHLPA executive director) Don Fehr is doing his job," Lindsay said. "(Bettman) is a representative of the owners. If these guys don't understand, then hockey is in trouble."

Lindsay said he has a "great association" with the Red Wings.

He has a stall in the locker room with his nameplate. He regularly works out in the weight room. He is close with coach Mike Babcock. He thinks the world of Chris Chelios, who doggedly fought for players' rights a half-century after Lindsay organized the union.

Most of the team's players and many club officials take part in Lindsay's annual golf outing to benefit research to battle autism. It's an event he started in 2001.

It pains him to see what is happening to the game he impacted so much and still loves.

He hopes an agreement can be reached to salvage the season, like in 1995 (48 games).

"Time is running out," he said.

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645675 Edmonton Oilers

Nugent-Hopkins tops list of players named to Canada's junior team selection camp

Centre toiling in AHL for Barons this season expected to get Oilers OK to play in worlds

By Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal December 3, 2012

EDMONTON - If Edmonton Oilers centre Ryan Nugent-Hopkins is given medical clearance to suit up for Canada at the world junior hockey championship, Oilers management won't prevent him from playing.

Nugent-Hopkins, the first overall pick in the 2011 NHL entry draft, was one of 37 players named to the Canadian junior team's selection camp roster on Monday. Hockey Canada's camp runs Dec. 10-15 in Calgary.

Oilers general manager Steve Tambellini and Kevin Lowe, president of hockey operations, have both worked on Olympic and world championship teams for Hockey Canada and they've never turned their back when asked for help or player.

It'll be the same for Nugent-Hopkins, no matter how many American Hockey League games he would miss during the world juniors, which begin Dec. 26 in Ufa, Russia.

The 19-year-old centre is playing for the Oklahoma City Barons, the Oilers' AHL affiliate, during the NHL lockout. He's also nursing a sore shoulder that he separated last season.

The world junior tournament would fill out Nugent-Hopkins list of accomplishments.

"It's one of the things that's missing from his resume, I know he wants to be part of this," said Hockey Canada chief scout Kevin Prendergast, who used to work for the Oilers and knows the NHL club's allegiance to the national body.

"He's a high-end, high-calibre hockey player. We're looking forward to seeing him next week," said Prendergast.

The Oilers, however, want to see Nugent-Hopkins' medical results first. If he's in any way compromised physically, they won't let him go.

Head coach Steve Spott isn't tipping his line combinations, but Nugent-Hopkins could easily play with Florida Panthers' 2011 third overall draft pick Jonathan Huberdeau (Saint John Sea Dogs) and Winnipeg Jets' 2011 top pick Mark Scheifele, normally a centre on his Ontario Hockey League team in Barrie.

If Nugent-Hopkins is not named captain, it would be a shock as well because he's played in the NHL and in the AHL. He was runner-up for the Calder Trophy last season. And while he hasn't had a point his last three games with the Barons, he's 10th in AHL scoring.

"Nugent-Hopkins is an impactful player on and off the ice. He's an elite player who gives us a great 1-2 (centre) situation (with Ryan Strome)," said Spott.

"I met with (former Oilers head coach) Tom Renney regarding Ryan (Nugent-Hopkins) as a person ... it's easy to watch him on video or in games, but ultimately, I wanted to know the type of person he is. From all accounts, he's a tremendous young man in the locker-room and around the team. I'm excited to work with him.

"His experience of having played a full year in the National Hockey League, under pressure, will hopefully serve our players well. They'll have a lot of pressure, too. He's another weapon we can throw out on the ice to bolster our offence."

Veteran Oilers winger Ryan Smyth, who played on the Canadian junior team during the 1994-95 NHL lockout, figures Nugent-Hopkins is tickled to have one last chance to put on a Canadian junior sweater before he's too old.

"We had (Alexandre) Daigle and Jason Allison from the NHL that year ... they were like Nuge is now, I guess," said Smyth. "This is a great opportunity for Nuge. If the team is successful, it'll be another feather in his cap.

"I'm sure he was discouraged when he got cut (at his first junior camp in 2010). I know there'll be high expectations on him after playing in the NHL, but he probably wants to be the best player out there. I know he makes players better."

Will Nugent-Hopkins get a landslide of points at the tournament? Four or five a night?

"I'm sure he'll want to, but it was an eye-opener for him to go to the AHL. This junior competition is a very high level. It also gets very emotional," said Smyth.

Canada doesn't have the access to all the best junior age players most years because the NHL is up and running and not every team wants to release its teenagers if they're doing the job at the NHL level. But during a lockout, everybody's up for grabs.

"Canada over the last few years has been the country hurt the most by the NHL call-ups," said Prendergast. "We've got Dougie Hamilton (Boston Bruins), Strome (New York Islanders), Scheifele (Winnipeg), Huberdeau (Florida) still playing in junior (not in the NHL). They're more mature, physically stronger and the world junior is a 20-year-old tournament. After watching the Russians for six games in the Subway (Super) Series, they had a very strong team."

The only danger for Hockey Canada's junior squad is if the lockout ends before the worlds start, or when the team is in Finland for exhibition games and a team bonding session in Helsinki. Canada plays Finland to open the tournament on Dec. 26.

"I've spoken to each NHL general manager who has a player on the recall (to the NHL) list if the lockout ends," said Scott Salmond, Hockey Canada's senior director of hockey operations. "We'll continue to talk during the negotiations (labour dispute). We don't have to have our roster set until Dec. 25. We are hopeful we'll leave Canada on the 15th of December with the 23 players that will stay with our team.

"But at this time, we haven't asked for that commitment."

The list of 37 players invited to camp includes four goalies, 12 defencemen and 21 forwards. The returnees are Huberdeau, Hamilton, defenceman Scott Harrington, forward Boone Jenner, Scheifele and Strome.

Thirty-one of the invited players have been drafted the past two years and 13 are first-round picks while eight are second-rounders. The youngest players are Nathan MacKinnon, the Halifax centre who could go No. 1 in the June 2013 draft, and his linemate Jonathan Drouin, both 17.

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645676 Edmonton Oilers

Game On: Stars have virtual Oilers number

By RENATO PAGNANI AND RAMIN OSTAD, Edmonton Journal December 3, 2012

EDMONTON - The performance of the virtual Edmonton Oilers has been on an upswing despite a loss that snapped a three-game winning streak.

The week started off with the (virtual) NHL season's third Battle of Alberta as the Calgary Flames hosted the Oilers. Despite Calgary's best efforts, the Blue and Orange left them feeling black and blue.

The first hit came early in the first period as Magnus Paajarvi continued his hot streak by jamming in a goal through Miikka Kiprusoff's legs off a rebound from veteran winger Ales Hemsky.

Hemsky then followed up at the end of the period with a power-play goal, easily sailing it past Kiprusoff who had been taken off balance defending a shot taken by Ryan Nugent-Hopkins.

The rest of the game, however, wasn't so easy for the Oilers. The first-period beating lit a spark on the Flames bench. Shot after shot, they tried valiantly to get back in the game, but Edmonton goalie Devan Dubnyk wasn't backing down.

His stellar performance kept the Oilers in the lead, and Paajarvi put the final nail in the coffin near the end of the third, firing a heated wrist shot that gave Kiprusoff no time to prepare.

Edmonton's game against the Nashville Predators was sadly not as clean of a victory.

Nashville opened strong with a quick goal about 40 seconds into the game. Winger Nick Spaling shot a wrist from a faceoff that snuck past an unprepared Dubnyk.

Oilers centre Sam Gagner tied it up soon after, deflecting a beautiful slapshot from Corey Potter that caught Predators goalie Pekka Rinne totally off guard.

Nashville took back their lead at the end of the first, thanks to a wrist shot from Matthew Halischuk that just made it inside the post, followed by another goal by Spaling with six seconds to spare.

The Oilers had no luck scoring in the second period, but Ryan Jones put them back on the board early in the third.

Nugent-Hopkins did the same a minute later, bringing the teams back to even footing. Both teams scored another goal, but they couldn't settle it during regulation or overtime. The Oilers broke out in the shootout, however, leading to a 5-4 victory.

It was the Dallas Stars who had Edmonton's number, however, as they hosted the Oilers on Thursday.

Nugent-Hopkins scored the first goal of the night halfway through the first period, but Stars forward Derek Roy returned the favour soon after.

Roy returned in the second with a slapshot that sailed past Dubnyk so fast it was as if Roy dared him to stop the shot.

It wasn't until late in the third that Nugent-Hopkins put another goal past Stars goalie Kari Lehtonen, tying the game.

Roy wasn't going to have any of that, however, scoring a rebound goal that gave him a hat trick. That was followed up by an empty-net goal from Jamie Benn, giving Dallas a 4-2 win.

The Oilers face the Predators once again on Tuesday. Let's hope the loss to Dallas didn't break their spirits.

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645677 Edmonton Oilers

Oilers goalie back on ice

NHL veteran Khabibulin skating following hip surgery in April

By Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal December 3, 2012

EDMONTON - Since he had surgery to repair a torn labrum in his left hip in April, Nikolai Khabibulin is called an injured, locked-out NHL player so his bank account is healthy, if his body is only halfway there.

"I've had my back fixed, now my hip ... I think I should be able to play another five to seven years," the Edmonton Oilers' netminder, who turns 39 in six weeks, said jokingly.

Khabibulin, who is in the last year of his four-year, \$15-million US contract, would likely settle for another five to seven months, but the lockout has to end first. Until then, he's like every other NHLer biding his time. At least he's getting paid.

He wouldn't have been able to play if the Oilers' season had started on Oct. 13, so the lockout has helped him. "They said it would be six to eight months (before he could play)," said Khabibulin, who has been around town for some time but taking it slow. He was on the ice before the Oil Kings skate Monday, however, at Rexall Place with goalie coach Fred Chabot. T.D. Forss, the Oilers medical trainer, was on the scene, too.

"The hip started bugging me around Christmas and it never went away so I had the surgery after the season," said Khabibulin, who was unbelievably hot the first month last season (5-0-2, 1.12 goals against average, .960 save percentage) but stumbled the second half. While he still played 40 games, Devan Dubnyk got into 47 contests and played almost every one the last couple of months.

With a sore hip courtesy wear and tear over 783 NHL games, Khabibulin found himself on a slippery slope.

"I couldn't practise (like he wanted). I would try and save it for the games. I wanted to get through to the end of the season," he said.

Hip problems are an occupational hazard for goalies.

Tim Thomas has had hip surgery, as has Minnesota's Nik Backstrom and Chicago's Ray Emery. Billy Ranford's days as an NHL goalie started to dwindle with hip problems.

"The butterfly. Takes its toll," Khabibulin said.

He was expected to spell off Dubnyk this season, with the Oilers likely looking at Dubnyk playing about 60 of the 82 games.

The team has to find out if Dubnyk is a bona fide starter. He showed promise last year with a 20-20-3 record, 2.67 GAA and .914 save percentage.

The Oilers gave him a two-year, \$7-million contract in the off-season, but they want to see if the 26-year-old could improve on last year's numbers.

Khabibulin is a veteran of lockouts. He's one of 14 NHLers who've been through all three of them. Khabibulin played half a season in Springfield (AHL) and was up with the Winnipeg Jets after the lockout ended in January 1995. In 2004-05, after helping Tampa Bay win their first Stanley Cup, Khabibulin hiked back to Russia and played for AK Bars Kazan.

His contract is up on July 1.

ON THE BENCH

Farmhand defenceman Brandon Davidson, who had surgery for testicular cancer in early November, was at practice in Oklahoma City Monday. "It's not over yet but things have been positive. Things are looking up," Davidson told the Oilers' website. He hopes to be playing in two to three weeks. "This (cancer scare) is an eye-opener on life." ... Jordan Eberle followed Barons' teammate Justin Schultz as AHL Player of the Month, winning the nod for November with 10 goals, 21 points in 13 games. Eberle is second in AHL scoring with 27 points (20 games). Schultz, October's Player of the Month, has 31 points ... Eberle will have his old No. 7 Regina Pats' jersey retired Wednesday. He'll be there for the ceremony ... The Barons sent forward Toni Rajala back to ECHL Stockton with Tyler Pitlick (blow to the head) skating and likely to play in San Antonio this weekend.

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645678 Edmonton Oilers

Police seek Nugent-Hopkins jersey thieves

By Brent Wittmeier, Edmonton Journal December 3, 2012

EDMONTON - They might not be autographed, but St. Albert RCMP are circulating snapshots to identify a couple believed to have lifted a signed Edmonton Oilers jersey.

Just before 5 p.m. on Aug. 9th, a man and a woman in their 30s entered the Source for Sports store at 580 St. Albert Trail. The woman snagged a signed Ryan Nugent-Hopkins Oilers jersey and stuffed it into her bag before the couple quickly left the store.

The jersey is valued at \$500.

The woman had sandy blond shoulder-length hair and was wearing a white top. The man had a shaved head and was wearing a blue shirt.

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645679 Edmonton Oilers

Nugent-Hopkins among 37 hopefuls named to Canada's world junior selection camp

By Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal December 3, 2012

EDMONTON - As expected, Edmonton Oilers'centre Ryan Nugent-Hopkins has been invited to Canada's world junior team camp in Calgary.

Nugent-Hopkins, who has been playing in Oklahoma City for the AHL Barons this season during the NHL lockout, has expressed a desire to play in the worlds starting Dec. 26 in Ufa, Russia, but is undergoing medical tests Monday on his shoulder, which he separated last season.

If he passes the tests, the Oilers will likely give their blessing to let him take the world junior stage even though he's been playing alongside Jordan Eberle and Taylor Hall on the Barons' top line..

Nugent-Hopkins was cut from the national junior team in December 2010 but made the Oilers rthe following fall after they took him with the first overall draft pick in 2011 and didn't play in his second go-round. This would be his first and only opportunity to represent Canada in the tournament..

Nugent-Hopkins would likely be the team captain if he's at the camp, which starts Dec. 10.

Edmonton Oil Kings goalie Laurent Brossoit and captain defenceman Griffin Reinhart are also among the 37 players invited.

Brossoit, who has an 11-2 record and a 2.56 average for the Oil Kings, will battle it out with Malcolm Subban (Belleville), Jordan Binnington (Owen Sound) and Jake Paterson (Saginaw) for one of the three goalie spots.

Reinhart, who was picked fourth overall by the New York Islanders in this past June's NHL draft, is one of a dozen defencemen invited. That list includes returnees Dougie Hamilton and Scott Harrington. Red Deer's Mathew Dumba is also in the blueline mix.

Oil Kings forward Travis Ewanyk, who sprained his knee playing for the WHL Selects against Team Russia about three weeks ago and has been outfitted with a brace in hopes of playing Wednesday against Lethbridge, was on the bubble but didn't get an invite as a fourth-line energy prospect.

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645680 Minnesota Wild

Locked out but hopeful, players lace 'em up daily at Ridder

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO , Star Tribune

With the NHL lockout approaching 80 days, more than two dozen players continue to skate daily at Ridder Arena.

That includes Wild players such as Niklas Backstrom, Mikko Koivu, Cal Clutterbuck and Kyle Brodziak and several other NHLers, including former Gophers Erik Johnson, Keith Ballard and Kyle Okposo.

"It's like Groundhog Day," said the Wild's Zach Parise, echoing the sentiment of many who are trying to stay sharp in case the lockout suddenly ends and training camp begins.

"I'm still optimistic that will happen. I think people are smart enough to know we can't miss a full NHL season. I've been proved wrong before, but I can't get my mind around missing a full season."

Matt Cullen agreed, saying, "I just think this is so needless. That's the shame of it. It's pointless. It's ridiculous that it's taking this long. I really don't think the issues that divide us are so much that it should cost us a season. It'd be an absolute shame for the game, for the fans, and it would just be a travesty. I honestly still believe it's going to get done."

Owners from six teams -- Boston, Pittsburgh, Toronto, Winnipeg, Tampa Bay and Calgary -- and six players, including superstars Sidney Crosby and Jonathan Toews, are supposed to meet Tuesday in New York to try to get dialogue and positive traction from fresh voices.

"I'm for whatever gets people in the room chatting," Parise said. "I think it's a good idea to get new people in there. Let's get some new ideas, let's try to get something positive to build on."

On Wednesday, the NHL Board of Governors will meet. Cullen said he thinks it would be a good idea to establish a drop-dead date in order to put pressure on both sides to get a deal done.

"It's scary whenever there's a deadline out there, but if that's what we need to spur it on, fine," Cullen said. "Everyone knows time is slipping and we're getting close to some sort of breaking point anyway because once you get past Christmas, we're either going to be playing or they'll be canceling the season soon."

"So as frustrating as this has been for all of us, you've got to start ramping it up because if we're going to play, it's going to be soon."

Spurgeon injured

Wild defenseman Jared Spurgeon returned to Minneapolis on Monday after injuring his groin while playing in Switzerland during the lockout, agent Eustace King said.

He will be examined by local doctors, and if the injury is minor, he might return to Switzerland if the lockout continues and the injury heals.

Devin Setoguchi (ECHL's Ontario Reign) and Clayton Stoner (Banska Bystrica in Slovakia) are the other Wild players skating elsewhere.

Junior achievement

Wild draft picks Tyler Graovac and Matt Dumba were invited Monday to Canada's world junior selection camp this month. Raphael Bussieres, who scored 10 goals and 23 points for Baie-Comeau of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League last month, was not chosen.

Jonas Brodin, who won gold with Sweden last winter, will miss the tournament because of a broken clavicle, while Christoph Bertschy is expected to play for Switzerland.

Mario Lucia is expected to be chosen Tuesday to attend the United States' camp. The tournament is Dec. 26-Jan. 5 in Ufa, Russia.

Etc.

• The Houston Aeros have won five consecutive games. Jason Zucker leads all American Hockey League rookie forwards with 11 goals, a league-leading six on power plays.

Mikael Granlund, who has missed 12 games because of a sprained ankle, is expected to return this weekend.

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.04.2012

645681 Montreal Canadiens

Pat Hickey: Meeting unlikely to resolve dispute

Pat Hickey

MONTREAL — No one should expect a settlement to come out of Tuesday's meeting between six National Hockey League owners and six players, but the session in New York should provide a clearer picture of how the battle lines are drawn in the ongoing labour dispute.

For most of the 80-day lockout, the focus has been on the two men who haven't been invited to Tuesday's gathering.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has been vilified by the players, who portray him as the architect of the lockout. This is the NHL's third lockout in 19 years and the players point out that all of the work stoppages have been on Bettman's watch.

Similarly, the NHL owners have cast NHL Players' Association executive director Donald Fehr in the role of bogeyman. Fehr, who earned his reputation as a tough negotiator when he represented Major League Baseball players, is seen as a major stumbling block to an agreement. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, the NHL has tried to paint him as someone who has been withholding information from or misleading the players.

Those stereotypes will be put to the test when Bettman and Fehr are relegated to the bench for the talks in New York.

While hardliners Jeremy Jacobs of Boston and Murray Edwards of Calgary have been at the table since Day 1, there will be some new faces on the owners' side, including Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik.

A number of the Lightning players, including Vincent Lecavalier and Martin St. Louis, were asked about Vinik last week and they said they believed that Vinik was anxious to play. This is the same response you'll find from players in Montreal and other cities around the NHL. There is very little animosity toward individual owners, but what happens if the players get into a meeting and discover that Vinik is as much of a hardliner as Jacobs?

The other newcomers on the owners' side are Larry Tanenbaum of Toronto, Mark Chipman of Winnipeg and Ron Burkle, whose money allowed Mario Lemieux to save the franchise in Pittsburgh. You would think that Tanenbaum and Burkle would want to get back to making money with their successful franchises, but what if they're hoping to recoup their losses with future concessions from the players?

The format was suggested by the NHL and you have to assume that they believe there is value in addressing the players when they are not under the influence of the Svengali-like Fehr. What happens if the owners learn that Jonathan Toews and Sidney Crosby are yearning to play, but not on the owners' terms? What happens when they face the realization that Fehr may be driving the bus, but the players are manning the GPS?

Tanenbaum may be the wild card in this latest round of talks. A success in the construction business, he became involved in sports when he brought the National Basketball Association to Toronto, and he was involved in the lockout that resulted in the abbreviated 2011-12 NBA season. Tanenbaum owns 25 per cent of the NHL's most valuable franchise and a lost season will cost Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment about \$90 million. But MLSE's losses are only part of the story. The other 75 per cent of MLSE is shared by Bell and Rogers, who spent more than \$2 billion to buy out the Ontario teachers' pension fund. While MLSE is a cash cow, the real prize for the media giants was the expanded opportunity to fill their media platforms with NHL access. You have to believe they will be pushing Tanenbaum to help find a solution to the lockout.

Jacobs's continuing presence is troublesome to some, but no deal gets done without his okay.

The strangest inclusion in the owners' group is that of Chipman, and his inclusion is interesting. The Canadiens' Geoff Molson has reportedly kept a low profile because he's one of the new kids on the block, but Molson has been an owner since 2009 and Chipman only joined the club last summer when the Atlanta Thrashers were relocated to Winnipeg. While it may be seen as a good sign that three successful Canadian teams are represented, Edwards is a known hardliner and the addition of Chipman stacks the deck in favour of the house. While the Jets made a tidy \$13 million in its inaugural season, this is a franchise with little margin for error. The Jets play in the smallest arena in the NHL, and a sour economy, a weak dollar and an uncapped player market forced the previous franchise to leave town. That's why Chipman will be looking for a deal that contains costs going forward.

All in all, the prospects for a settlement continue to be remote, but the upcoming talks should give both sides a clearer understanding of the gap which separates them.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 12.04.2012

645682 Montreal Canadiens

Tough-guy Nilan has big soft spot for his dogs

Posted by Stu Cowan

Nobody has ever questioned Chris Nilan's toughness, but the former Canadiens enforcer has a big soft spot for dogs.

The Gazette's Dave Stubbs reports that Nilan was living with his girlfriend in Oregon a few years ago, emerging from treatment to overcome substance addiction he'd developed through some 30 surgeries and the 251 times he fought in his unforgiving role of NHL enforcer. Jaime owned a pound rescue, a border collie/shepherd mix she had adopted as a puppy in Costa Rica, nursing it back to health.

"Jaime was working but I wasn't, having just gotten out of treatment, so I had a lot of idle time," Nilan, 54, told Stubbs. "I was focusing on my recovery, going to my meetings, but every day I'd get up and run the dog at the beach.

"It was therapeutic for me, honestly. With Jaime, the dog helped me get back on my feet."

Nilan was in Afghanistan on a goodwill tour 20 months ago, visiting the troops for a third time, when their dog was fatally struck by a car back home.

"We went through a difficult time, a real rough time," Nilan told Stubbs.

Nilan and Jaime, now living together in Montreal, have two new dogs.

"You come home after a long day and you want to talk about unconditional love?" Nilan told Stubbs. "That's what our dogs give, and it's pretty cool."

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 12.04.2012

645683 New Jersey Devils

New Faces at the N.H.L. Negotiating Table

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

Published: December 3, 2012

The outcome of two meetings this week could decide whether the N.H.L. season will be salvaged or lost to a lockout for the second time in nine years.

On Tuesday, a new set of owners will represent the league in talks with the players' union, as the sides try a different approach to jump-start stalled negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement.

On Wednesday, a meeting of the league's Board of Governors will decide whether to continue the lockout despite financial losses or move toward the players' position in pursuit of a settlement. The tenor of that meeting could hinge on how Tuesday's meeting with the union goes.

Regardless of the outcome of either meeting, more games are expected to be canceled by the end of the week, adding to the 34 percent of the 2012-13 season already erased by the lockout. The schedule from Dec. 15 through Jan. 1 is likely to be canceled next, increasing the total number of games lost to about 540 out of the 1,230-game season.

The new faces on the owners' side at Tuesday's meeting will be those of Mark Chipman of the Winnipeg Jets, Larry Tanenbaum of the Toronto Maple Leafs, Ronald Burkle of the Pittsburgh Penguins and Jeff Vinik of the Tampa Bay Lightning. That group is considered to be part of the owners' moderate wing. But two more hard-line owners from the negotiating committee will also be present — Jeremy Jacobs of the Boston Bruins and N. Murray Edwards of the Calgary Flames.

Several players will gather in New York on Tuesday morning to select which six of them will attend the meeting. Sidney Crosby, Jonathan Toews, Ryan Miller and other outspoken, pro-union stars will be in New York, and the players' delegation is expected to include one or two big names.

But the delegation is also expected to include some lesser-known players like Ron Hainsey, Kevin Westgarth and George Parros, who have been present for most negotiating sessions and are well-versed in the issues.

Jacobs, the chairman of the Board of Governors, is considered the hardest of the hard-line owners and, alongside the N.H.L. Commissioner Bettman, the architect of the lockouts in 1994-95 and 2004-5.

"If it's Jeremy Jacobs in there spewing his stuff, I don't think it's going to move this process forward," Winnipeg forward Andrew Ladd said last weekend, distilling the players' views of Jacobs.

Steve Fehr, the union's special counsel, and Bill Daly, the N.H.L. deputy commissioner, will attend the meeting, along with lawyers from each side. But Bettman and Donald Fehr, the union's executive director, will not. Their absence was proposed by the league after two days of federal mediation went nowhere last week.

The owners Ted Leonsis of the Washington Capitals and Craig Leipold of the Minnesota Wild also will not be present Tuesday.

Leipold is resented among some players for having signed Zach Parise and Ryan Suter to 13-year, \$98 million contracts in July, then demanding a rollback on those contracts and limits to future deals as part of the league's negotiating committee.

Leipold and the free-agent defenseman Chris Campoli got into a brief exchange during a negotiating session last month.

Burke, Tanenbaum and Chipman are believed to be less hard line than other N.H.L. owners. The Penguins, with Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and a new arena, thrived under the expired collective bargaining agreement. Burke and his co-owner, Mario Lemieux, are believed to be less inclined to want as a radical rollback in players' salaries and contract rights as other owners.

Tanenbaum's Maple Leafs are the league's richest club and are losing the biggest revenue stream to the lockout, estimated at \$200 million a year. Last December the rival communications giants Bell Canada and Rogers Communications joined forces and spent \$1.3 billion to buy a majority stake in Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment. Those corporations are presumed to want games to resume and the revenue stream to start flowing again.

Chipman's Jets are an N.H.L. success story, having become very profitable after Chipman and David Thomson, the chairman of Thomason Reuters, bought the club and relocated it from Atlanta in 2011. The Jets are presumed to be eager for a return to play, but Chipman and Winnipeg are also beholden to Bettman, who facilitated the rapid relocation a year and a half ago.

Vinik's views are less clear. He bought the Lightning during the 2009-10 season and subsequently brought in a new management team, including Steve Yzerman as general manager, to revamp the club and the arena. But it continues to lose money, and Vinik may be willing to hold a hard line until the owners wring more concessions from the players.

Left off the six-owner negotiating team was the Rangers owner James L. Dolan, after reports over the weekend that Dolan wanted to take part. That might reflect Dolan's continuing isolation from N.H.L. leadership after his failed call to oust Bettman in 2008 and a related failed lawsuit against the league over Internet rights.

The lockout, in its 12th week, is costing the N.H.L. \$18 million to \$20 million a day, Bettman estimated.

Sponsors have expressed frustration. The chief executive of Molson Coors has said the brewer will seek financial compensation from the league. The chairman of Comcast told stockholders about his disappointment with the loss of programming for the NBC Sports Network. Kraft withdrew its name from the popular annual Hockeyville promotion, in which a small Canadian town is chosen to host an N.H.L. preseason game.

On Saturday, the Small Business Administration announced that its representatives would reach out in the 23 N.H.L. cities in the United States to provide counseling sessions to merchants affected by the lockout.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our cities and towns, and they should not have to sit in the penalty box," said Karen Mills, an administrator at the Small Business Administration.

The players have missed four paychecks this season. But last week they received a \$10,000 stipend from the union, and in late October they received escrow checks from last season that amounted to 8 percent of their 2011-12 salary (or about \$190,000 for a player making \$2.4 million, the average salary).

In addition, several players who received bonuses for signing new or renewed contracts before Sept. 15 are continuing to receive checks for those bonuses, like Parise and Suter (\$10 million each) and Brad Richards, whose 2011 signing with the Rangers stipulated that he receive an \$8 million bonus this season.

New York Times LOADED: 12.04.2012

645684 New Jersey Devils

NHL players, owners to try new tack

By TOM GULITTI

The latest, best chance for a breakthrough in the NHL owners' lockout will bring some of the biggest names in the sport to the negotiating table today, but not the top executives from both sides.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and union executive director Don Fehr will sit out the 2 p.m. meeting in Manhattan between owners and a group of players that is expected to include Pittsburgh Penguins star Sidney Crosby, Chicago Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews and Buffalo Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller.

The hope is that, with the help of some new voices in the room, the sides can have an open discussion of the issues without being bogged down by the posturing of their respective leaders.

Bettman proposed the owners-players get-together after two days of meetings with federal mediators last week failed to produce any traction in collective bargaining agreement talks. At this point, it appears neither side has anything to lose by giving it a try.

Today is Day 80 of the lockout, and the league already has canceled its regular-season schedule through Dec. 14, the Jan. 1 Winter Classic outdoor game and All-Star weekend in Columbus.

The NHL's board of governors will receive an update on the lockout from Bettman on Wednesday in Manhattan and it's likely they also will discuss the next steps, including a possible drop-dead date for the 2012-13 season. At the same time, the NHL Players' Association is contemplating decertification and pushing the labor dispute into the courtrooms.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly confirmed Sunday that Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, Winnipeg's Mark Chipman, Calgary's Murray Edwards, Boston's Jeremy Jacobs, Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum and Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik will be the six owners at today's meeting. Burke, Chipman, Tanenbaum and Vinik have not attended previous negotiating sessions.

The players plan to select their representative group from a larger collection that will gather in Manhattan today prior to the meeting with the owners.

Both sides will also be accompanied by a staff member or counsel. Daly will sit in with the owners' group. Union special counsel Steve Fehr likely is to join the players' side.

BRIEF: Locked-out Devils C Stephen Gionta signed Monday to play for the organization's AHL team in Albany. Although he has a one-way NHL contract for 2012-13, Gionta is eligible to play in the AHL during the lockout because he was on Albany's 2011-12 clear-day list.

Bergen Record LOADED: 12.04.2012

645685 New Jersey Devils

Hypocritical owners face players today

By LARRY BROOKS

On Sept. 15, the day before Owners' Lockout III commenced, the Jets signed Evander Kane to a six-year, \$31.5 million contract that begins with a \$3 million salary for one year, increases to \$4.5 million the next year and then settles at \$4 million for each of the final four seasons of the deal.

Four days earlier, the Bruins signed Tyler Seguin to a six-year, \$34.5 million extension beginning with 2013-14 that ranges between \$4.5 million and \$6.5 million per. Boston entered into this contract even though Seguin was just two seasons into his three-year Entry Level deal.

So it would be interesting indeed for Winnipeg owner Mark Chapman and Boston owner Jeremy Jacobs to explain why the NHL is insisting on systems changes that would limit contracts to five years and annual variance within those contracts to five percent, and why these demands have become non-negotiable barriers to settlement.

It would be interesting to hear these owners explain themselves this afternoon when they and four others sit across the table from an as of yet unidentified sextet of players before tomorrow's Board of Governors meeting — also in Manhattan — that is likely to be explosive.

It's not just Boston and Winnipeg, of course. The fact is (with reference material provided by capgeek.com) that 10 of the last 61 one-way contracts signed prior to the lockout would violate either the term-limit clause or the annual variance clause — or both — that the NHL is seeking to impose through this lockout.

That includes the Capitals' contract with John Carlson, the Oilers' deals with Jordan Eberle and Taylor Hall and the Hurricanes' deal with Jeff Skinner (all extensions two years into Entry Level); the Flyers' contracts with Wayne Simmonds and Scott Hartnell; and the Canadiens' contract with Max Pacioretty.

This does not include the Penguins' 12-year, \$104.4 million extension of Sidney Crosby's contract set to begin next season that fluctuates between \$12 million and \$3 million per. Nor does it include Conn Smythe winner Jonathan Quick's 10-year, \$58 million extension with the Kings scheduled to begin next year that varies between \$7 million and \$2.5 million per. Neither does it count the \$10-year, \$60 million extension Jordan Staal signed with Carolina after his trade from the Penguins.

These deals took place earlier in the summer. These deals — which have nothing to do with the massive contracts that went to free agents Zach Parise, Ryan Suter and Shea Weber — are examples of the rank hypocrisy at work in the league's money grab and power trip that define this destructive, insane lockout.

It's not about make-whole money. It's about control. It's about the attempt, most notably, of Canceled-in-Chief Gary Bettman, Jacobs, and counsel Bob Battersman to shape the NHL in their own shortsighted image.

This is about the NHL attempting to both minimize the bargaining power of every player in the league and all but eliminate the maneuverability of general managers in the market.

It is one thing to eliminate the type of dramatic front-loaded contracts that do in fact eliminate low-revenue franchises from the mix. It is quite another to force every player and GM into a five-year straitjacket.

And it is even quite another for the league to use this collective bargaining agreement to attempt to institute the most rigid contract and freedom restrictions in pro sports, this by the way coming off the previous seven-year collective bargaining agreement that produced seven different Stanley Cup winners and 19 different conference finalists.

This isn't about competitive balance. This is about raw power. This is about hypocrisy. The floor is yours, Messrs. Chapman and Jacobs.

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645686 New York Rangers

Andrew Gross: Rangers owner James Dolan too anti-Gary Bettman to get invited to NHL meetings

The Record

James Dolan is not typically the first person who comes to mind as a white knight.

But in a sign of what a sinkhole the NHL has allowed itself to fall into, the news that the Rangers' owner is not one of the six owners who will meet directly with members of the locked-out NHL Players' Association today seems a damning indictment that the league wants to keep its more moderate voices muffled.

Because there's little doubt that if it were up to Dolan, clearly no fan of NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, the NHL season would have started on time in October rather than entering Day No. 80 of the third lockout since 1994 — the previous one forcing the cancellation of the 2004-05 season.

For the bulk of Dolan's tenure as owner of the Rangers and Knicks, he's been perceived and/or portrayed as a loose cannon, a rich son openly distrustful of the media, vindictive toward those who buck his policies (see ex-Knicks coach Larry Brown), impetuous regarding who he forces out (see ex-Knicks general manager Donnie Walsh) or guilty of displaying unwavering loyalty toward the incompetent (see ex-Knicks president/GM/coach Isiah Thomas).

Yet the common sentiment from the teams' athletes is that Dolan is an owner who would spend anything to have his teams win, even if his spending has been unwise (see former Knick Stephon Marbury) and who provides his teams with first-class facilities both at home and on the road.

And Dolan certainly knows 2012-13 might have been his team's best chance to hoist the Stanley Cup for the first time since 1994.

But while Dolan reportedly wanted to be in today's meeting, the designated six instead will be Boston's Jeremy Jacobs, Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, Winnipeg's Mark Chipman, Calgary's Murray Edwards, Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum and Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik. Jacobs and Edwards are already on the NHL's negotiating committee, meaning the players are furious with them.

Burkle is considered player-friendly and only Tanenbaum, whose franchise had its value estimated at \$1 billion, has a team worth more than the Rangers (\$750 million).

Still, having Dolan in the meeting would have been a big step in the players' direction.

Perhaps one that Bettman could not afford.

Bergen Record LOADED: 12.04.2012

645687 NHL

Juniors shooting for hockey gold get some help from NHL lockout

ERIC DUHATSCHKEK

The Globe and Mail

Boxing Day in Canada generally features three staples — leftover turkey, 8 a.m. mall openings and the beginning of the world junior hockey championship. But this year, thanks to the ongoing NHL lockout, Canadian hockey fans will have something extra to cheer about.

Up to half-a-dozen junior stars who might otherwise be in the National Hockey League are suddenly available to play for Canada at the 2013 world junior championships in Ufa, Russia. That mirrors what happened during the last lockout — 2005 — when the likes of the teenaged Sidney Crosby and Shea Weber were able to play in the world under-20 tournament in North Dakota, because NHL play had ground to a standstill that year too.

Canada hasn't won the world juniors since 2009, and a primary reason is that so many of the nation's top eligible juniors jump to the NHL before they turn 20 — and thus are generally not made available to play in the tournament.

Thanks to NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and players' association executive director Donald Fehr, that is not the case this year.

Barring an unexpected settlement to the NHL labour dispute, last year's Calder Trophy runner-up as the NHL's rookie of the year, Edmonton Oilers wunderkind Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, will be included on Canada's talent-laden team.

On Boxing Day last year, when he might have been playing for Canada in the 2011 world juniors, Mr. Nugent-Hopkins was ripping it up in the NHL,

tied with Patrick Kane, Nicklas Backstrom and James Neal for 19th in the scoring race. He has been keeping busy in the American Hockey League, where he regularly plays with Jordan Eberle, one of Canada's most prolific world junior players ever. Assuming he gets medical clearance for a nagging shoulder problem, Mr. Nugent-Hopkins will have the chance to follow in Mr. Eberle's footsteps, and maybe be a world junior hero.

"I know he wants to be part of this," said Kevin Prendergast, Hockey Canada's chief scout. "Knowing the young man, he's very mature. He's a high-end, high-calibre hockey player, so we're looking forward to seeing him when he gets here next week."

Six players who competed for last year's bronze-medal team are back, including forwards Ryan Strome (New York Islanders), Mark Scheifele (Winnipeg Jets), Jonathan Huberdeau (Florida Panthers) and Boone Jenner (Columbus Blue Jackets), along with defencemen Doug Hamilton (Boston Bruins) and Scott Harrington (Pittsburgh Penguins).

"Canada, over the last couple of years, has been the one country that's hurt the most by the NHL call-ups and the players that go there," Mr. Prendergast said. "The big thing for us is that the players that are coming back, the Scheifeles and the Stromes, the Dougie Hamiltons, they're that much more mature and physically stronger. It's a 20-year-old tournament. It just gives us a better opportunity – when you have kids that are a little more mature and physically stronger."

The last two times the NHL came to a halt under similar circumstances – world juniors in Red Deer (1995) and North Dakota (2005) – Canada put together star-studded rosters and emerged with gold medals. In addition to Mr. Crosby and Mr. Weber, the North Dakota team featured captain Patrice Bergeron, who found himself in the same situation as Mr. Nugent-Hopkins does this time around. Mr. Bergeron played in the NHL as an 18-year-old with the Boston Bruins, competed for Canada in a senior world championships and still had junior eligibility remaining.

Defenceman Ryan Murray – the second player chosen in last June's NHL entry draft – can't play because he's out for the season recovering from shoulder surgery. But even without him, defence is Canada's deepest position, according to coach Steve Spott.

Goaltending, meanwhile, is in the hands of four newcomers, but the favourite to win the starting job is Malcolm Subban, the brother of the Montreal Canadiens' P.K. Subban and a Bruins first-round draft choice. And even though the tournament generally features 19-year-olds, Canada invited a pair of 17-year-olds from the Halifax Mooseheads, Nathan MacKinnon and Jonathan Drouin, to attend. Mr. MacKinnon is considered the top prospect to go first overall in the 2013 NHL entry draft.

After winning five consecutive world juniors from 2005 to 2009, Canada was settled for two silvers and a bronze in the past three years. Normally, going to Europe is considered a disadvantage for the Canadians because they do not benefit from the supportive and wildly partisan home crowds, but the past two times the event was played overseas, Canada emerged victorious.

With an unusually experienced team this year, the chances will be greatly enhanced. The NHL is where they all want to be, but if the NHL cannot figure out how to settle its dispute with the players, then the world junior tournament in the unexpected beneficiary. With every cloud, a silver lining. Maybe, for Canada's sake, even gold.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.04.2012

645688 NHL

Player safety: The elephant in the NHL negotiation room

ROY MacGREGOR

There is opportunity here.

In all the dreary nuts-and-bolts talk about a new collective agreement between NHL owners and players we hear endlessly about share of revenues and the length and structure of contracts – but nothing at all about what, only one year ago, was hockey's biggest issue:

Player safety.

Perhaps the problem has been a failure to connect players' heads to owners' to pockets – something that just may occur Tuesday in New York

as a half dozen owners sit down with a half dozen players in what may be a desperate attempt to salvage what increasingly appears to be a doomed season.

Among the players will be Sidney Crosby. It is now one year, almost to the day, that Crosby returned to the game after missing more than 10 months while struggling with concussion symptoms. He soared brilliantly in a four-point debut against the New York Islanders and, seven games later, crashed again following what appeared to be a fairly minor hit to the head against the Boston Bruins.

Crosby will be a voice in the meetings, but he should also be a physical reminder of hockey's top potential as well as its bottom line. His contract extension is scheduled to pay him \$12-million a year beginning next fall. He can well be worth that, and more, to a league struggling to maintain and even gain on its fan base.

Not playing, however, he still costs that – and a great deal more. There is, of course, the price of replacing him. There are also the league-wide losses from empty seats and lost souvenir sales if, heaven forbid, he were once again injured for a length of time.

Without a Matt Cooke incident to remind the NHL every so often how hideous as well as ridiculous injuries to the head are, not much is said during labour negotiations about player safety.

This is unfortunate, as research is still ongoing even if NHL hockey is not.

Last month there was a major symposium at Toronto Western Hospital's Krembil Neuroscience Centre. Marc Savard, the brilliant Boston Bruins centre who appears to have lost his career to a headhunter's foolishness, has joined the advisory board of the Canadian Sports Concussion Project headed by Dr. Charles Tator. Other athletes, from football and hockey, are increasingly stepping forward in this project to tell their stories of the struggles they and their families have faced in dealing with the long-term effects of severe blows to the head.

And on Monday, Brain, a leading scientific journal, carried a report on the world's largest study on concussions. Scientists at Boston University studied the brains of 85 athletes involved in high-impact sports and determined that 68 of them – including those of hockey players Reggie Fleming, Derek Boogard and Bob Probert – were found to show signs of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). The long-term effects can be devastating.

"I don't think we can ignore it any longer," Lead author Anne McKee, a professor of neurology and pathology at the U.S. school told The Globe and Mail. "It's not going to go away if we pretend it doesn't exist. It does exist."

It does, and here is where it relates directly to the NHL's ongoing negotiations.

Reports continually say that the two sides, owners and players, are \$182-million apart. Given that at certain points last year half the Philadelphia Flyers seemed to be out with concussions and, according to one report, there were days when as much as \$50-million in salaries was sidelined by head injuries throughout the league, that \$182-million would be quickly covered and more if the league would only move to ban head shots entirely.

Concussions would still happen through accident, but this is so in every game from soccer to schoolyard swings.

Can it be done?

Paul Kariya says yes, it can be done. Kariya is a future hall-of-famer who won Olympic gold for Canada and had a perfect point-a-game average (989 points in 989 games) with Anaheim, Colorado, Nashville and St. Louis. He was also, long before Crosby's 2011 injury, the NHL's best-known casualty of the head shot.

Kariya believes that it is entirely possible to rid the game of this continuing blight. He points to hockey's once-infamous bench-clearing brawls, so common a generation ago but unknown today in a time of severe penalties and fines.

"This," he says, "is how the league got rid of bad behaviour before."

In Kariya's opinion, a head-shots discussion within the realm of the labour agreement is neither anti-owner nor anti-player, but completely pro players safety and future revenues. Healthy players, especially when they are the calibre of a Crosby, means a healthier bottom line.

In other words, the timing is perfect for both owners and players to talk about hits to the head as well as hits to the pocketbook.

"The last lockout, horrible as it was, had a positive note that when the game came back it was better, a much-improved product," Kariya says.

"Hopefully, something else good can come out of this."

Hopefully.

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645689 NHL

New voices in NHL labour talks may provide last chance to salvage season

DAVID EBNER

The conclave of hockey players and owners in direct talks – without NHL commissioner Gary Bettman or NHLPA head Donald Fehr in the room – is the best hope to save the season, say several sources with direct knowledge of the negotiations.

Optimism, however, varies among those involved, ranging from "I'm hopeful," to the opposite, "I'm not." The most negative view sees the season likely cancelled, whereas the most optimistic believes Tuesday's meeting could revive the stalled labour talks.

The players-owners meeting in New York, which takes place on the 80th day of the lockout, comes the day before the NHL's board of governors convene. The players-owners meeting, if positive, could stretch into Wednesday.

Tuesday's meeting, in the wake of last week's failed mediator-led sessions, is an attempt to remix the recipe. The NHL Players' Association hadn't said who would attend, but the likes of Chicago's Jonathan Toews were headed to New York. Among owners, two mainstays will be there, Jeremy Jacobs of Boston and Murray Edwards of Calgary, but are complemented by a fresh cross-section of the league, including Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle and Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik.

The new mix of voices and perspectives may be what is needed to revive the stalled talks, one owner source told The Globe and Mail on Monday.

A second owner source, who had been previously pessimistic about the prospects for a season, felt optimistic Monday. He said the owners' ability to present "unfiltered" views could help.

"I'm hopeful," the source said. "If it's going to happen, it's going to happen this week."

A third owner source said the NHL has already offered a fair deal and that there is nothing more to cede to the players, and blamed Fehr for the impasse. The source envisions a repeat of 2004-05, the lost season. "I don't think we're playing," the source said. "That's the bottom line."

While at least several owner sources feel some optimism, there remains an entrenched chasm in points of view. The players want the owners to yield more. The owners believe they have ceded enough.

"We feel we have given up a lot," a fourth owner source told The Globe in late November just before the failed meditated talks.

On Monday, some hope did seem to percolate. The new owner names were parsed.

The presence of Larry Tanenbaum, co-owner of the Toronto Maple Leafs, was noted, in part because the Leafs, who were pegged by Forbes last week as worth \$1-billion, stand to lose the most by not playing.

Burkle is a friend of labour, having been previously honoured for humanitarian work by the largest union in the United States, the AFL-CIO, and being chosen man of the year by the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. Vinik was saluted by his locked-out captain, Vincent Lecavalier.

"I'm happy he's going," said Lecavalier of Vinik on Sunday in an interview with the Tampa Bay Times. "He's a guy who will listen and talk and have a conversation and see where things go."

Jacobs's reputation as a give-no-ground hardliner has been widely discussed, and his presence could squash new ideas from bursting forth. Still, the other mainstay owner who will be there Tuesday, Edwards, does have a relationship with players. "There's a respect factor between us

players and Murray," Matt Stajan, the Flames player rep, said in mid-September.

Eliminating the intermediaries could bring together two sides that have more in common than believed, said labour-relations expert Maurice Mazerolle, who is director of the Centre for Labour Management Relations at Ryerson University and had previously worked on labour relations in construction, health care, teaching, and transportation.

"Both the owners and the players, I suspect, have a more common bond than those who represent them," Mazerolle said. "It holds some promise. Sometimes you just have to go past the people who represent you and talk directly."

Meetings such as Tuesday's – which is not considered an official bargaining session – allow for what Mazerolle called "supposals" – ideas that can be chewed over, rather than hard proposals that are either accepted or rejected.

But, in the end, with the season on the line, "changing the human element" is the bet, in terms of the people in the room.

"When you get to a stalemate – which is what we're talking about – you can take some people out of the room," said Mazerolle, referring to Fehr and Bettman, both of whom are seen as dug in, the root of the stalemate. "In their absence, perhaps it sets a different tone. Perhaps the framing of interests is somewhat different. The dialogue could be different."

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645690 NHL

Rule changes reduce hockey head injuries: Study

Hayley Mick

From high-tech helmets to computerized baseline tests, scientists are hard at work devising new ways to tackle the problem of concussions in minor hockey.

But a new study has highlighted the effectiveness of a more rudimentary strategy: changing the rules.

Rules changes can significantly reduce injuries among minor hockey players, and lead to fewer penalty minutes for aggressive acts, according to a study published Monday in the Canadian Medical Association Journal.

Toronto researchers found stricter bodychecking rules led to injury rates that were between three- and 12-times lower.

"Interventions based on rule changes showed the greatest likelihood of making ice hockey safer for youth," lead author Michael Cusimano, a neurologist at St. Michael's Hospital, said in a release.

Concussion and other head injuries are a major concern from the bantam to professional levels. But in youth hockey, the debate around head injuries has centred on bodychecking among pee wee players (ages 11 to 13).

The sport's national governing body, Hockey Canada, has said it is not interested in implementing a national ban on bodychecking at that age.

In October, Hockey Canada president Bob Nicholson told The Globe and Mail he believes it is better for children to be taught how to properly hit at a young age. He also said concerned parents are free to enroll their children in leagues that ban the hits.

But even as concerns about head injuries drive more regions to create leagues that ban the hits, critics say they are mostly recreational, forcing some athletes to choose between safety and their desire to play top-tier hockey. It also creates problems when teams from different streams face each other. (Which almost became the case in Alberta last year, when minor hockey officials in Calgary narrowly defeated a motion to ban the hits in city's pee wee leagues. In Edmonton, the hits are allowed.)

Brain injuries such as concussions, which can result from bodychecking, account for 15 per cent of all injuries to players ages 9 to 16, according to the authors of the CMAJ paper.

The report's authors conducted a literature review, meaning they found 18 other studies that looked at interventions aimed at reducing violence in

minor hockey, and assessed them for larger trends. Of the 13 studies that looked at rules changes, 11 showed a reduction in penalties and/or injuries; nine showed a statistically significant decrease.

The findings bolster what safety advocates have been saying for years: prevention is key, and no piece of equipment on the market can protect a child from concussion.

"[The most important thing is] prevention of those concussions by proper adherence to the rules – and some new rules. Head-to-head contact has to be eliminated," Charles Tator, a neurologist and founder of ThinkFirst Canada (which is now a part of safety advocacy group, Parachute) said in an interview.

Last month, Hockey Canada announced it had spent more than \$100,000 to create a new smartphone application to help educate parents, coaches and trainers on how to diagnose and treat concussions. The application will be updated as new data emerges.

The CMAJ study also looked at research into the effectiveness of educational programs, but those trends were less conclusive. The three studies that looked at educational interventions showed they led to fewer penalty minutes, but did not account for injury rates.

Nine of the studies looked specifically at bodychecking rules, which led to fewer injuries, penalties, or both.

"Given that brain injuries are so common, and that they can have permanent effects, we need to introduce measures that we know have been shown to work to reduce the numbers of children and youth suffering these injuries in sport," Cusimano said.

"Rule changes essentially alter the culture of a sport and clearly define acceptable behaviour for players, coaches, parents and officials."

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645691 NHL

World junior hockey tournament: Ryan Nugent-Hopkins invited to play for Canada

Daniel Girard
Sports Reporter

During the two most recent NHL work stoppages, Canada dominated the world junior hockey championships, winning every game and the gold.

This year's holiday classic is set for Ufa, Russia beginning on Dec. 26, and once again the Canadians look stacked thanks to the NHL lockout.

"It gives us a better team to start with," Kevin Prendergast, head scout for Hockey Canada, said of the impact of having all junior-age players available. "At this point Canada, over the last couple of years, has been the one country that's been hurt the most by the NHL call-ups and players there.

"It just gives us a better opportunity when you have kids that are a little bit more mature and physically stronger," he said Monday as the roster of the 37 players invited to the selection camp in Calgary from Dec. 10-15 was unveiled.

They include 12 NHL first-rounders and eight second-rounders.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Edmonton's first overall pick in the 2011 NHL entry draft who starred for the Oilers last season, is among at least a half-dozen of the group who might be in the big leagues right now if not for the lockout.

"It's one of the things that's missing in his resumé right now and certainly I know he wants to be part of this," Prendergast said of Nugent-Hopkins, 19, who was to have his shoulder examined in Edmonton on Monday before getting the final go-ahead to report to camp. Playing with the Oklahoma City Barons in the AHL, he was cut from the team before the 2011 tournament.

A half-dozen players are returning from last year's team, which won the bronze medal. Among them are Boston Bruins prospect Dougie Hamilton of the Niagara Ice Dogs, a potential captain, who will anchor the blue line with Pittsburgh Penguins draft pick Scott Harrington of the London Knights.

Even with the injury to Ryan Murray, the second overall pick of Columbus in the NHL draft last spring, the blue line is still solid. Leafs prospect Morgan Rielly of the Moose Jaw Warriors, Carolina's Ryan Murphy, who plays for Canadian head coach Steve Spott in Kitchener, Detroit draft pick Xavier Ouellet and the Islanders' Adam Pelech, who plays for the Erie Otters, are among the 12 defencemen battling for seven spots on the final roster.

Nugent-Hopkins would headline the 13 forwards, who will be chosen from among 21 invited to camp. Four are returnees — Jonathan Huberdeau of the Florida Panthers and Saint John Sea Dogs, Winnipeg Jet Mark Scheifele of the Barrie Colts, Niagara's Ryan Strome and Boone Jenner, a Columbus draft pick who plays in Oshawa — who will be joined by a mix of high-end scoring talent that will be asked to play a variety of roles for Canada.

While the world juniors tend to be a tournament for 18- and 19-year-olds, five players eligible for next spring's NHL entry draft are among the 21 forwards. Nathan MacKinnon, a potential first overall pick in June, and his Halifax Mooseheads teammate, Jonathan Drouin, both 17, got the call.

"When we meet and discuss our players that are coming to this camp, at no time do we talk about birth years," Spott said. "It's about bringing the best players to our camp."

Three of the four potential goalies are from the GTA. Boston prospect Malcolm Subban of the Belleville Bulls appears to have the inside track with Jake Paterson of Detroit and the Saginaw Spirit. St. Louis' Jordan Binnington of the Owen Sound Attack and Calgary prospect Laurent Brossoit of the Edmonton Oil Kings round out the group, all tournament rookies.

Canada last won the tournament in Ottawa in 2009.

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645692 NHL

NHL lockout: NHLPA united in its distrust of owners: Cox

By Damien Cox Sports Columnist

Don Fehr may yet win this thing. And he surely didn't take the job to lose.

What that will look like, precisely what would constitute an NHLPA victory over the NHL in this current labour spat, is unclear. How to win a give-back negotiaton has always been the fundamental conundrum facing the union.

What we do know, and the latest manifestation of it was vividly demonstrated this weekend in the fussing over the details of direct talks between owners and players, is that the presence of Fehr has both galvanized the players while at the same time league-union relations have been set back at least 20 years.

Are the players more united than ever? Roman Hamrlik aside, it seems so, although with at least another six weeks of negotiating ahead before the 2012-13 season is finished for good, the mettle of both sides has yet to be tested to the max.

But if the NHLPA is united, it is united not by a common goal or an objective, but by a total and complete distrust of ownership and league executive bordering on hatred.

And in that, we're really back to where we were circa 1990 when Alan Eagleson and John Ziegler had an oh-so-cozy relationship and players were just starting to understand how they'd been had for the previous two decades.

Then, at least, the players could honestly see how Eagleson and his many hats had compromised their position on a variety of fronts including pensions, salaries, expansion, mergers, international hockey and benefits in general.

It was the last time that you could seriously make an argument that NHL players were an exploited group. Then Bob Goodenow took over and the great evening process began. By 2004, players were getting 73 cents of every dollar that went in the NHL's till.

Fast forward to 2012. NHL players have never been as rich as they are now, or were under the previous collective bargaining agreement. During

Gary Bettman's reign as NHL commissioner, their salaries have increased more than five-fold.

For that, Bettman is almost universally hated by the players.

There was a little of this back in 2004-05. We remember Chris Chelios' unkind/threatening words. But the proliferation of social media since then has given us access to the inner workings of the minds of more players, and unless they are being untruthful, to a man they appear to distrust and despise the NHL commissioner as a "cancer" and an "idiot" and generally in a way that is reminiscent of the way in which the Eagleson-Ziegler tandem was despised when it became clear what they'd been up to.

Interestingly, however, it hasn't stopped there, with a massive hate-on for Bettman.

In recent weeks, Boston Bruins owner Jeremy Jacobs has become the focal point of the union's spite. Before, it was Bettman accused of restraining the majority of good-willed owners and using voting rules to keep a minority in charge. Now, Jacobs has joined the commish in the minds of the players, ostensibly as the hardest of the hard-line owners, a individual who cannot be reasoned with because of his unbridled greed and disrespect for the hockey union.

At least that's what the brethren believe. Forget the \$34 million Jacobs lavished on Tyler Seguin for no particular reason just before the lockout began, about as anti-Bettman a move as an owner could make.

Don't confuse the the effort to create PA unity by introducing facts.

The union line is that Jacobs hates players, and wants to take the game back to the Ziegler days. This is what the players seem to now believe, or what their propagandists are trying to convince them of.

Again, there are echoes of years past in this. Back in the Ziegler days, it was Dollar Bill Wirtz, owner of the Chicago Blackhawks, who was identified as the power behind the throne.

Now it's Bettman and Jacobs. We didn't really have this during the Goodenow years, at least not in the final ones after the league was forced to finally open up its books and prove what it claimed to be true was indeed true, both with Wirtz's Blackhawks and elsewhere.

For a time, that seemed to change the flavour of league-union relations. They might disagree, but it was over facts and objectives. Then the union got a little preoccupied with trying to burn its own house down.

Now, we're back to plain old "You're trying to rip us off." The "make whole" issue has been turned into players fighting back against a league effort to "tear up" existing contracts. Fear and loathing abounds, which makes it hard to make a whole lot of progress, and creates scenes like Chris Campoli screaming insults at Craig Leipold.

Give Fehr credit. In a take-back scenario, he didn't have a lot of cards to play. All he could really do was find a way to make the players believe this was about their manhood, about standing up to the owners, about making amends for turning on one another in the last lockout.

To have any cards to play in this negotiation, Fehr needed to rally the players around the concept that despite the fact salaries had increased substantially since the last lockout, the 2005 CBA was their Treaty of Versailles. This required some finesse. Fehr, rather than working on a new deal, talked from the start about the massive give-backs of that CBA, and the vital need not to capitulate again.

He needed to make this negotiation about the past, not the future.

The best way to achieve that goal was to unite the players behind a secondary idea, the idea that the owners were and are lying to them at every turn, that they won't bargain fairly, that the players are giving and giving more and more not getting anything in return, that Bettman and Jacobs and the rest of them are trying to take food off the table of today's player and the player of the future.

It doesn't have to be true to work.

The owners and Bettman seemed caught unawares this would be the strategy. Indeed, if there has been a great miscalculation in this process, it was in the first offer of the owners to the players. Instead of being seen as simply an opening move in a long negotiation, Fehr and Co. made sure it was viewed as an attack on players, as a declaration of all-out war. You could even go back before that, to the realignment proposal of last season, killed by the union basically because Fehr convinced the players they

hadn't been consulted properly and the league was trying something untoward, something shifty.

These events fuelled the distrust and united the players, and Jimmy Devellano's ill-timed and offensive words were just gasoline on the fire. If the players were unsure of themselves before, they weren't any more.

What this means is that even relatively simple negotiating tasks have become thorny nightmares. Trying to organize direct player-owner talks as will take place on Tuesday became a debate over which owners should be there because surely Jacobs shouldn't be.

The champion of the players has become New York Rangers boss Jim Dolan, and not because Dolan is seen to be a sharp hockey man. History tells us Dolan and Bettman don't get along, so to the players, that means Dolan must be the only sensible member of the NHL lodge, and therefore the only owner likely to see reason.

Hey, if Dolan could be included in the talks and the talks led to a resolution, it might even be an impetus to get rid of Bettman.

But Dolan won't be at the table. Instead, the NHL will send Larry Tanenbaum (Toronto), Murray Edwards (Calgary), Mark Chipman (Winnipeg), Jeff Vinik (Tampa Bay) and Ron Burkle (Pittsburgh). Oh yes, and Jacobs, and his inclusion is likely to be interpreted as a red flag to the ever wary players.

This deal will get done eventually. Perhaps not in time to save this season. Next season might also be impacted. But eventually, there will be a new CBA.

But how will the distrust created by this standoff, layered on top of unprecedented public cynicism over the entire mess, ever be reduced? It's hard to see at this point how, or when, the league and union might have a relationship based on mutual respect and common goals as was supposed to be the case after the last lockout but turned out to be a mirage.

At this point, growing the pie, which would benefits owners and players, appears to be the last objective on the minds of either side. It's scorched earth for both. This isn't about moving forward; we're back to the early 1990s in terms of the relationship between owners and players.

And isn't that the worst scenario of all? That this battle won't just be the biggest, nastiest one yet, but rather the first in a series in this new century.

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645693 Ottawa Senators

Mendes: Bettman inherited overexpansion woes to southern U.S.

By IAN MENDES, Ottawa Citizen December 3, 2012

Last week, Forbes magazine published a report estimating the value of each of the 30 NHL franchises.

With the lockout in full swing – and a lack of hockey statistics to pour over on a daily basis – these numbers were received with great interest by the NHL community.

The report seems to detail the wide gap between the successful franchises in the league and the ones that struggle.

That a number of small markets anchor the NHL's financial stability is nothing new. It has long been a point of debate among hockey fans.

The discussion usually goes something like this:

"Gary Bettman added too many teams. And he put them in warm weather climates like Florida. Nobody cares about hockey there and now we have a bunch of franchises that are pulling down the entire league."

The commissioner is often blamed for being overly aggressive with expansion into the southern United States, which has led to the game being watered down on so many levels.

But in reality, Bettman's role in the expansion into the Sun Belt is an urban myth.

The NHL currently has five teams playing in the states of Florida and California — often cited as the most non-traditional markets on the circuit. However, all of those teams were in place before Bettman took over his job as NHL commissioner in February of 1993.

The Los Angeles Kings are the most senior Sun Belt team, having joined the league during the original expansion in 1967.

In the spring of 1990, the San Jose Sharks were granted a franchise. A few months later, Phil Esposito's ownership group was awarded the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Two years later, in December 1992, Anaheim and Miami were given NHL teams as well.

So when the Sharks, Lightning, Ducks and Panthers officially joined the league, Bettman was still working under David Stern as one of the top advisors in the NBA. Bettman was also out of the picture when the wheels were set in motion to move the Minnesota North Stars south to Dallas. Those Sun Belt teams were added courtesy of previous NHL presidents John Ziegler and Gil Stein.

That Bettman didn't have a hand in bringing those teams into the NHL fold comes as a surprise to many of his detractors.

Since Bettman became commissioner, he's overseen the addition of four new teams to the NHL: Minnesota, Columbus, Atlanta and Nashville.

Of those cities, Minnesota and Columbus would certainly not fit the bill as warm-weather locations. Nashville is probably as non-traditional of a market as you can find in the NHL, but the Predators have enjoyed a fair degree of success during their time in the league. Last season, for example, the Predators played to 97.5 per cent capacity at their home games at the Bridgestone Arena and made the playoffs for the seventh time in eight years.

Bettman's biggest expansion mistake, of course, was putting a team back in Atlanta. And while he was absolutely stubborn about moving the franchise, he eventually relented and allowed the Thrashers to re-locate to Winnipeg.

The commissioner did put two teams into the Sun Belt via relocation, moving the Jets from Winnipeg to Phoenix in 1996 and the Whalers to Carolina the following year. And yes, Bettman deserves a significant amount of blame for allowing the prolonged soap opera that has unfolded in Phoenix.

But in hindsight, moving the Winnipeg and Quebec City franchises was the right decision. Those cities were not prepared to handle the fall of the Canadian dollar coupled with the rise of player salaries without a cap. There were no local ownership groups willing to step in, build new arenas and absorb the costs of operating an NHL franchise.

The landscape has changed dramatically and now Winnipeg has its team back, while Quebec City is poised to return with a new arena. For all of his foibles, Bettman rarely receives credit for saving franchises in Edmonton, Calgary and Ottawa when things looked bleak with the Canadian dollar 10 years ago. In the big picture, the commissioner has probably saved as many Canadian teams as he has added to the southern United States.

Bettman shoulders a lot of blame for the missteps that have occurred during his tenure as NHL commissioner. Three lockouts, a concussion epidemic and the lack of a meaningful television deal south of the border are just some of the issues for which he is responsible.

But overexpansion to weak markets in the southern United States is a problem he inherited — not one he created.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 12.04.2012

645694 Ottawa Senators

Column: Keefe hoping success in CCHL translates to success in the OHL

By DARREN DESAULNIERS, Ottawa Citizen December 3, 2012

If Sheldon Keefe can have the same impact on the Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds as he did on the Pembroke Lumber Kings, it won't be long until The Soo will rise again.

On Monday Mike Stapleton was relieved of his head coaching duties with the Greyhounds of the Ontario Hockey League. Shortly thereafter, Keefe was named the new head coach of the Greyhounds, leaving behind the Lumber Kings after six very successful seasons.

Keefe became the Lumber Kings coach and general manager in June, 2006 and won five straight Central Canada Hockey League titles.

That reign came to an end last season, but not before he also added two Fred Page Cup titles as Eastern Canadian champions, and in 2011 he led the Lumber Kings to the RBC Cup as Canadian junior A national champions.

With the Greyhounds, he inherits a team that has missed the playoffs three of the past four seasons. This year are tied for seventh in the OHL's Western Conference with a 13-14-2 record. They haven't won an OHL title since 1992, but they did win the Memorial Cup the following year as hosts.

"If you're ever going to get a chance, you're going to be going into a situation where there is a challenge and the team likely is underachieving," Keefe said.

"I think that's the situation here and I'm up for a challenge."

Keefe compiled a 265-76-20 regular season record in the CCHL and became the fastest coach in league history to reach 200 wins. He had a post-season record of 67-22.

The 32-year old Keefe said the decision to leave was an easy one from a hockey standpoint, and that he had been preparing himself for a change since winning the RBC Cup. He did say he was a little surprised at how quickly the opportunity came and that Sunday was a difficult time off the ice.

"There are so many people here in Pembroke that make the Lumber Kings who they are. The people behind the scenes, the volunteers, all the people that do all the thankless jobs.

"Without them, as a guy who's owner coach and GM, I don't survive in this town very long and certainly don't have the opportunity to develop that I had," Keefe said.

"I'm forever grateful for those people and their efforts."

Keefe becomes the third CCHL coach in the past six years to jump from a head-coaching position in the CCHL to a head coach at the major junior level.

Eric Veilleux left the Hawkesbury Hawks to lead the Shawingan Cataractes part way through the 2005-06 season and won a Memorial Cup with the Cataractes last spring.

Todd Gill had a successful five-year tenure with the Brockville Braves before becoming the head coach of the Kingston Frontenacs this season.

"It really is good news for everyone," CCHL President Kevin Abrams said of the Keefe promotion.

"Our league is seen as developing a lot of players and now that's three coaches that have gone directly from being head coaches in our league to being head coaches in (major junior). Those guys really honed their coaching skills in our league."

Chris Byrne also coached the Nepean Raiders before joining the Ottawa 67's as an assistant seven years ago and is now in his fourth season as head coach.

Scott Mohns, who has been an assistant to Keefe for five years now, will take over as head coach of the Lumber Kings.

The Lumber Kings begin life without Keefe Tuesday as they visit the Cumberland Grads.

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645695 Ottawa Senators

Swedish coach angry Senators won't make Zibanejad available for world juniors

By Ken Warren, Ottawa Citizen December 3, 2012

Swedish coach Roger Ronnberg is livid about the Ottawa Senators' decision to not make prospect Mika Zibanejad available for the world junior championships in Russia later this month.

Ronnberg suggested it was indicative of an overall attitude that NHL teams hold towards top European prospects.

"It is sad that Europeans always have to be on our backs for them over there and that they can dictate and decide about these tournaments," Ronnberg told reporters in Sweden Monday after formally announcing the country's training camp roster.

"They (North Americans) are pretty stubborn. It's a game of power against Europe, this."

Ronnberg says he won't get directly involved, but that the Swedish Ice Hockey Federation will look at all its options to possibly overturn the Senators decision.

The Senators offered no comment Monday when asked about Ronnberg's words.

Last week, following internal discussions within the Senators organization and conversations with Zibanejad and his agent, the Senators opted to keep the 19-year-old Swedish prospect with Binghamton of the American Hockey League.

Zibanejad, selected sixth overall by the Senators in the 2011 NHL entry draft, scored the gold-medal winning goal for Sweden at last year's world championship. His previous success at that tournament was one reason for the Senators' decision. The Senators also believe that Zibanejad's development as a pro will be better served by him staying in the AHL. Zibanejad has one goal and six assists in 16 games with Binghamton.

The Swedish roster does include another Senators prospect. Defenceman Mikael Wikstrand, chosen by Ottawa in the seventh round (196th overall) of last June's NHL draft, will be given a shot at representing Sweden in Russia.

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645696 Ottawa Senators

Senators players jaded by lockout process

By Ken Warren, Ottawa Citizen December 3, 2012

Once upon a time, Marc Methot would get excited with each new development in negotiations to reach a new collective bargaining agreement between NHL owners and players, thinking the end of the lockout could be near.

"Not anymore," the Ottawa Senators defenceman said Monday, following an off-ice workout at the Bell Sensplex. "For the first two months, every time there was a glimpse of hope, I would get butterflies, thinking that I might be playing my first game in Ottawa soon."

Disappointed at every twist and turn in talks so far, he now has his guard up against too much optimism. Accordingly, Methot is taking a wait-and-see attitude as the sides take up a new tact in New York Tuesday, removing both commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr from talks in favour of head-to-head meetings between owners and players.

In discussing the lockout, Methot acknowledges that "it's hard to stay motivated" and that he's "sick of it." He went on the charity/cultural tour of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon two weeks ago, taking advantage of a chance to see a different part of the world.

He even played in a men's league game at the RA Centre last Thursday – he had two goals and two assists in a 6-4 win – to try and find some form of competitive game action. Clearly, though, he's itching to get back to playing NHL hockey as soon as possible.

Just the same, he's low key when talking about the new direction of meetings. Winnipeg's Mark Chipman, Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum, Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik, Calgary's Murray Edwards and Boston's Jeremy Jacobs – a hardliner and a lightning rod for criticism among players – will be representing the NHL. The NHLPA will bring a

group of players to New York – believed to include Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby, Chicago's Jonathan Toews, Florida's George Parros and Shane Doan of Phoenix – before deciding who, exactly, will be a part of direct negotiations.

"This is not really the way I thought things would go down, without our representative representing us," said Methot. "But if this means we're that much closer, I'm all for it. It's changing the dynamic of the conversation." He also concedes that "ego right now is the biggest thing keeping us apart."

Fellow Senators defenceman Chris Phillips, the club's union representative, also isn't getting ahead of himself. He, too, has been down this road before.

"It's past the point of putting emotions into this, but I'm glad we're trying something different," Phillips said. "Instead of just the same guys saying the same things all the time, maybe (new) guys have new arguments, new ways of saying things."

DISAPPOINTING DAY FOR SENATORS PROSPECTS: The lockout has also had a trickle down effect on Senators prospects. Without NHL hockey, several top Canadian 19-year-olds, who would likely be on NHL rosters this season, have become available for the world junior team. That means players such as left winger Matt Puempel and defenceman Cody Ceci were left off the Canadian junior roster announced Monday. Puempel has 21 goals and six assists in 26 games with the Kitchener Rangers, while Ceci has seven goals and 23 assists in 30 games with the Ottawa 67's.

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645697 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers' Lilja on conditioning assignment with AHL Phantoms

Frank Seravalli, Daily News Staff Writer

FLYERS DEFENSEMAN Andreas Lilja, who underwent left hip surgery in mid-July, joined the Adirondack Phantoms on Monday in Glens Falls, N.Y., on a conditioning assignment.

Since Lilja was injured when the NHL lockout began on Sept. 16, he was not part of the group of players locked out. He is receiving his \$700,000 salary in regular installments. The surgery repaired a degenerative condition that has been plaguing Lilja for a few years. The former Stanley Cup champion as a member of the Red Wings played 46 games with the Flyers last year.

Lilja, from Sweden, is expected to remain with the Phantoms in practice for a few days but not play in any games. Previously, even players under a one-way NHL contract could join the AHL during a 15-day window for conditioning/rehab exercises, including games. Lilja, 37, is in the final year of his deal with the Flyers. Should the lockout, which reached its 80th day on Tuesday, wipe out the entire season, Lilja's pro career in North America could be in jeopardy.

Whenever Lilja is medically cleared to play, he will join the rest of the locked-out players and stop receiving payments from the Flyers.

Also, the NHL and players association have a meeting planned Tuesday in New York consisting of six players and six owners, plus staff and counsel from each side but without NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and union executive director Donald Fehr.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.04.2012

645698 Pittsburgh Penguins

Burkle's arrival at labor talks offers hope to Penguins players

By Josh Yohe

Updated 1 hour ago

Feeling resentment toward certain NHL owners is currently commonplace among NHL players, especially for a loyal union man like Penguins left wing Matt Cooke.

Penguins owners Ron Burkle and Mario Lemieux, however, were loyal to Cooke during perhaps the most difficult time of his life. And Cooke's respect for them remains.

Burkle will attempt to jump-start labor negotiations Tuesday in New York as part of a small NHL committee that will meet with a handful of players. Cooke and many teammates believe Burkle's presence gives negotiations a fresh hope.

"I have nothing but praise for Ron and Mario," Cooke said. "Obviously, with what I went through, their support and their ability to communicate with me in a constructive manner, and standing beside me for all the stuff I went through ... I'd say I have a great relationship with them."

Cooke was referring to his 17-game suspension that concluded his 2010-11 season and the subsequent summer of change he underwent. The veteran became a different player and a better man during that summer, and team ownership was behind him.

"Ron's been great every time I've had a conversation with him," Cooke said. "Every time we're in L.A., he brings us to his house. When we're somewhere when he can be around, he's there. It's always great to see him, and it's great to see that he's going to be there (in New York on Tuesday)."

The Penguins speak highly of their ownership, and that has not changed despite the lockout. Burkle and Lemieux are considered moderates in NHL circles — certainly not hard line, anti-union figures such as Boston's Jeremy Jacobs and Washington's Ted Leonsis.

Many Penguins called for "new blood" in the next installment of negotiations. Burkle is no stranger to negotiating, but this is the first time he has involved himself in the NHL dispute.

"Just from dealing with him in the past," defenseman Ben Lovejoy said, "I'd say we're all feeling pretty optimistic about him being involved."

Penguins captain Sidney Crosby, who maintains a strong relationship with Burkle and former landlord Lemieux, is one of the several players expected to attend the meetings.

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.04.2012

645699 Pittsburgh Penguins

NHL lockout: Optimism thin, but new faces at table encouraging

By Dave Molinari / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Craig Kunitz would like to get back to work.

Soon.

For lots of good reasons.

After all, Kunitz, a left winger with the Penguins, was scheduled to earn a little more than \$3.7 million in 2012-13 and, at age 33, might be approaching the twilight of his most productive years as a pro.

Kunitz has every reason, then, to hope that a meeting today between NHL players and owners in New York generates some genuine traction in the negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement that would end the lockout that has shut down the NHL for 2 1/2 months.

And he certainly couldn't be blamed for wishing that Ron Burkle of the Penguins, who will be one of six owners taking part in the session, and teammate Sidney Crosby, who is expected to be one of a half-dozen players involved, will play a prominent role in whatever progress is made.

Kunitz, though, made it clear after player-organized workout Monday at Southpointe that he's not especially optimistic that anything significant will be accomplished today in Manhattan.

Or that having Burkle and Crosby take part will have a meaningful impact.

"I don't think so, no," Kunitz said.

"I don't think it changes anything. Maybe conversation-wise, but I don't see it helping."

His perspective, it should be noted, was not shared by most of his teammates at the workout.

If anything, the majority seemed cautiously optimistic that having Crosby and Burkle in the room could give the talks a badly needed spark.

"[Crosby and Burkle] obviously have a respect for each other," defenseman Matt Niskanen said.

"That alone could lead to more productive talks, serious conversation where they're taking our proposal seriously and not walking out in 10 minutes. Ron Burkle is not going to do that to Sid."

Whether Crosby will be in on the talks with the owners won't be known until today, because he is part of a contingent of players -- Jonathan Toews, George Parros, Martin St. Louis, Kevin Westgarth and Ryan Miller reportedly are among the others -- the NHLPA has summoned to New York and from which it will choose its six representatives.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr will not take part in the talks, although each side will have at least one staff member on hand.

The meeting today will be the first foray into the negotiations for Burkle, who pointedly stays as far from the spotlight as possible.

Nonetheless, he has made a habit of having team dinners at his southern California mansion when the Penguins play there, and he routinely attends their games at Madison Square Garden in New York.

"He always seems really happy to come to the games and say 'Hi' to the guys," winger Pascal Dupuis said.

Burkle's professional acumen and reputation as an exceptional negotiator -- he's a billionaire Dupuis described as "a ridiculously successful businessman" -- pretty much assure that he will command respect and attention today from everyone in the room.

And while Crosby does not have a business background to rival Burkle's, teammates say that he will contribute more than just star power to the proceedings if, as seems likely, he's one of the players chosen to participate.

He has taken part in several sessions since the lockout began and, according to those who share a locker room with him, has studied the issues and understands them.

"He won't be just a name, sitting in the room," Niskanen said.

"He obviously cares a ton. Being out [because of injuries] the past two years and not playing, he thinks this thing should have been done a while ago.

"He's really smart. I ask him questions almost every day when he's here about what he thinks about what's going on. ... He knows the ins and outs of what's going on in the negotiations."

It shouldn't take Burkle long to get up to speed, either, assuming he isn't already there.

And while it's far from certain he and Crosby can help to get the sides on the path to an agreement, letting them try can't hurt.

"It's always great to get new blood in there," Dupuis said. "When you have the same people going over the same stuff all the time, the same ideas are going to come out.

"But some new blood in there, some new ideas, could help."

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NOTE -- Penguins prospects Scott Harrington and Derrick Pouliot, both defensemen, are among 37 players invited to try out for Canada's entry in the upcoming world junior championships. ... Evgeni Malkin had a goal and two assists and won 18 of 27 faceoffs in Metallurg Magnitogorsk's 7-4 victory Monday against Spartak in a Kontinental Hockey League game.

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645700 San Jose Sharks

Sharks notes: Havlat returns to San Jose

SAN JOSE – Sharks defenseman Dan Boyle has let his strong opinions on the NHL lockout be known more than once since it began on Sept. 16. But, that doesn't mean he has a desire to join the official talks when they resume in New York on Tuesday.

"I've communicated with the people I need to on my end, and my opinion, where I stand on things. They know where I'm at. I'll probably just wait and see what happens," Boyle said on Monday at Sharks Ice.

Several owners and players will sit down together without Gary Bettman and Donald Fehr on Tuesday in New York. Four owners new to the process – Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum, Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, Winnipeg's Mark Chipman and Tampa Bay's Jeff Viink – will join Boston owner Jeremy Jacobs and Calgary owner Murray Edwards along with several players that have yet to be revealed by the players' association. Sidney Crosby and Jonathan Toews could be among them, according to the Canadian Press.

The veteran Boyle is hopeful that some good comes from having new participants involved in what has been an ugly negotiation so far.

"I'm open to anything at this point. I would like to see a few different owners and a few different faces in there, but we'll take what we can right now. We just hope it sparks something positive, and hope for the best."

As for salvaging a season, Boyle said: "It's been hard to be optimistic. I'm just shocked we're at this point to begin with. I don't even know how to feel about it, to be honest with you. You hope, you certainly hope, but I don't know."

Sharks forward Marty Havlat, who has returned to the Bay Area after several months in the Czech Republic, is more confident than Boyle.

"In [1994-95] they started in January, so we have, let's say a month and a half left until we know what's going to happen. I believe still that we're going to play," Havlat said. "I believe in what we're doing and what we stand for, and I believe in Don Fehr."

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This week could be key in the labor battle for more than just Tuesday's meeting between the players and owners. The league's Board of Governors is set to convene on Wednesday, and the lockout will obviously be the biggest topic on the agenda.

According to a team spokesman, general manager Doug Wilson, a former president of the NHLPA, and executive vice president and general counsel John Tortora will represent the Sharks at the meeting.

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Speaking of Havlat, the 30-year-old forward welcomed a new baby girl, Tereza, on July 6. He and his wife Ivana had the baby here before the pair headed back to their native country shortly after. Havlat returned recently in order for his new daughter to have some routine shots.

Havlat is one of a number of NHL'ers represented by blunt and forthright agent Allan Walsh, who has been a vocal supporter of the players and vociferous critic of the league since the lockout began, via his Twitter page.

I asked Havlat what he thought about his agent's outspokenness.

"I know what he's doing, and what he's writing," Havlat said. "I talk to him a lot, too. I think it's been great. Unfortunately, he might be the only agent speaking out and supporting the players. It would be nice if we get some help, but he's been great. He's doing a great job not just for his own players, but for the whole group of players."

As for his health, Havlat, who suffered a serious knee injury a year ago before returning late last season, said he was prepared for training camp had it started on time.

"I feel great. I was ready to go in September and I am ready to go now. I'm working out like everybody else and trying to stay in shape as much as I can...waiting for the call," he said.

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Former Sharks captain Owen Nolan, a mean, physical player who could put the puck in the net in his prime, thinks the lockout and extended break could prove advantageous to players like him when (or if) the league opens its doors.

"It probably benefits the guys that play more physical because they get a longer time to heal," Nolan said. "I always say when I started the season, I called it the wandering bruise. First game you got a bruise, and it just kept moving from body part to body part and it never healed until the summer came. When you play that style, you choose that style, that's what got you there, and you're certainly not going to change."

Sharks players Ryane Clowe and Douglas Murray, both of whom had off years last season, could be among those that will be rejuvenated should the NHL salvage a season if you buy into Nolan's reasoning.

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Worcester Sharks forward Tim Kennedy was named as the American Hockey League's Player of the Week on Monday, after scoring five goals in three games over the weekend.

Kennedy, who has NHL experience with Buffalo and Florida, is tied for third in the league in scoring with 23 points (11g, 12a).

Worcester is in first place in the Atlantic Division with an 11-8-1-1 mark (24 points). The club has won six of its last seven road games.

Kevin Kurz

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645701 San Jose Sharks

Nolan weighs in on lockout

SAN JOSE – Owen Nolan is fortunate that there isn't a strict dress code for the informal team lockout skates at Sharks Ice.

Nolan, the former Sharks captain, has joined the few remaining Sharks players in the area for their practices. On Monday, he was spotted wearing the blue pants of the Toronto Maple Leafs, green-and-red gloves of the Minnesota Wild, a helmet with a bright red "C" of the Calgary Flames, and a black-on-white NHLPA jersey.

"I'm just trying to survive," said Nolan, 40, after skating for about an hour with Dan Boyle, Patrick Marleau, Brad Stuart, Marty Havlat and several extras. "The body doesn't want to keep up as much as it used to, but I'm having fun out here."

The skates are probably more fun for the retired Nolan than the players who should be earning their NHL paychecks at the moment.

One of the most popular Sharks to ever don a black and teal sweater, Nolan spent 18 years in the National Hockey League, from his rookie year of 1990-91 with the Quebec Nordiques through his final year with Minnesota in 2009-10. During that time, which includes eight seasons with the Sharks, he experienced a hat trick of work stoppages – the players' strike of 1992 which postponed 30 games; the 1994-95 lockout that resulted in a shortened season, and the last year of 2004-05.

Now that his long and storied career is over, Nolan considers himself a fan, and is disappointed the NHL and players' association hasn't yet reached a deal as the lockout approaches three months in length.

"I haven't been watching it too closely – enough to stay informed, but it's never good for anybody," Nolan said. "It doesn't matter which side it is. It's just a matter of, how quick can you get it done? As an ex-player and more of a fan now, you want to see it back. It affects everybody – the little guy, the parking guys, the communities. It's not just players and owners that get affected, it's the fans and the people that rely on the hockey to make a living."

Nolan seems to suggest that both sides are a little too set in their ways at present, as negotiations are set to resume on Tuesday with a select group of players and owners but without head honchos Gary Bettman and Donald Fehr.

"I think there's got to be a give-and-take on both sides. In the long run it doesn't benefit anybody. Players are going to lose out on money and

they're never going to make back. These owners have other businesses other than hockey, so they're still going to make their income. There's got to be give-and-take. Both sides are never going to get what they want, so you've got to find that common ground that's going to make it work."

A number of players that have since hung up their skates are on record as saying that the cancelled season of 2004-05 wasn't worth it in the end. Jeremy Roenick, Mike Modano and Mark Recchi have all stated in some way or another that the players should find a way to get a deal done as soon as possible so as to avoid missing out on money they'll never see again. Current players have missed four of 13 paychecks this season, and games are cancelled through Dec. 14.

Nolan understands that side of it, but doesn't completely concur. Instead, he points out that the reason NHL salaries are as high they are today is due to the work that the players fought for when he was still a member of the association. NHL players averaged \$2.4 million last season, up from \$1.4 million eight years ago.

"It's not only for yourself, it's for future generations that you're fighting for," he said. "Do you want to be a part of it? No, you don't want to be a part of it, but you've got to fight for what you believe in and make sure that when you're long retired, the guys that are still playing understand what happened years before. I think that's the same situation that's going on now.

"I've been through a couple of them, and I don't think if we went on those battles early on in my career, that guys would be making the same salaries they're making now."

At the same time, he points out that not everyone in the players' association is on equal footing, and a cancelled season would affect some players much more than others.

"The guys that are making \$5 million-plus on long-term deals are not going to be as affected as the guy that's maybe in the league for three years, making less than \$1 million. There's a lot of those guys in there that will have to find jobs after hockey.

"I understand why they're fighting tooth and nail to get everything they can, but at the same time, if the season goes by and you're not getting paid, that's another year off your contract and career. There's a lot of different angles you've got to look at."

Kevin Kurz

Comcast SportsNet.com: LOADED: 12.04.2012

645702 San Jose Sharks

San Francisco Bulls fill a need for hockey-starved fans

By David Pollak

DALY CITY -- David Claudio provides a short answer when asked why he made the 44-mile drive from San Jose to the Cow Palace for a minor league hockey game.

"Withdrawal," said Claudio, wearing his Sharks jersey as he celebrated his 28th birthday at a San Francisco Bulls game with his wife and another couple. "It's pretty rough. Hockey was a routine for me, and when that went away it left a hole."

The NHL lockout, of course, is what has disrupted Claudio's routine, and with one-third of the Sharks season canceled, he and other fans can find themselves in need of a hockey fix. For them, the Bulls are part East Coast Hockey League expansion team and part methadone clinic.

During the 2004-05 NHL lockout, the closest pro hockey to San Jose was the now-defunct Fresno Falcons. Since then, the ECHL added a team in Stockton and now another in the building where the Sharks skated for their first two seasons.

Minor league sports in a major league area can be risky, but the Bulls seem to be making a go of it.

Attendance for the first nine home games has averaged 4,597 -- about 50 percent above the minimum owner-coach Pat Curcio says he needs for financial viability in a building whose downsized capacity is 8,277.

"It seems like a minimal number, but 4,000 in this building is loud, and they're energetic," said Curcio, whose team is 8-12-1-2 overall but 6-3 at home. "I think you'll see more fans if we continue to win, but there's a loyal base there now, win or lose."

Individual game tickets range from \$14.25 to \$41, far less than what the Sharks charge. And a night at the Cow Palace differs from one at HP Pavilion in other ways as well.

Fans can spend \$1 to throw a foam rubber puck on the ice between periods with the hopes of winning \$150 and a team jersey if it lands on the bull's-eye. Unlike the Sharks, the Bulls have hired "ice girls." A video that uses San Francisco scenes to introduce the team is first class.

The Bulls have had a few growing pains on the ice. They lost six straight on a nine-game trip before rebounding with five wins in the next six, all at home. That momentum stalled when San Francisco went back on the road last week and picked up only one point of a possible six.

The Bulls are a San Jose affiliate, and Sharks forward Ryane Clowe is practicing with the team and serving as an assistant coach during games.

"Ryane's been awesome," said Curcio, who also serves as the Bulls general manager. "His work ethic in practice makes everyone else better."

Clowe, strangely, is responsible for the defense -- "It's weird because I'm always screaming at the D during the year and now I'm defending 'em" -- and earning high marks from players.

"He almost simplified how we were taught to play," said Bulls captain Justin Bowers, a 27-year-old forward with his fourth ECHL team. "That helped a lot. Guys are in the right spots now."

Those guys included goalies Thomas Heemskerk and Taylor Nelson, forwards Marek Viedensky and Mikael Tam, and defenseman Daniil Tarasov -- San Jose prospects squeezed out of jobs in Worcester, the Sharks' top development team, where Tam was recalled over the weekend.

Playing close to San Jose means young players get a closer look from the Sharks front office. Assistant general manager Wayne Thomas was there for a recent 5-1 victory over the Ontario Reign.

"It's been very convenient," said Thomas, who doubles as one of two Sharks goalie coaches. "The proximity of being able to work with them (goalies) also is of great benefit."

Heemskerk was named ECHL netminder of the week Tuesday, but Viedensky has had the biggest impact on the scoresheet with four goals and 10 points in six games. In Worcester he was odd man out as the NHL lockout meant 17 forwards were competing for 12 jobs.

"I had a feeling I might play here," said Viedensky, 22, a second-year pro from Slovakia who was San Jose's seventh-round pick in 2009. "When I came here it was kind of tough going from nothing to playing three games in a row, but I survived."

Back-to-back-to-back games are common in the minors. And because ECHL teams are limited to three forward lines -- not four like the NHL -- it can be extra taxing.

Fewer forwards is one difference fans notice between the NHL and ECHL, said Clowe, who isn't playing for the Bulls in part because he would be risking injury in his contract year.

What else is noticeably different?

"The biggest thing is speed and how quick players make decisions," Clowe said. "Things probably happen a little slower here."

Still, Sharks fan Claudio and his friend, Brad Helfenberger, weren't complaining.

"Minor league prices, minor league game," Helfenberger, 29, said. "It's cool."

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 12.04.2012

645703 Toronto Maple Leafs

World Juniors: Leafs happy to see Morgan Rielly selected for Team Canada camp

Kevin McGran
Sports Reporter

With two blue-chip defence prospects in their system, the Maple Leafs are happy that one of them — Morgan Rielly — is headed to Team Canada's world junior camp.

And they don't sound all that surprised that the other — Stuart Percy — is not.

"This is a big opportunity for Morgan," Leafs assistant GM Dave Nonis said of their 2012 first-round pick. "If he plays like he's played for the majority of the year, he has a good chance to be a real big part of the back end.

"You never know how players are going to come back from injury. He worked hard all summer. He had a very good start. Being part of Team Canada will be special for him."

Rielly, generally considered the best player on the Moose Jaw Warriors, has 26 points in 30 games.

On the other hand, Percy — a first rounder from 2011 — was not named to the tryout camp of 37 of the top Canadians under the age of 20. Percy, captain of the Mississauga Steelheads, has 17 points in 28 games.

"I'm sure (Percy) is disappointed," Nonis said. "He's had a very good year as well. He's getting better as the season goes along.

"It's just a deep pool. It's an excellent group that's going. It doesn't diminish Stuart's play this year."

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645704 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Mistake for players to meet owners one-on-one, Buzz Hargrove says

Kevin McGran
Sports Reporter

Some of hockey's biggest names — Sidney Crosby, Jonathan Toews, Shane Doan — are expected in New York, ready to take on the owners in face-to-face meetings in New York.

The players will meet by themselves on Tuesday morning to decide which among them will meet with six owners — including Maple Leafs owner Larry Tanenbaum — on Tuesday afternoon.

"The players will decide prior to the meeting, which players will be present in the meeting," said NHLPA spokesman Jonathan Weatherdon.

Neither NHL commissioner Gary Bettman nor NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr will attend the meetings, although both sides could be armed with lawyers.

"I think it's a mistake on the part of the union; I wouldn't have agreed to it," said Hargrove, former executive director of the Canadian Autoworkers and former ombudsman of the NHLPA.

"They have a bargaining committee to do the bargaining, and they hired an executive director to lead it.

"He (Fehr) is the guy with the experience as opposed to players who are for the most part very young and very inexperienced at these kind of things . . . It's lopsided in terms of power and experience of the people who are meeting."

The six owners who will be present are Tanenbaum, Mark Chipman (Winnipeg), Murray Edwards (Calgary), Ron Burkle (Pittsburgh), Jeff Vinik (Tampa Bay) and Jeremy Jacobs (Boston).

Jacobs and Edwards have been part of Bettman's chief negotiating team. The other four are new to the process. Five of the teams — all but Tampa — are profitable.

Crosby has been active during CBA negotiations and attended past sessions while Toews has been among the more outspoken players, having taken some pointed shots at Bettman in media interviews.

More than 100 players have taken part in head-to-head negotiating, with the likes of George Parros, Ron Hainsey, Mathieu Darche and David Backes being among the most active. But if the owners are throwing in new faces, the players may want to as well.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.04.2012

645705 Toronto Maple Leafs

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins headlines Canada's world junior selection camp

Michael Traikos | Dec 3, 2012 1:24 PM ET | Last Updated: Dec 3, 2012 8:08 PM ET

The Canadian junior hockey team roster for selection camp

GOALTENDERS

Jordan Binnington, Owen Sound (OHL)

Laurent Brossoit, Edmonton (WHL)

Jake Paterson, Saginaw (OHL)

Malcolm Subban, Belleville (OHL).

DEFENCEMEN

Frank Corrado, Sudbury (OHL)

Mathew Dumba, Red Deer (WHL)

Dougie Hamilton, Niagara (OHL)

Scott Harrington, London (OHL)

Ryan Murphy, Kitchener (OHL)

Xavier Ouellet, Blainville-Boisbriand (QMJHL)

Adam Pelech, Erie (OHL)

Derrick Pouliot, Portland (WHL)

Griffin Reinhart, Edmonton (WHL)

Morgan Rielly, Moose Jaw (WHL)

Ryan Sproul, Sault Ste. Marie (OHL)

Tyler Wotherspoon, Portland (WHL)

FORWARDS

Francis Beauvillier, Rimouski (QMJHL)

Anthony Camara, Barrie (OHL)

Daniel Catenacci, Owen Sound (OHL)

Phillip Danault, Victoriaville (QMJHL)

Jonathan Drouin, Halifax (QMJHL)

Tyler Graovac, Ottawa (OHL)

Jonathan Huberdeau, Saint John (QMJHL)

Charles Hudon, Chicoutimi (QMJHL)

Boone Jenner, Oshawa (OHL)

JC Lapon, Kamloops (WHL)

Nathan MacKinnon, Halifax (QMJHL)

Mark McNeill, Prince Albert (WHL)

Sean Monahan, Ottawa (OHL)

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Oklahoma City (AHL)

Ty Rattie, Portland (WHL)

Brett Ritchie, Niagara (OHL)

Mark Scheifele, Barrie (OHL)

Hunter Shinkaruk, Medicine Hat (WHL)

Colton Sissons, Kelowna (WHL)

Ryan Strome, Niagara (OHL)

Tom Wilson, Plymouth (OHL)

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins was the only American Hockey League player invited to Canada's selection camp for the World Junior Hockey Championship. But just because the 19-year-old spent all of last season in the NHL do not expect him to shoulder the offensive load.

For one, Nugent-Hopkins hurt his shoulder last weekend in a game for the Oklahoma City Barons (he will have it examined in Edmonton this week). And secondly, thanks to the NHL lockout, Canada has more depth than it knows what to do with.

With or without Nugent-Hopkins is healthy — and he claims he is not injured, just a bit sore — this should be a strong team. Some have already compared it to the 2005 so-called Dream Team that included Sidney Crosby, Mike Richards, Ryan Getzlaf and many others who would otherwise have been playing in the NHL.

Chances are that three-year gold medal drought will end in Ufa, Russia. But first, Hockey Canada has to pick the team.

Of the 37 invitees to next week's camp in Calgary, there are six returnees (Dougie Hamilton, Scott Harrington, Jonathan Huberdeau, Boone Jenner, Mark Scheifele and Ryan Strome) from last year's team that won Bronze. Meanwhile, top prospect Nathan MacKinnon is one of five players — Jonathan Drouin, J.C. Lipon, Sean Monahan, Hunter Shinkaruk are the others — who are eligible for the 2013 NHL Entry Draft.

We say this every year, but there really is the potential to have two or even three teams that could medal. Of course, the challenge will be to find the right pieces that can bring home a championship.

Canada's strength at the upcoming tournament will likely be down the middle, where Nugent-Hopkins, Strome, Jenner are expected to centre the top three lines. Despite losing Ryan Murray to a shoulder injury, the defence is still as incredibly deep. Hamilton is a potential captain, while Harrington, Toronto Maple Leafs prospect Morgan Rielly are considered locks. However, expect some real competition from Griffin Reinhart (New York Islanders), Tyler Wotherspoon (Calgary Flames), Derrick Pouliot (Pittsburgh Penguins), Ryan Murphy (Carolina Hurricanes), Mathew Dumba (Minnesota Wild), Ryan Sproule (Detroit), amongst others for the final three spots.

"The one area on this team that we have some depth on is on defence," Team Canada head coach Steve Spott told the National Post last week. "The group of players that are born in 1994 and especially on the position of defence are supremely talented and gifted. Although Ryan is going to be a huge loss for our team, we feel that that's the one area where maybe we could afford to lose a player."

The real question mark, however, is in goal. While Malcolm Subban (Boston Bruins) appears to be the early favourite to be named starter, Jake Peterson, Jordan Binnington and Laurent Brossoit will all battle for playing time.

Either way, it should make for an interesting camp.

National Post LOADED: 12.04.2012

645706 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL should eliminate bodychecking: concussion expert

Sean Fitz-Gerald | Dec 3, 2012 12:06 PM ET

Don Cherry will not enjoy the findings of this study.

Authors of a new article published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal suggest a commitment to reducing aggressive body contact in hockey — such as adopting rules to limit bodychecking — would lead to a reduction in injuries on the ice. The lead author, Dr. Michael Cusimano, from the Division of Neurosurgery and the Injury Prevention Research Office, St. Michael's Hospital and the University of Toronto, offers an analogy.

"If we had a pill, and we said we could cut down the number of concussions, or the number of instances of this brain sickness or this arm sickness called a fracture — if we could cut that down by tenfold, if you were a parent, you would want to get that for your kid," he said. "So we know, right now, with these rule changes, that we could do that. But the culture is such that we're not doing it, so there are kids getting hurt needlessly, when we know what we need to do to diminish [the risk]."

The article is a review of 18 studies, including several well-known works, with most of the focus on youth hockey. Eleven of those studies showed injuries and penalties were reduced after rules were changed. You can read the full article here, and read a partial transcript of the National Post's interview with Dr. Cusimano (MC) below.

Is the idea that, by reducing physical contact (through bodychecking, etc.) aggression would be reduced, thereby reducing the risk of serious injuries on the ice?

MC: "Basically, the bigger picture is the culture. The cultural aspect right now in sport in general — but hockey is a good example of sport — is such that aggression is promoted, aggression is fostered. It's OK. It's, in fact, rewarded. This is manifested by things like bodychecking. And the research shows ... between 40 and 70% of injuries in hockey are being caused by bodychecking."

A study about the impact of the Todd Bertuzzi incident with Steve Moore is included. How does that relate to the idea of taking away bodychecking as a way of reducing injuries?

MC: "It does impact the bodychecking, because if you get rid of bodychecking, then you would get rid of that kind of activity from ever happening. I think that's where it is. But it goes even beyond that, where it says, 'if you do an act like that, where it involves bodychecking, or frank violence against somebody, there are going to be stiff penalties against it, and we are serious, as a culture, to say we don't find that acceptable behaviour.'"

So when parents read this, does this work advocate that bodychecking be taken out of hockey until a certain age?

MC: "We found a whole bunch of research out there, lots of studies, that talked about all the negatives. I still haven't found a single paper that talked about any positive effects of bodychecking, at any age. And not even at the NHL level. So if we're thinking about sport, and the good aspects of sport, why would we even have a practice like bodychecking in it, with all these negative things? Who's benefitting from it?"

I guess you're not expecting a Christmas card from Don Cherry, who might argue hockey is hockey in part because of bodychecking ...

MC: "I would happen to disagree. But I don't care if I never got a Christmas card from him. And I don't really give a hoot..."

There would be people who would say if you take bodychecking away from the game, then it's not really the game anymore.

MC: "Well, that's an old thing. The game is constantly changing. The game played today is very different than the game played 50 years ago, which is different than the game played 50 years before that. And everybody would agree that there are forms of the game that are still very exciting, still very good, and that you can still get fans to go to them, and parents to watch them. Ultimately, you would have to look to the kids' game: Why do we need those practices with kids and teenagers? What benefit do they gain from that? Who are we playing into?"

What do you say to anyone who might suggest this notion is heresy?

MC: "Well, you know, there's more and more professional players coming out now who have problems with their brains. There have been some high-profile suicides, different things that are the long-term effects. And then, there's a lot of research showing the shorter-term effects on kids' learning and other things like that ... Eventually people will wake up. It's just one step in that progression. Of course, people will say that. And I'm sure you'll

have a bunch a comments at the bottom of your article, where people sign in and say, 'why are we wasting money on more research like this?' And 'butt out,' and all that kind of thing. But ultimately, it's a public health question. And ultimately, it's about making the game fun and safe for kids."

Are you really talking about eliminating body contact in the NHL?

MC: "You can't eliminate body contact. When you put two people face-to-face, they're going to contact, sooner or later. What we're talking about is bodychecking, and then different forms of that, like headshots, with elbows to the head. I don't see a role for it at any level."

National Post LOADED: 12.04.2012

645707 Vancouver Canucks

Vancouver Canuck Manny Malhotra's sense of justice may be costly, but rewarding

Veteran forward fighting for fellow players in labour negotiations despite a clock ticking over his career

By Iain MacIntyre, Vancouver Sun columnist December 3, 2012

VANCOUVER — The son of a Pakistani father and francophone mother, Manny Malhotra grew up barely aware of racism.

"Yeah, there was the odd comment on the ice," the Vancouver Canuck explained recently. "But growing up in Toronto, which was so multicultural, I think I was blind to it. Jamaicans lived across the street, Asians were over there. It was a melting pot."

So Malhotra's fierce beliefs in justice and fairness were created not by skin colour or language, but by birth order. He was the youngest, by three years, of four children — two big brothers and a sister. Life was not fair.

"When your brothers and sister pick on you, that's always unfair," the 32-year-old said with a smile before travelling to New York for meetings Tuesday that could salvage the National Hockey League season.

"I remember being so angry that they could do stuff better than me, or wouldn't let me play or wouldn't share. That kind of built my desire to stand up for myself and do what's right.

"It's kind of a family mindset: if you're going to do something, then do it. There's no starting something, then giving up. There's no room for sitting on the fence."

Malhotra hasn't been there since the lockout began Sept. 15 when owners shut their rinks to players in an attempt to force another round of massive contract concessions.

After feeling like a bystander during commissioner Gary Bettman's last lockout, Malhotra wanted to be involved this time. He is part of a pool of 31 players who have rotated in and out of negotiations overseen by Bettman and NHLPA boss Donald Fehr.

But at Bettman's suggestion, the Cold War generals are sitting out Tuesday's session because — if you take the commissioner at his word — fresh voices at the negotiating table might generate progress toward a new Collective Bargaining Agreement as the NHL teeters at the financial cliff of another lost season.

Malhotra has learned to be cynical when it comes to owners and their agent, but he travelled to New York in good faith, anyway.

He has much to lose.

After a horrific eye injury two years ago permanently impaired his vision, Malhotra had to earn his roster spot last season in Vancouver. He played on the fourth line instead of the third, seeing his role and minutes reduced by coach Alain Vigneault.

And that fight for playing time and a paycheque wasn't going to be any easier this fall, with Malhotra a year older and potential fourth-liners Aaron Volpatti and Steve Pinizzotto returning from injuries that cost them nearly all of last season.

Then the owners locked out players.

The last time that occurred, eight years ago, 120 professionals who played at least 40 games in the NHL in 2003-04 never played in the league again.

Malhotra's career is very much at risk here. The eye injury didn't get him, but the lockout might.

Yet, he is adamant about not yielding further to a league that has already pocketed what amounts to a \$250-million-a-year concession from players, who have agreed in principle to have their share of NHL revenue cut to 50 per cent from 57.

Malhotra won't make a deal to save his career, which seems both noble and naive. Even if the lockout ends in time to stage another truncated season, he will never make up the portion of his \$2.5-million salary lost in the labour war. Every player understands this reality.

The owners, given their ever-increasing share of the wealth, will get their money back. Players won't.

"We full well understand that," Malhotra, whose contract with the Canucks expires next summer, said. "What's frustrating for us is this (lockout) is completely calculated on their part. They know how much they'll lose after so many weeks and so many games, and have taken that calculation into account. It's a brilliant strategy by them to keep locking us out if we keep giving and giving because a couple of CBAs down the line, players will be getting 35 per cent (of revenues), if that. If we continue to back down and give, give, give, they will just keep locking us out every time. We do have to dig our heels in."

It seems if the players were as greedy as accused, they'd have rolled over in September and taken what was offered because — in Malhotra's case — \$2.3 million isn't as good as \$2.5 million, but it sure beats making nothing.

"But if we'd had that mentality in 2004, we'd be playing under a \$31-million hard cap right now," Malhotra said. "I was as pissed off as anyone missing a season (in 2004-05), but the benefits as far as players rights and the dollars we're playing for is much greater because of what we went through.

"I guess you could say we're being selfish because we're standing up for our rights and what we believe in."

As of late Monday, the NHLPA hadn't announced its six-man negotiating roster for today although Chicago Blackhawk Jonathan Toews and Pittsburgh Penguin Sidney Crosby reportedly will provide star power.

If this is another ruse like last week's mediation, Bettman is at least fully committed to the deception. Boston Bruin hardliner Jeremy Jacobs leads the ownership contingent, but the six-billionaire negotiating team contains at least a couple of moderate owners and representatives from three Canadian franchises — the Toronto Maple Leafs, Winnipeg Jets and Calgary Flames.

"Since my first year, I've been fighting for everything," Malhotra said of a career spanning 13 seasons and five teams. "Fighting for that extra bit of ice time, fighting for that confidence from the coach to play me in certain situations. My whole career has kind of be clawing at it and wanting it, fighting for that next contract and my position on the team. It's kind of the story of my career."

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 12.04.2012

645708 Vancouver Canucks

Vancouver Canucks prospect Frank Corrado in heady company on Team Canada world juniors list

By Elliott Pap, Vancouver Sun December 3, 2012

VANCOUVER — On a Team Canada world junior roster filled with high-end NHL draft picks, Frank Corrado's name almost seems like a misprint.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Morgan Rielly and Griffin Reinhart, all first-rounders, are on the invited list and you would expect nothing less. But Frank Corrado, fifth-rounder? What's he doing here?

Corrado is an intriguing invitee mostly because he is property of the Vancouver Canucks, who selected him with the 150th pick in the 2011 entry draft. Over the years, the Canucks have had some success in the mid-to-

late rounds with players like Kevin Bieksa and Jannik Hansen eventually making an impact. Perhaps Corrado will, too.

"It makes me very happy for our scouting staff that a player selected in that portion of the draft has come so far so fast," Canucks assistant GM Laurence Gilman commented Monday after the selections were announced. "It's really a testament to all the hard work Frank has put in since he was drafted. We realized at his first camp last year how good this kid was and signed him right away."

Corrado, 19, is a right-side defenceman and captain of the Ontario Hockey League's Sudbury Wolves. He has 21 points in 30 games but will be auditioning for a shutdown role with Team Canada rather than an offensive one. He was one of 12 blueliners invited to next week's final selection camp in Calgary. Players report on Dec. 10 with practices beginning the following day. This year's world junior tourney is in Ufa, Russia, and starts Dec. 26.

"Frank Corrado has played exceptionally well in Sudbury this year, and last year," noted Team Canada head scout Kevin Prendergast in a conference call. "He's a stay-at-home type of player. He's gritty and he brings leadership to the table. We felt we had enough offensive puck-movers and he sort of fit the bill for us as a defensive type."

Corrado might be in tough to make the team but his inclusion is at least a sign his development is moving along nicely. In addition to 2012 first-rounders Rielly and Reinhart, Matt Dumba and Derrick Pouliot were also first-round choices. Dougie Hamilton was a first-rounder in 2011. Four others were second-round picks, including Cloverdale's Tyler Wotherspoon.

Team Canada head coach Steve Spott, who normally stands behind the bench of the Kitchener Rangers, has seen plenty of Corrado in their OHL battles and knows him well.

"When you look at Frank, he gives us an element of grit and shutdown," he said. "It's a competitive group back there and, if there's one area where we have depth, it's going to be on our back end."

Rielly is among the biggest offensive weapons on the back end and Spott indicated he might have to rein in the roving West Vancouver native. He has already coached Rielly internationally at the 2011 Ivan Hlinka U-18 tournament where Canada won gold. Reinhart, Pouliot and Dumba were also on that team.

"Sometimes when players who have Morgan's ability are playing junior hockey, they are able to press the envelope but I can assure you that when we meet with Morgan on Monday, his role will be clearly defined," Spott explained. "I fully expect that he'll play a complete game, a safe game and a risk-free game for Team Canada throughout the evaluation process."

The greater Vancouver area will be well represented at the camp with goalie Laurent Brossoit (Cloverdale) and forward Colton Sissons (North Vancouver) joining Burnaby's Nugent-Hopkins, Wotherspoon and the West Van duo of Rielly and Reinhart.

There was some discussion Monday about Nugent-Hopkins' availability as he was having a sore shoulder examined in Edmonton. He's been playing this season with the Oilers' AHL farm team, the Oklahoma City Barons. Nugent-Hopkins has 20 points in 19 games with the Barons.

"As of today, Ryan is on our list and, barring health, we would expect him to be here on Dec. 10," said Hockey Canada executive Scott Salmond. "I've had a number of conversations with Steve Tambellini (Oilers GM) and we're going to talk again later tonight in regards to Ryan's exam that he had in Edmonton. Right now, I don't anticipate a change to having him here on Dec. 10."

Brossoit, the Edmonton Oil Kings netminder, is in a four-way battle for three goalie spots with Malcolm Subban, Jordan Binnington and Jake Paterson, all of the Ontario Hockey League.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 12.04.2012

645709 Vancouver Canucks

Henrik Sedin: 'I don't know if they (owners) think they're dealing with kids or if we're stupid'

Posted by:

Ben Kuzma

VANCOUVER — Henrik Sedin usually measures his words carefully and tries not to offend anyone. However, the frustrated Vancouver Canucks captain felt offended Monday, so he spewed some NHL lockout venom.

When presented with a possible collective bargaining impasse scenario — six owners and six players gathering for an unproductive meeting Tuesday in New York before the board of governors convenes the next day and commissioner Gary Bettman asks for a drop-dead date to cancel the season — the reserved centre shot back. After all, it's getting to the point where Henrik and Daniel Sedin are seriously considering returning home to Sweden and playing for MoDo manager Markus Naslund should the season be scrapped. And if that's been the league's plan all along unless the players cave, it's doesn't surprise Henrik.

"I think from Day 1, this has fallen into what we really thought was going to happen," he said. "I don't know if they [owners] think they're dealing with kids or that we're stupid or think the fans are stupid. It's a little mind-boggling when you see what's coming out of their side. I want to hear a change, that they're actually going to give us something in return for the things we've given them."

"I doubt that may happen tomorrow [Tuesday] but it's a start. It's good to see that there are new owners coming into the meeting, but the bad thing is there are still some of the tight group that has been there since Day 1. That's a concern."

That tight group is headed by hard-line Boston Bruins owner Jeremy Jacobs, who carries considerable clout with his peers. Ronald Burkle of the Pittsburgh Penguins, Larry Tanenbaum of the Toronto Maple Leafs, Mark Chipman of the Winnipeg Jets, Murray Edwards of the Calgary Flames and Jeffrey Vinik of the Tampa Bay Lightning will also attend. The NHL Players' Association representation includes Sidney Crosby and Jonathan Toews and the session will be conducted without NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr and Bettman.

With games cancelled through Dec. 14, Bettman said the league is losing \$18-\$20 million US a day and the players \$8-\$10 million. But the bigger problem is what's being lost in translation. In its make whole transition into a new CBA, the league is offering \$211 million to help protect contracts and the NHLPA is asking for \$393 million, creating an \$182 million divide. And with the league seeking to alter the length of deals, arbitration and free agency while seeking a 50-50 split of revenue, there's obvious apathy. The laughable appointment of federal mediators to sit in on sessions last week and offer non-binding input could be seen as the owners just buying time until the BOG meeting.

"You never know what to expect," said Canucks centre Manny Malhotra, a member of the 31-player negotiating committee. "We thought there were a few key dates for them [owners] where there may have been a deal done. This will get done when they feel like getting it done. I certainly hope there's room to gain some traction and that it's not just a dog-and-pony show."

Kevin Bieksa believes trying anything new is better than not trying at all. The Canucks defenceman thought mediation was a shot in the dark because the biggest concern has always been the owners' agenda.

"That's the one thing we've kind of been puzzled by in this whole negotiation," he said. "When do they want to settle and what do they want to settle for? Is it just a money issue or the contracting rights and what are the reasons for them? Owners doing it face-to-face [Tuesday] with players on their team and to look those guys in the eye, it should be good."

And if it's not?

"We'll try other ideas," added Bieksa. "We don't want to give up on the season yet, but there are days when I wake up and I'm pretty frustrated. Those are the days I should probably stay off the road and it seems like it transfers over to road rage."

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645710 Vancouver Canucks

Canucks prospect Corrado invited to world junior final camp

By Ben Kuzma, The Province December 3, 2012

Frank Corrado won't be the first name or maybe not even the last name announced when Hockey Canada sets its final roster for the world junior hockey championship in Ufa, Russia following a four-day, 37-player selection camp that opens Dec. 11 in Calgary.

However, the Vancouver Canucks prospect defenceman will enter the conversation because the Sudbury Wolves captain has a way of getting noticed. It's why he was taken in the fifth round of the 2011 draft at the prompting of Canucks regional scout Dan Palango and why he scored the winning goal for Team OHL in a Super Series matchup against Russia on Nov. 12 in Sarnia, Ont. He was paired with Boston Bruins first-round pick Dougie Hamilton of the Niagara Ice Dogs which proved a dynamic duo.

"I never had a doubt that I could play at that level," Corrado said Monday. "You play with good players and Dougie is obviously very good, so it worked out well for both of us. People already knew who he was and it worked a little bit in my favour because I may have been a little bit of an unknown before that."

That's what attracted the Canucks. They not only saw a work in progress at the junior level, they saw how quickly Corrado grasped the pro game in his first camp last fall and promptly signed the Toronto native to a three-year, entry-level deal. After all, Corrado is just 19 but played six games last spring for the Chicago Wolves when his junior season ended. He didn't look out of place. This season, Corrado has 21 points in 30 games (3-18) on a 11-15-0-4 last-place team in the Central division of the Eastern Conference. But the 6-foot-2, 191 pound blueliner is buoyed by the challenge of leading by example while improving every facet of his game.

"I've improved offensively," he added. "Last year, I really focused on the defensive side of my game and I'm trying to round out my game and become a total defenceman. Our guys are trying their hardest and I can't say anything bad about anybody. We've been hit by the injury bug and have a suspension now, but I don't want to blame anything on that and there's a lot of the season to go. We're in tight games and it shows we can play in them."

The Canucks have always been attracted by players like Corrado who have the work ethic and desire to make the NHL.

"We're just trying to continue to push him knowing full well that he could step in and play at the American League right now," said Canucks general manager Mike Gillis. "I don't think he's realized his offensive potential yet, but he skates extremely well and is a very smart player who is doing nothing but growing."

That growth factor will be tested at the selection camp. Team Canada has Hamilton and Scott Harrington of the London Knights (second round, Pittsburgh, 2011) returning. There are also first-round picks in Mathew Dumba of the Medicine Hat Tigers, Ryan Murphy of the Kitchener Rangers, Morgan Reilly of the Moose Jaw Warriors, Griffin Reinhart of the Edmonton Oilers and Derrick Pouliot of the Portland Winterhawks. They were drafted by Minnesota, Carolina, Toronto, Islanders and Pittsburgh respectively. Making the roster will be an uphill climb for Corrado.

"Adversity helps you grow as a player and in life, too," said Corrado. "I'm no stranger to it and I've always been able to be get it done and be awarded with an opportunity like this. It's the first step to achieving one of your long-time dreams. Making the world junior team would mean the world to me. I'm going to give it all I can and focus on the right things. Make the right decisions and hopefully it works out in the end."

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 12.04.2012

645711 Tampa Bay Lightning

Bolts' Vinik, five other NHL owners, to meet with players

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS | Tbo.com

NEW YORK --

Traditional labor talks have made little progress in the ongoing NHL lockout, so the league and the players' association are going to try something different in an attempt to save the season that is slipping away.

A crew of six owners — including Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik — will meet with a handful of players on Tuesday in New York — one day before the league's

board of governors meeting — without Commissioner Gary Bettman and union executive director Donald Fehr. Bettman proposed the unique meeting on Wednesday when talks broke off following two days of negotiations with federal mediators, and it wasn't agreed to until Sunday.

Originally the thought was no one other than owners and players would be in attendance, but each side will have staff and counsel there. Deputy commissioner Bill Daly will likely participate for the NHL, along with union special counsel Steve Fehr.

In addition to Vinik, Ron Burkle (Pittsburgh Penguins), Mark Chipman (Winnipeg Jets), Murray Edwards (Calgary Flames), Jeremy Jacobs (Boston Bruins), and Larry Tanenbaum (Toronto Maple Leafs) will take part in the talks for the league, Daly said.

"No further details have been confirmed at this point," Daly said in a statement announcing the meeting. "We will provide further details when available and as appropriate."

Six players will be picked for the meeting, but that list wasn't expected to be announced on Sunday, a union spokesman said. Neither the NHL nor the players' association had input on who would attend on the opposite side, Daly said in an email to The Associated Press.

All games through Dec. 14 have already been wiped off the schedule, along with the outdoor Winter Classic on New Year's Day and All-Star Weekend that was slated for January in Columbus, Ohio.

The lockout reached its 78th day on Sunday, and at best, there will only be a shortened season if there is any hockey at all.

Many conditions needed to be worked out before this meeting could be scheduled. The sides were in contact over the weekend and finally saw eye to eye on Sunday night. Now they need to figure out how to break through on the financial issues and player contracting disputes that are keeping them apart and putting the entire season at risk.

The union has allowed any players who wanted to attend previous bargaining sessions to come, but the NHL has limited which owners could take part.

"The NHLPA has agreed to a meeting on Tuesday in New York that should facilitate dialogue between players and owners," Donald Fehr said in a statement. "There will be owners attending this meeting who have not previously done so, which is encouraging and which we welcome. We hope that this meeting will be constructive and lead to a dialogue that will help us find a way to reach an agreement."

Jacobs, considered one of the hard-line owners, and Edwards are the only members of the group of six to have taken part in previous negotiations.

The New York Post reported Sunday that Madison Square Garden chairman James Dolan wanted to be included in the talks, as he was last year during the NBA lockout, but he wasn't picked. The Post said that Dolan, who was part of the NBA owners' negotiating committee, hasn't had a personal relationship with Bettman since at least 2007.

Dolan's New York Rangers were listed as the NHL's second-most valuable franchise this week, according to Forbes magazine, at \$750 million — \$250 million behind the Toronto Maple Leafs, the first hockey team to be valued at \$1 billion. Forbes said that the Rangers were the second-most profitable franchise, behind Toronto, generating \$74 million of the league's \$3.4 billion income.

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 12.04.2012

645712 Washington Capitals

Alex Ovechkin says his soul is in NHL, with Capitals

Posted by Katie Carrera on December 3, 2012 at 12:46 pm

Multiple times during the lockout, Capitals star left wing Alex Ovechkin suggested that he might not return to the NHL if the new collective bargaining agreement resulted in the reduction of his existing contract. He said players might not return before the lockout began, reinforced that sentiment days after it went into effect and reiterated it at every turn.

Many have questioned the motives behind Ovechkin's statements, wondering whether it was a threat designed as an attempt to influence negotiations or if the Capitals captain was truly contemplating walking out on the remaining nine years of his NHL contract.

For the first time since the stoppage began there seems to be some clarity. Ovechkin backed off his aforementioned stance during an interview with Igor Fain of Russia's VM Daily and said he intends to return to the NHL once the lockout ends. (s/t Japers' Rink)

Given the limitations of Google Translate, here's an excerpt of a more nuanced translation of Ovechkin's interview from Alex Ovetjkin, where you can check out his full comments.

So once the lockout will be over, will you return to the NHL as soon as possible?

Certainly. I am very comfortable in Moscow, Russia in general, but my soul is across the ocean, in the NHL, with Washington Capitals, with whom I still hope to win the Stanley Cup.

Alas, every week, even every day and hour, the hope that the NHL lockout will be solved, is decreasing.

- Over the weekend, Ovechkin recorded his first hat trick of the season in Dynamo Moscow's 4-2 win over Donbass Donetsk.

- Owners and players will meet Tuesday in New York without NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA Executive Director Donald Fehr present.

Washington Post LOADED: 12.04.2012

645713 Winnipeg Jets

Scheifele super-psyched

Determined to impress at World Junior camp

By: Ed Tait

Mark Scheifele has heard his name called out as a first-round National Hockey League draft pick.

He has suited up for seven big-league games with the Winnipeg Jets and, with a flair for the dramatic, scored his first NHL goal in Toronto against the Maple Leafs with family in the stands.

But he'll tell you nothing in his young career compares to wearing the red and white jersey with a Team Canada logo stitched on the front.

And so while it may have been a foregone conclusion that the 19-year-old Kitchener product would have his name included among the 37 players invited to Canada's World Junior Team Selection Camp beginning next week in Calgary, Scheifele wasn't about to assume anything. He plans to stay that way.

"I don't want to take anything for granted," Scheifele said Monday, not long after practising with his Barrie Colts. "That's my approach to everything. I take everything as a challenge. It's only going to make me a better person and a better player if you understand you have to work hard at everything.

"My goal right now is to make that team and, if I do, do whatever it takes to win gold."

Scheifele is one of six players invited back from last year's bronze-medal squad, including Dougie Hamilton, Scott Harrington, Jonathan Huberdeau, Boone Jenner and Ryan Strome. A seventh, defenceman Ryan Murray, is unavailable due to an injury.

"I'm thinking about it a lot," Scheifele said. "Getting bronze last year definitely leaves a bitter taste in my mouth and there's nothing I want more than to get gold this year. I'm going to do whatever it takes to make that team and, if I do, to win gold."

Scheifele entered last year's tournament in Alberta under the microscope, having led the Jets in scoring during preseason and suiting up for seven NHL games before being sent back to junior.

And while he finished the event with six points (3G, 3A) in six games, he didn't wow observers like so many had expected.

But since then he has developed more layers to his game under Colts' head coach and Jet icon Dale Hawerchuk and has shown a versatility that has impressed Team Canada brass.

Canadian head coach Steve Spott has already spoken to Scheifele about possibly playing on the wing in the tournament, which runs Dec. 26-Jan. 5 in Ufa, Russia.

"I didn't think (last year's World Juniors) went the best personally," admitted Scheifele. "I don't think I was as confident last year or had that edge that I like to play with sometimes. I didn't play terrible, but I wasn't my best.

"But now, going through the whole process once and playing the other countries and just being a year older I think is a really big step. I think you're able to take more of a leadership role and be more confident with the puck.

"Just the chance to play is a great opportunity. I haven't played the wing a lot, but I'll take that challenge."

Scheifele was the lone Jet draft pick selected to the camp and there were no Manitobans invited.

When the season started it was thought Saskatoon Blades forward Lukas Sutter, a second-round Jet pick in 2012, might get a look and Swift Current Broncos winger Adam Lowry, a Jet pick from 2011, has had an outstanding start to the season. Neither was named.

Said Team Canada head scout Kevin Prendergast about Sutter:

"Any kid that puts on the sweater at one time wants to come back and put it on again. But for whatever reason it just hasn't happened so far this season with Lukas."

All of this -- and with more talent available because of the NHL lockout -- understandably left Scheifele beaming Monday at just getting an invitation.

Jets' GM Kevin Cheveldayoff has seen Scheifele play a number of times this season with the Colts -- he leads the team with 44 points (21G, 23A) in 27 games -- and their post-game conversations always come back to the same thing.

"Every time I talk to him, there's not a conversation that doesn't happen between us where the World Juniors doesn't come up," Cheveldayoff said. "I saw him play in the Subway Series last month and he wore a letter (assistant captain) in the game and took the leadership role very seriously. I saw him play a very serious, very up-tempo game.

"Not to take away from regular-season and league play, but you could tell it was a game with special meaning. He knew these games were important to being named to the selection camp."

The team at the camp

When: Dec. 11-13 at the Markin MacPhail Centre at Canada Olympic Park in Calgary.

Number of players: 37 (born 1993 or later), 31 of which were selected in either the 2011 or 2012 NHL Entry Drafts.

Of note: Of the 37, 13 were first-round picks while eight were second-rounders. Included are 2011 first overall pick Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, who did not play in last year's tournament after cracking the Edmonton Oilers' roster.

Getting ready: Team Canada will hold a Red-White intrasquad game on Dec. 11 and play two exhibition games against CIS teams (comprised of players from Calgary, Alberta and Mount Royal Universities) on Dec. 12 and 13.

The top scout says: Team Canada head scout Kevin Prendergast on Mark Scheifele: "When you go through the situation once and then come back a second time you're a better person for it. And in the summertime against the Russians I thought Mark was one of our best players.

"He's that much stronger than he was last year at this time and probably a little bit more mature. He's a high-end player and we're expecting big things from him."

--Ed Tait

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.04.2012

645714 Winnipeg Jets

Jets players applaud Chipman's presence at talks

By Ken Wiebe ,Winnipeg Sun

With the NHL lockout at another impasse and the threat of losing another full season picking up steam, the presence of Mark Chipman at the bargaining table has to be viewed as a positive step.

Regardless of how things turn out on Tuesday afternoon when a group of six owners meet with six members of the NHLPA in New York City without Gary Bettman and Don Fehr in the room, this should be a chance for the Winnipeg Jets co-owner to express himself.

We're not sure what the structure is going to be for this meeting, but unless the NHL wants this latest development to be viewed as another public relations stunt, you'd have to think Chipman and the others weren't simply invited to simply shut their mouths while Jeremy Jacobs and Murray Edwards — members of the NHL's negotiating team and noted hardliners — dominate the discussion.

Although Chipman has respected Bettman's gag order and not shared his views on the lockout, it's safe to say the Jets owners are among the group of moderates and would benefit from the game being back on the ice sooner than later.

Chipman is passionate about hockey, cares about his players and is cognizant of what is required for the greater good of the game.

He's also a problem solver and a consensus builder, which is why numerous Jets were applauding the fact Chipman has been brought on board for the meeting.

"I am very pleased to hear Mr. Chipman will be involved," Jets team rep and NHLPA bargaining committee member Ron Hainsey said via text message. "Hopefully, along with everyone else present, we can bring our two sides closer to an agreement."

Jets captain Andrew Ladd took it a step further.

"Hopefully, it makes a difference," said Ladd. "If Mark had been involved in the whole process, we'd be having a different result right now."

That's a glowing endorsement from a player who has been candid throughout the lockout and expressed plenty of disappointment with the owners' stance in negotiations.

Whether Chipman can actually help bridge the gap remains to be seen, but he's not about to let this season get flushed down the toilet before at least trying to provide a voice of reason.

After all, Chipman has overcome long odds before.

Long before he was able to bring the NHL back to Winnipeg, Chipman was the point man when six teams from the International Hockey League gained entrance to the American Hockey League.

From there, he became one of the people AHL commissioner Dave Andrews could count on, a member of the executive committee.

Before folks begin to get their hopes up, it's important to remember that Chipman is only one of six owners involved in the meeting.

This is not to discount his voice. Not in the least.

But to think Chipman is going to waltz into the room and somehow solve a lockout that is now into its 12th week by himself is simply unrealistic.

However, if he's able to come up with something that can bring the two sides closer together, or at least stimulate the discussion, that will be viewed as a victory in itself.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 12.04.2012

645715 Winnipeg Jets

Jets happy to have Mark Chipman involved in NHL lockout talks

By Ken Wiebe ,Winnipeg Sun

News that Mark Chipman is going to be one of the six owners present for a meeting with members of the NHLPA on Tuesday has been met with a collective thumbs up from a trio of Winnipeg Jets.

After completing the regular Monday morning skate with a group of locked-out NHLers at the MTS Iceplex, captain Andrew Ladd made it clear he wishes Chipman had been given an opportunity to contribute to the dialogue sooner.

"Hopefully, it makes a difference," said Ladd. "If Mark had been involved in the whole process, we'd be having a different result right now."

Tuesday's meeting in New York will include Chipman, along with Jeremy Jacobs of the Boston Bruins, Murray Edwards of the Calgary Flames, Jeff Vinik of the Tampa Bay Lightning, Larry Tanenbaum of the Toronto Maple Leafs and Ron Burkle of the Pittsburgh Penguins.

"I was kind of surprised to see (Chipman) in there, but at the same time he's kind of like the new kid on the block," said Jets centre Bryan Little. "He's a smart guy and it's good for (the owners) to have him in there. But as a Winnipeg player, I think it's good for us to have him in there too."

"It's a good step to get some new guys into the meetings," added Jets centre Jim Slater. "I have a lot of respect for Mr. Chipman. This is his baby here, the Jets, knowing Mr. Chipman and the passion he has for this city and for this team, he's very passionate about the game and wants to see the game at its best — which is obviously on the ice."

"Hopefully, this (meeting) is one of those things that can solve (the lockout). As a collective group, we're willing to try just about anything to try and get this thing worked out. This is just another step in the process and hopefully, it works out for the best."

The fresh perspectives are welcome, but you could tell Ladd was a bit leery of the continued presence of Jacobs and Edwards, who are part of the NHLs negotiating team and viewed as hard-liners.

"I can't see (the owners) message changing in this meeting, to be honest with you," said Ladd. "It will be nice to have some different ears in there and let them hear what we have to say."

"By now, we know (the NHL) is driven by the guys that have been around a long time and they do things a certain way."

The six players involved haven't been unveiled yet, but are expected to include Winnipegger Jonathan Toews of the Chicago Blackhawks and Pittsburgh Penguins captain Sidney Crosby. Jets team rep Ron Hainsey is a strong possibility as well.

Neither Don Fehr or Gary Bettman will be involved the meeting, in an attempt to change the dynamic a bit.

The lockout is now into its 12th week and there is a growing fear that if a deal isn't made in the next month or so that the entire season could be lost.

Little wasn't ready to make any predictions about what Tuesday might bring.

"I don't really know what's going to happen," said Little. "Now it seems like both sides are willing to try to look outside the box and see if that will get any results. Hopefully, we get some kind of traction here. We're both getting pretty desperate."

"I'm always optimistic but I don't ever get too hopeful. I learned that at the beginning. It was like a roller coaster ride. It looks like you're going to be playing and then it looks like the whole season is going to be gone. It's a bunch of ups-and-downs. You learn to be steady right now and not get your hopes up."

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645716 Websites

ESPN / Boom! goes the decertification

By Scott Burnside

ESPN.com

At this point of the proceedings, why not toss a small nuclear device into the works?

Things have gone so swimmingly between the NHL and its locked-out players that to be talking about decertification -- a strategy described by various legal experts in terms ranging from "AK-47" to "incendiary device" to "nuclear weapon" -- seems about as logical as anything, given the lack of logic at play so far.

In a process marked by a startling lack of grace and civility, many players are now clamoring for a move that has the potential to level the NHL and leave it in tatters, pending the various outcomes that decertification represent.

In short, and in the wake of a failed attempt at mediation, it is the ultimate act in a play whose main characters have been anger, mistrust and disrespect.

"The failure of mediation is a reminder that a deep divide exists between the sides," Ottawa-based sports lawyer Eric Macramalla told ESPN.com on Friday. "Given that deep divide, and in the eyes of the NHLPA, a failure to make any significant progress, decertification is a real option for the NHLPA."

There are a couple of routes the players' association could travel. They could file a disclaimer of interest that would see NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr inform the league that the union no longer represents the interests of the players, or they could go the full decertification route, which involves polling the players to ensure support of the strategy. Some experts believe the disclaimer of interest is more expedient but more susceptible to a legal challenge from the NHL.

Either way, the results are the same. Essentially, the union will argue that the very raison d'être of the NHLPA has run aground, given the bargaining position of the owners and that the union needs to be imploded, struck down. Such a move would allow players, no longer existing within the bubble of a collective bargaining agreement, to file antitrust suits.

Those courts could rule in favor of the players' case and strike down the lockout as illegal and, barring a rapid settlement, provide the players with huge punitive-damage awards.

The strategy worked to varying degrees for both NFL and NBA players, as the owners in those leagues were prompted by the threat of decertification to quickly broker deals to end labor disputes in those sports last year.

It might work for the NHLPA.

Or it might not.

If the NHL digs in its heels and goes to court to challenge the decertification -- surely the stubborn nature of commissioner Gary Bettman and his top owner, the often-vilified Jeremy Jacobs of the Boston Bruins, should act as a guide to how this might unfold -- then you can start with the certainty that any thoughts of hockey this season would evaporate.

Next season? Or the season after that? Who knows?

Anyone who suggests they know how decertification might play out should the players choose this strategy is flat-out lying.

"There is no road map, per se," said Macramalla, a partner in the Gowlings national law firm. "Decertification is profoundly dramatic."

If the players do decertify and are successful in arguing the lockout is illegal, they could be in line for triple the damage payouts in an antitrust suit. So what then?

How many teams would survive a lengthy court battle and subsequent damage payments?

What kind of league would remain for the players?

Similarly, if the NHLPA does venture down this road and loses a protracted court battle, then they will have finished the job started eight years ago

when the players' association was left in disarray after capitulating during the last set of negotiations.

And yet, in the absence of any real traction toward a new CBA, there is growing pressure on NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr to not just explore decertification as a strategy but begin what would be an end-game strategy one way or another.

"Decertification takes this from being a battle to a war," he said.

If the two sides do get to court on this issue, it will take a significant amount of time to decide and the results could be seismic in terms of potential damage awards, to say nothing of the legal costs incurred by both sides.

The monetary awards in an antitrust case "can be catastrophic," Macramalla said.

How on earth did we get to this point?

In many ways, decertification is the ultimate act of an angry group, a group of players that believes in its heart of hearts the owners aren't just bargaining a position but bargaining to destroy them.

That the atmosphere surrounding these negotiations -- such as they are -- has been poisonous from the moment the owners presented their first hard-line offer in mid-July is undeniable.

Macramalla agreed that from that moment when the owners presented a veritable wish list of demands disguised as a bargaining proposal, the level of mistrust -- a key factor in resolving any labor negotiations, he said -- was fractured.

In between, the owners have enraged players by examining three proposals for about 10 minutes before walking out. They have taken the last player proposal -- a significant piece that should have formed the framework of something on which to build a deal -- and dismissed it as unworkable within a couple of hours of its presentation.

They were part of a federal mediation process that lasted all of two days.

Many of the "concessions" made by the owners have come from modifying their first lowball offer, another ploy that continues to upset the players.

Talk to players and union officials in the rooms where the two sides have met and they describe a dismissiveness that has made give-and-take discussions almost impossible.

Big deal, right? This is a negotiation, it's not patty-cakes.

Still, let's go back to last July.

The NHL was coming off five years of record revenues. Yes, tweaks needed to be made to the system, mostly borne from loopholes and mistakes made by the league during the last round of talks when, oddly enough, the owners got pretty much everything they wanted.

But what should the absolute imperative have been when talks began in the summer?

Keep the gravy train rolling forward.

Do not under any circumstance have a repeat of the disaster that was the lost season of 2004-05.

Duh.

Make no mistake, the lack of civility and grace cuts both ways here.

The union fiddled around and declined to bargain for months, citing various flimsy excuses reinforcing the NHL's view that new executive director Donald Fehr was here to exact vengeance from the last go-round, not do a deal.

When the players presented their three proposals earlier this fall, Fehr hadn't bothered to run the numbers on one of them to see how it might work.

There were complaints to the labor boards in Alberta and Quebec and, more recently, a letter to Canada's federal politicians explaining in part how mean the NHL had been to them.

Boo-hoo.

And so instead of moving to defuse the growing anger and resentment present in the talks, the two sides have continued to poke at each other even as they appeared to edge closer on key issues, such as the split of

hockey-related revenues and the issue of owners honoring existing contracts.

In the past couple of weeks, Ian White has called Gary Bettman an "idiot" (he later told CBC he was sorry) and Kris Versteeg called Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly "cancers." Some moron on Twitter asked Chicago's Dave Bolland to re-tweet a post wishing aloud that Bettman was dead and Bolland did so. Bolland told ESPN.com's Pierre LeBrun he had done so by mistake; still, come on.

Is it any wonder the public and, more recently, key sponsors, turn away, sickened by the entire process?

And so decertification becomes the ultimate act of anger from a group that feels it has nowhere else to turn.

How pathetic is that?

Two sides in a rush to burn down their own house with all their belongings inside.

Maybe the mere threat of such a potentially devastating move sparks the types of resolutions we saw in the NBA and the NFL. But if this lockout has taught us anything it's that the obvious path, the right path, has been one that has been studiously avoided by both sides.

So maybe decertification isn't just the logical next step but exactly what both sides deserve, a leveling of the landscape.

So, bring it on.

Kaboom.

ESPN LOADED: 12.04.2012

645717 Websites

ESPN / Debate: Owners-players meeting will be pivotal

By Scott Burnside and Pierre LeBrun

Today, Scott Burnside and Pierre LeBrun weigh the pros and cons of the NHL-NHLPA owners-players meeting scheduled for Tuesday. Bring it, fellas.

SCOTT BURNSIDE: Good day, my friend. Well, this promises to be an interesting -- dare we say seminal? -- week in the NHL and in the lockout that now approaches the three-month mark. The NHL's board of governors meets in New York on Wednesday, but first, on Tuesday, a group of NHL owners and select players will meet for a powwow, accepting commissioner Gary Bettman's suggestion he and NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr step back after federal mediation fell apart after two days. Stunt? PR move? Or catalyst to a deal? We'll find out soon enough, but there are lots of questions about whether this will amount to anything. First, a source told ESPN.com on Monday morning that the lineup for the two sides was entirely at the discretion of the individual groups. So it was up to Bettman, et al, to exclude New York Rangers owner James Dolan and include the oft-vilified Jeremy Jacobs of the Boston Bruins in the group of six owners. Does Jacobs' presence destroy any benefit of this kind of gathering before it starts? Still, lots of new faces and voices at the table from the owners' side, including Ron Burkle of the Pittsburgh Penguins and Jeff Vinik of the Tampa Bay Lightning, both of whom are seen as moderates. And while the top American team in terms of revenues, the Rangers, won't be represented, the top-earning team in the league, the Toronto Maple Leafs, will be represented by Larry Tanenbaum. So what do you think?

PIERRE LEBRUN: Burkle's inclusion is the key, in my opinion. Hugely successful in his private businesses, the billionaire has a reputation as a deal-maker. Heck, he was once named "Man of the Year" by the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. He negotiated with unions many times in his business career. How could he not be a benefit to this process? Burkle, I'm told, has strongly wanted to get involved of late and I believe he's going into this meeting with the intent of doing everything he can to close the gap between the sides. And I don't think Jacobs' presence in the room means a newbie like Burkle is going to take any marching orders from him. So I can only take it as a positive that Burkle, with his impressive track record in his real-life business world, is taking a stab at this. Fresh voices

are needed in this impasse, that's clear and obvious. But it's not just new voices that are needed, but rather voices that matter, voices that can make the difference. And I think, in Burkle, there's a real positive here.

BURNSIDE: Things could hardly be worse, no? The two sides have stumbled along for weeks and I think the poisonous air that has existed in the room from the very beginning has been a significant impediment to getting a deal done. I'm not so sure that Jacobs' presence is a nonfactor. The players can't stand him, so I'm not sure why he needs to be in the room if this is about bridging a gap that most people believe isn't that significant. And you've already got Murray Edwards from Calgary in the mix and he's been part of the NHL's bargaining committee from the get-go. Still, I'm with you, the new voices are imperative for creating some sort of momentum. Another NHL source whom I spoke with this morning said he thinks this can't hurt. This source pointed to Mark Chipman, the top man with the Winnipeg Jets, as an important presence in the room. It's interesting Chipman was included as there were reports, vigorously denied by all concerned, about a flare-up between Jacobs and Jets officials at a board of governors meeting. Still, this meeting only works if there is a free flow of ideas about where the two sides are coming from. If it devolves into more finger-pointing and boo-hooing about how the two sides have behaved during this process, then it just amps up the potential for the entire season to go pffftttt.

LEBRUN: I've been saying it for weeks, but the reality is that both sides aren't actually that far away from a deal. Once both sides move a little on the "make-whole" provision and on player contract rights, the deal is done. The problem is that the growing level of mistrust between the two sides has paralyzed any ability to push this over the final stretch. So hopefully fresh voices in the room will help ease that mistrust and lead to a more constructive discussion. I know some players I spoke with over the weekend had hoped both Jacobs and Edwards would be left behind, but it's no surprise they remained part of the league's lineup. Of course, the other part of the intrigue is just who will enter the room for the players. Like Jacobs and Edwards, no doubt there will be some level of continuity with players who have been there for most of the meetings. But certainly there will also be big names in the mix. And it's no surprise to hear that Sidney Crosby might be there. He's already taken in a few bargaining sessions. And his presence is important.

"Crosby really should be in there," one NHL team executive told me Monday morning.

BURNSIDE: Crosby has really emerged this fall as a player who understands his place in the pantheon of NHL players as well as the importance of his presence and profile toward maintaining what has been a unified player front in the face of lost paychecks and untold damage done to the game. I still wonder about the logistics of how this will work and whether the unusual setup will allow for the kind of frank exchange between the two sides that will be needed to come up with fresh ideas that could help move the two sides toward a deal. With the board of governors set to meet Wednesday, do you think this puts unnecessary pressure on the two sides to come up with something right away? Here's hoping that both groups understand the urgency attached to this process. You and I are both of the mind that we could see hockey by the end of the month. I still believe that. But I'll believe in it a lot more if we get a sense of strong dialogue Tuesday. My fear is that if this doesn't provide traction right away, the two sides will throw up their hands and walk away. Then what? If that happens, it's hard to imagine a scenario that allows for a deal to be made. If things do break down, the two sides will have no one to blame but themselves. The players have long complained about not hearing other voices from the ownership group and the owners have questioned Fehr's motivation in the process. Now the table is set for something different. Here's hoping they don't jab each other in the hands with their forks.

LEBRUN: It's important to understand the framework of Tuesday's meeting. It's not as if either side will come armed with a new proposal. That's not happening; rather, you can expect discussion of the key issues that have continued to separate the two sides.

Honestly, once there's a breakthrough on the core economics -- "make-whole" and the players' share -- the rest of the deal's components should fall like dominoes. Once the league gets something it can live with in terms of the core economics, it will finally back down on some of its player-contracting rights demands. I'm sure of that. The league has held firmly to its list of player contracting demands because it hasn't seen the NHLPA sign off on a "make-whole" solution it can live with yet. But you're right, if this latest attempt at bridging the gap blows up, I'd be very concerned over what happens next. I have to think decertification talk would ramp up big-time on the players' side if Tuesday's meeting implodes.

For hockey fans who still care, let's hope this isn't yet again a monumental setback, but rather the long-awaited breakthrough that this process has so desperately needed.

ESPN LOADED: 12.04.2012

645718 Websites

NBCSports.com / Examining the six NHL owners that will meet with players

Jason Brough

Tuesday afternoon in New York, six NHL owners will meet with a handful of players without the presence of commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr.

It's hoped the introduction of some new voices will lead to progress in CBA negotiations.

Here are the six owners that will be in attendance, with a short blurb on their potential role in the talks:

Ron Burkle (Pittsburgh Penguins): If there's one owner that could bring some goodwill to talks, it may be him. As ESPN's Pierre LeBrun notes, Burkle was once named "Man of the Year" by the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor (he's also been named the AFL-CIO's Humanitarian of the Year), so clearly the billionaire's past dealings with unions have been successful.

Jeremy Jacobs (Boston Bruins): A controversial, though not entirely surprising, invitee. Jacobs has been a fixture in negotiations, along with Murray Edwards (Flames), Ted Leonsis (Capitals) and Craig Leipold (Wild). The players have expressed a good deal of anger at Jacobs' heavy-handed approach. If he's a dominant influence tomorrow, it's hard to see the union being overly receptive.

Mark Chipman (Winnipeg Jets): Last week, he emphatically denied a report that one of the club's alternate governors was reprimanded by Jacobs in an NHL Board of Governors meeting. Given the way Winnipeg fans supported the NHL's return to the city last season, it makes sense that Chipman is anxious to make a deal. That said, the Jets are a budget-conscious club that needs to think long-term. Profits are no guarantee in the league's smallest market.

Murray Edwards (Calgary Flames): Also reportedly a hardliner, though not as much as Jacobs. If we're looking for a reason to be optimistic, former Flames owner Harley Hotchkiss, who died in 2011, was considered a key figure in ending the 2004-05 lockout after forging a relationship with NHLPA president Trevor Linden, so maybe Edwards will feel some pressure to follow in his peacemaking footsteps.

Larry Tanenbaum (Toronto Maple Leafs): The owner of a 25 percent stake in the NHL's most profitable franchise can't be happy that his money machine has stalled. It's not clear how much the Leafs stand to profit from a new CBA that will likely see the players' share of revenue fall from 57 percent to 50. For all they gain from lower player costs, some of that will be offset by increased revenue sharing between rich and poor clubs. Tanenbaum won't want to lose a season.

Jeff Vinik (Tampa Bay Lightning): In mid-October, Vinik said he was optimistic a deal would be struck "sooner rather than later." A month and a half later, the two sides have yet to bridge the gap. Vinik has been popular with Lightning fans since buying the team in 2010. The hedge fund manager has spent millions on upgrades to the Tampa Bay Times Forum and, despite the team's relatively low revenue, hasn't been afraid to commit big dollars to players.

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 12.04.2012

645719 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Spector on CBA: A new place to start

Mark Spector

Perhaps the owners and players meeting tomorrow should take place in the early evening, in a bar, with no one taking any notes.

"I remember being in meetings with the owners on stuff as a player rep, and also on the (NHLPA) committee that selected (Bob) Goodenow," recalled retired defenceman Dean Kennedy. "There were some owners who, if you got them alone, got to know them personally, maybe sat down and had a scotch with them, they'd be totally different than they were sitting around the board room."

Kennedy, who has retired to life as a rancher near Pincher Creek, Alberta, figures the best thing that the players could do is to separate an owner or two from the herd and find out what they really might be thinking.

"It may spark some better, more positive approach," he said of Tuesday's player/owner meetings. "But it's all going to go back to Bettman and Fehr. Nothing's decided without those guys' approval anyways."

When he played the game, a 12-year career that began with the Los Angeles Kings back in 1982, Kennedy was an active union man. Today, as he looks over his acres near the Alberta-Montana border, he sees the league's problems from both sides of those long fences.

"The owners built the business. Do players legitimately deserve half of the proceeds, or 57 per cent?" he asks. "If I'm running the business and I'm on the road promoting the business, and I've got a hired man at home that's doing the chores, does he deserve half of the revenue? I'm the one out there on the road increasing the price on the bulls that I'm selling."

That analogy relates to the huge increases in revenues that the league created, which nearly doubled the salary cap since the last lockout.

"But as a player it's driven into you all the time (by your coaches and owners): 'Do what's best for the team. Sacrifice for the team.' Then you get into these negotiations and it's the opposite. You're being told, 'Don't think of the team. Shut up, sign this.' Well, players aren't that dumb."

Is this a true partnership?

"Absolutely not," Kennedy said. "Five years from now it's going to be exactly the same."

Partners or no, retired players look at these two sides and see the future being decided by a bunch of suits. That is perhaps why Tuesday's players/owners meeting could be helpful.

"With 100 lawyers in there it seems like they talk in circles," said Jason Strudwick, the retired defenceman, who think this players and owners tete-a-tete is a fine idea.

"These are the people who are in the game day in and day out. It's not Fehr and Bettman," he said. "What are we after? Let's get some truth out there. The representatives are playing the ol' shell game. Maybe these guys can get some real, truthful dialogue going. Maybe they can find somewhere to start from."

The further salaries rise, and the longer the two sides fight over an ever-increasing pie, even these former players begin to wonder what has happened to the game they once played.

"I made about \$3 million in my whole career. Half of that went to taxes, paid 13 years of expenses," Kennedy figured. "I watched every dollar I ever had, and came out of the game with about three-quarters of a million."

"The year after I retire, Keith Tkachuk signs a deal that pays him in one year twice what I earned in my entire career."

Kennedy's hope is that some of the owners who are new to the process -- like Tampa's Jeff Vinik or Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle -- can help to soften the hard line stance of ownership.

"The only thing that can possibly happen is if ... the new owners in this meeting are of a different approach. Possibly there's going to be some movement."

If not, they may lose another season. And if that happens, even this old NHLer might have watched his last NHL game.

"It is the average guy who has built the game, and now a family of four from Redvers, Sask. (Kennedy's hometown) can't even afford tickets," Kennedy said. "The business has forgotten where it came from. They're greasing the skids right now, and pretty soon they'll tip over the peak, they'll be skidding, and there's no coming back. People will find somewhere else for their entertainment."

"If they don't play this year, they're going to have to refigure a whole new approach to the game to give people value. People will move that money somewhere else.

"Getting those people back is way tougher than keeping them."

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