

# SPORT-SCAN DAILY BRIEF

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## Websites

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645882 NBCSports.com / NHL presents NHLPA with counter-proposal

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645884 Sportsnet.ca / Spector on NHL: Winners of a shortened season

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645790 Anaheim Ducks

NHL owners, players move closer as negotiations continue

Terms of a new collective bargaining agreement are still being worked out after Wednesday's discussions. More conversation is expected Thursday.

By Helene Elliott

11:16 PM PST, December 5, 2012

NEW YORK — A long day of negotiations between players and owners and a meeting of the NHL's Board of Governors on Wednesday produced an agreement on how to split one kind of pie: the thin-crust pizza delivered to hungry reporters at about 11 p.m. by Steve Fehr, special counsel to the NHL Players' Assn.

How they will split the financial pie remains in dispute, but people familiar with the discussions said the talks had gained traction through earnest efforts by both sides. However, a new collective bargaining agreement had not been forged after players and owners met separately and jointly over about 10 hours at a Manhattan hotel, breaking up about 1 a.m. Eastern time.

"We had a series of very candid discussions tonight and we plan on meeting again" Thursday, said Winnipeg Jets defenseman Ron Hainsey, one of 18 players who participated in the talks with six owners Tuesday and

Wednesday. An NHLPA spokesman said the group will talk internally before meeting with the league Thursday.

"We had good, candid dialogue. A lot of issues," NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said. "There continue to be some critical open issues between the two parties and we understand the union should be getting back to us [Thursday] on some of those issues."

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman was excluded from the player-owner meetings, as was NHLPA Executive Director Donald Fehr. Daly and Steve Fehr led their respective delegations as players and owners heard new, more moderate voices, most notably businessman and Pittsburgh Penguins owner Ron Burkle.

The NHL has canceled games through Dec. 14 as well as the Winter Classic and All-Star game. This week's talks are crucial to sustaining any chance to save the season.

Bettman updated the governors on the negotiations at the board meeting and clarified the league's differences with the union on substantial issues. The financial gap isn't huge — \$182 million on "make whole" payments that would pay the full value of players' current contracts when they go from 57% of hockey-related revenues to 50% — but the NHL is holding out for terms that would restrict free agency and salary arbitration in order to keep payrolls down and help small- and mid-market teams operate profitably.

The league sketched out a contingency plan for a shortened season, with a seven-day training camp leading up to a Christmas Day start and 58-game season. The NHL traditionally hasn't scheduled games on Christmas.

Bettman spoke only briefly after the governors' gathering.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing, and out of respect for that process I don't have anything else to say and I'm not going to take any questions," he said.

After the governors met, the NHLPA made a proposal that tweaked some of its previous points. The league responded, setting off a series of meetings.

Along the way, the NHL proposed a 10-year term for the new labor deal, up from its previous seven-year proposal but including an "out" clause after eight years. The NHLPA has proposed a five-year agreement because it doesn't want the earnings of future players to be adversely affected if the deal doesn't work out as anticipated. The NHL could keep owners happy by spreading out the make-whole payments over 10 years so players' share of hockey-related revenues would stay below 50%.

LA Times: LOADED: 12.06.2012

645791 Boston Bruins

NHL labor talks go late, still no deal

By Steve Conroy

After Scrooging it up for hockey fans for more than two months, it looks as though the powers that be in the NHL were working hard yesterday and last night to end the 81-day lockout and deliver some games by Christmas.

With traction being gained in seven-plus hours of player-owner meetings on Tuesday, the league held its annual Board of Governors meeting yesterday in New York. After the meeting adjourned, the players presented the owners with a new proposal. The league contingent reviewed it and returned a counter-proposal last night before the two sides broke for dinner.

The negotiators reconvened later in the evening and continued until wrapping up for the night shortly after midnight. In other words, the two sides were doing some actual negotiating, something that might have helped had it been done last summer.

"We had a series of very candid discussions tonight," Winnipeg Jets defenseman Ron Hainsey told reporters just before 1 a.m., "and we plan on meeting (today)."

Though a deal was not done, the audio-visuals remained positive, at least from the owners side. After the league and NHLPA seconds-in-command, Bill Daly and Steve Fehr, met with reporters side-by-side after Tuesday's marathon — a symbolic departure from the dueling press conferences that had been the norm — commissioner Gary Bettman did not take any

questions after the Governors meeting in the afternoon. He instead issued a simple, let's-keep-the-ball-rolling statement.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing, and out of respect for that process I don't have anything else to say," said Bettman, who, like his NHLPA counterpart Don Fehr, remained mostly on the sidelines in yesterday's negotiations.

While there was supposedly still a gag order on team personnel, a couple executives did stop on the way out of the Governors' meeting to give reporters their generally positive, if very nonspecific, takes on what's taking place.

"We feel good about the information we got," new Columbus Blue Jackets president John Davidson said.

Toronto Maple Leafs owner Larry Tanenbaum, one of the six owners participating in these negotiations and one of four newcomers to the process, also struck a positive tone.

"We're going to continue to talk up until we get a deal," said Tanenbaum. "All I can say is as long as we're talking we're hopeful."

An NHL podium was set up at the hotel later in the evening, spurring a rash of rumors of an impending announcement, but none came.

Meanwhile, in Boston some of the Bruins and other local NHLers who have remained in the area continued to skate and workout at a local rink, a task that has on some days seemed like drudgery. But B's goalie Tuukka Rask, who this week joined the local skaters after a two-month stint in the Czech Republic, admitted it was a little easier to come to the rink yesterday morning.

"Oh, yeah," said Rask "I've been hoping (for an end to the lockout) for months, like everyone else. But you're just trying to maintain your level and stay on top of things and be ready when the season hopefully (begins). Some days could be a little tougher than other days, showing up here at 7:30 in the morning and you're skating with 10 guys.

"But you try to look at the big picture, too. Maybe in a couple of weeks, we could be playing."

Brad Marchand struck the "cautiously optimistic" tone.

"It's been a lot longer than it probably should have gone on, but the fact that they're in there and they were in there (Tuesday) night and they're really trying to hash this thing out is positive," said Marchand. "But it's still going to take a little bit of time. Hopefully, they'll get a deal done as soon as possible."

NHL veteran Jay Pandolfo, currently without a contract, has already lost one season to the lockout of 2004-05, and he'd prefer the curtain not come down on his career because of another lost season.

And if this lockout ends soon, Pittsburgh co-owner Ron Burkle could become known as the NHL's Bob Kraft, the Patriots owner who was widely credited with breaking the stalemate in the 2011 NFL lockout.

"That'd be nice to have an owner to have a big part of getting this thing resolved," said Pandolfo. "That's the biggest thing, to try and get a deal that works for both sides. If someone like (Burkle) can step in and move the process along it's only going to help hockey and get the game going. It's important. You don't want to miss another season. Two seasons in eight years seems kind of crazy."

Material from the Associated Press was used in this report.

Boston Herald LOADED: 12.06.2012

645792 Buffalo Sabres

Players, owners finally wrap up talks just before 1 a.m., plan to meet again Thursday

John Vogl

While nearly everyone in the NHL was quiet, including Commissioner Gary Bettman, a select group of players and owners began talking Wednesday

afternoon and continued well into Thursday morning. They formally exchanged ideas for a new collective bargaining agreement.

It's unclear how much progress they made.

"We had a series of meetings today, very candid discussion, and we plan on meeting again tomorrow," Winnipeg's Ron Hainsey said to reporters in New York just before 1 a.m. Thursday.

About a half-hour later, NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly told reporters that after the candid dialogue some critical issues still remained.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," Bettman said during an afternoon news conference that lasted 24 seconds. "Out of respect for that process I don't have anything else to say."

Six owners and 19 players spoke to each other and internally from afternoon till night till morning, breaking for dinner as speculation swirled about their conferences.

"We're going to continue to talk up until we get a deal," Toronto owner Larry Tanenbaum, who was one of the half-dozen league representatives, told reporters following a midday board of governors meeting. "All I can say is as long as we're talking we're hopeful."

The negotiating group, which included Buffalo Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller, talked for 7½ hours Tuesday but did not formally make offers. That changed Wednesday.

The NHL Players' Association made a proposal in the afternoon, according to multiple reports. The league countered early in the evening, according to ESPN.com.

At about 8:45 p.m., following their two-hour dinner break, the owners returned to the meeting room. They stayed for less than 15 minutes and departed for another internal discussion, according to reports. They returned 15 minutes later.

The owners departed again at 10 p.m., rejoined the players an hour later and left again at 11:30 p.m. Meetings then continued well into the morning with smaller groups, reports said.

While they talked, reporters noticed an NHL lectern being set up for a news conference.

The suspense as to why added to the intensity of the day. A new CBA needs to be reached by Friday or more games are expected to be canceled. The schedule has already been wiped out through Dec. 14.

While Miller took part in negotiations, Sabres owner Terry Pegula, President Ted Black and General Manager Darcy Regier attended the board of governors meeting. Bettman described the two-hour session as "basically an update."

"We feel good about the information we got," Columbus Blue Jackets President John Davidson told reporters.

Black, via email, declined comment. The NHL has threatened substantial fines for team employees who talk about the lockout.

It was unclear whether the meetings would extend into today, but the schedule is now open.

The sides were supposed to appear in front of the Quebec Labour Relations Board today and Friday, but because of the increased talks in New York they agreed to postpone the hearing. The NHLPA, led by members of the Montreal Canadiens, filed suit with the labor board in September to have the lockout declared illegal in the province.

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645793 Buffalo Sabres

MSG to air Sabres' finale in Aud, followed by premiere of 'Rafters Club' sitdown

John Vogl

Sabres fans can once again say to the Aud, "Farewell, old friend."

The replay of classic games from Buffalo's history continues Monday on MSG with the April 1996 season finale against Hartford, which marked the last game in Memorial Auditorium. Pat LaFontaine ceremoniously turned out the lights with a final postgame goal, and he will provide commentary throughout the broadcast, which begins at 8 p.m.

Following the two-hour telecast will be the premiere of "Buffalo Sabres: Rafter's Club Roundtable." Sabres broadcaster Brian Duff sat down last month with the four living players who have their numbers retired in the rafters: LaFontaine, Gilbert Perreault, Danny Gare and Rene Robert.

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645794 Buffalo Sabres

Bettman: 'Pleased with the process that is ongoing'

John Vogl

Gary Bettman, in an update that lasted 24 seconds, said this afternoon he is pleased with the direction talks are going between the NHL and its players' association.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," Bettman said in New York, "and out of respect for that process I don't have anything else to say."

Resuming the talks that began Tuesday, six owners and 20 players (up from 18) are scheduled to meet again this afternoon. Neither Bettman nor union Executive Director Donald Fehr will take part. The NHL Players' Association today added Chris Campoli and Daniel Winnik to its list of players.

It is not known whether either side will present a formal proposal.

Bettman today presided over a two-hour board of governors meeting and described it as "basically an update."

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645795 Buffalo Sabres

Players, owners set to chat again this afternoon after NHL board meeting

John Vogl

The second day of meetings between NHL players and owners will begin this afternoon because the sides spent the morning meeting internally.

The 24 negotiators who met for 7 1/2 hours Tuesday will gather again in New York after the NHL conducts its board of governors meeting, which was scheduled to start at 11 a.m. Sabres owner Terry Pegula, team President Ted Black and General Manager Darcy Regier were expected to attend.

The six owners and 18 players, including Buffalo's Ryan Miller, were originally planning to sit down prior to the board meeting. But Yahoo! Sports' Nick Cotsonika reports the players' association "has something" for the owners and didn't want to rush through it. It's possible the NHLPA is readying a new proposal.

A collective bargaining agreement needs to be reached this week or more games will be canceled.

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645796 Calgary Flames

Flames players optimistic but will wait for official news of lockout end

By Scott Cruickshank

Calgary Flames forward Blake Comeau battles with Phoenix's Martin Hanzal during a game last winter. Comeau, who has been working out with the Kelowna Rockets, insists he's in top shape should the lockout end and training camp begin in short order.

Burned previously by bouts of optimism, the Calgary Flames' skaters are trying to maintain an even keel.

Earnest negotiating sessions — finally — between the National Hockey League and its players have the hockey world abuzz. There's enough traction that some folks are guessing at training-camp dates, taking stabs at regular-season openings.

Blake Comeau and Blair Jones, however, would rather await official word.

When a new collective bargaining agreement is hammered out, let them know.

Till then, they'll keep on keeping on.

"I've had my hopes up a few times, so I'm just waiting to see what the final result will be this time around," Jones, in Calgary, said Wednesday afternoon — Day 81 of the NHL lockout. "It's hard to judge from outside the negotiating room. I hear what everyone says, but I try not to get too high or too low.

"There's still work to be done. When — and if — it happens, I'll be ready. For now, though, I'm not going to rush to any conclusions. It's, 'Give me the news when it's ready to go.'":

Added Comeau: "It's been like a roller-coaster ride. I'm a little reserved, but, obviously, I have more optimism right now than I've had throughout this whole process. I'm not sure something will be done in the next 24 hours, but, hopefully, something is done sooner rather than later."

Not that Jones and Comeau are oblivious to the latest developments.

Conference calls, news snippets, union apps, social media, and old-fashioned hearsay keep them in the loop. So no one can deny the signs of actual bargaining.

"For the first time, both sides are saying that things are moving in the right direction," Comeau said from Kelowna, where, on a daily basis, he skates with a crew that includes Brent Seabrook, Jordin Tootoo, Wade Redden, Keaton Ellerby, Luke Schenn. "There's definitely some excitement and more optimism from myself than there has been throughout this whole process. When you hear (NHL commissioner Gary Bettman) say he's happy the way things are going, when (NHLPA special counsel) Steve Fehr is saying that he thought it was one of the best days they've had so far . . . obviously comments like that are going to create some optimism, some excitement.

"At the same time, I've been excited quite a few times throughout this process."

But should someone in the know suddenly inform players that training camps are a week away, no one would need to ask for a prep-time extension.

"I feel physically that I'm ready to go," said Comeau. "I've been skating with the (Kelowna Rockets) junior team, I've been skating with other NHL guys. And mentally? If an agreement was made, everyone would just be so excited and ready to go. So that wouldn't be a problem at all. Everyone wants to get playing right away.

"Personally, I hope something gets done right away, and the NHL starts up and gets back on the ice where it belongs."

Because, yes, Sept. 16, the first day of the lockout, feels like ages ago.

"For everyone involved — owners, players, fans, media — it's been a long process," said Comeau. "I think both sides realize that it's gone on long enough. It's been frustrating, that's for sure."

Calgary Herald: LOADED: 12.06.2012

645797 Calgary Flames

Calgary Flames' Blake Comeau sees progress 0

By RANDY SPORTAK

And good vibes.

"It was definitely a lot easier to get out of bed this morning and get a workout done before a skate," Flames forward Blake Comeau said Wednesday from his off-season — and now into what should be a season — home in Kelowna.

That's because finally, FINALLY, there was some action between the NHL and the players' association in the quest for a new collective bargaining agreement and end to the lockout.

On the heels of Tuesday's surprisingly successful meetings between a half-dozen owners, including Flames co-owner Murray Edwards, and 18 players, one of whom was Flames forward Michael Cammalleri, in New York City, the push continued Wednesday with owners, who had a scheduled board of governors meeting in the morning, and nearly 20 players.

Talks went into the night, bringing about some optimism around the league.

"I'm more optimistic than I was a couple of days ago," Comeau said after skating with a handful of other locked out NHLers, including Brent Seabrook, Jordyn Tootoo, Luke Schenn, Wade Redden and Keaton Ellerby.

"That being said, I was pretty optimistic the last time they met for three days in a row and spoke all day.

"But you get the feeling this is a little different. I don't want to get my hopes up, but there's more optimism than there has been throughout the whole process."

The collection of players around Calgary didn't skate Wednesday, and messages to a handful of other players, including Flames NHLPA representative Matt Stajan, weren't returned, a likely sign players are sensing the negotiations have finally become serious enough to be careful with their words.

Or, keeping their optimism tempered.

"Everybody was more optimistic than they've been throughout the whole process, but, at the same time, trying to be reserved because we don't want to get our hopes up," Comeau said of the Kelowna crew he skated with.

And just think a few days ago, so many were scoffing at the decision to have owners and players meet without NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, calling it nothing more than a publicity stunt.

"I thought there was a chance we could make some progress with having new faces in there with the ownership and having a good group of players there that want something done and to get back on the ice," Comeau said.

"I think both sides realize time is of the essence and both sides want to get something done.

"It seems both sides are saying we're going in the right direction, so hopefully we get something done soon and start playing as soon as possible."

Who knows? If negotiations continue to build steam, we could have NHL games before Christmas.

Considering not long ago it looked like players and NHL fans would have the opportunity to divert their attention away from hockey, and maybe even have a vacation, during the festive season.

"All my family is in Calgary," Comeau said. "So going there for Christmas would be good."

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 12.06.2012

645798 Calgary Flames

By RANDY SPORTAK

Oh sure, Jon Gillies is proud of his achievements so far this season.

And thrilled with the latest payoff — a spot on the U.S. national team for the upcoming world junior tournament in Russia.

But it's all not coming as a big shock for the Calgary Flames prospect, especially the world juniors opportunity.

"It was in the back of my mind," said Gillies, one of three goalies on the preliminary list for a Team U.S.A. squad that will bring all three netminders to Ufa, Russia.

"When I got the call, I was obviously thrilled. It's a big honour, especially being the only 1994 (born) goalie taken. It'll be a good chance to gain a lot of experience.

"I'll be a sponge, take in everything."

Gillies, chosen in the third round (75th overall) in the 2012 draft, went into the season with a golden chance to be a big part of his NCAA team. The Providence College Friars needed a new No. 1 netminder.

He's played all but one period so far this season, and posted a 7-6-1 record with a 1.88 goals-against average and .930 save percentage.

"I set pretty high expectations for myself," the freshman netminder said by phone after Wednesday's practice. "It's been a relief. I've proven to myself and to my teammates I'm capable of holding my own and playing well.

"With that said, my teammates have been unbelievable in front of me and made the transition seamless."

Gillies is one of three Flames hopefuls who could be on the American squad when the tournament kicks off Boxing Day.

Forward John Gaudreau, and defenceman Patrick Sieloff also received invitations and have very good chances of making the squad.

While the world juniors are on the horizon for Gillies, the 6-foot-5, 230-lb., netminder who'll turn 19 years old next month, more immediate is Friday's game against the No. 2-ranked Boston College Eagles, led by Gaudreau and another Flames prospect, Bill Arnold.

"It'll definitely be a fun game," Gillies said. "Our team is really young. B.C. is not exactly an old team, but more experienced. It'll be a big test for us.

"I know we're going to play as hard as we can, play well, and hopefully come out with the 'W'."

Gaudreau is lighting up the NCAA ranks in his sophomore season with 10 goals and 21 points in 13 games for the defending national champions, and will provide a big test for the netminder.

"He's a big part of their offence and you have to look out for him. At the end of the day, they all can shoot the puck," Gillies said.

The Flames connection doesn't end there, either.

Mark Jankowski, Calgary's 2012 first-round choice, has netted eight points (4-4-8) in 14 games in his freshman season, tied for second on the Friars.

"Mark and I are best friends, we're together all the time, and he's done great," Gillies reported.

"His numbers are good — knowing him, probably not where he'd like them to be — but his play goes beyond the numbers with the little plays he does in games and things he does.

"His vision and hockey sense is truly unbelievable.

"I'm so happy he's been able to get off to a great start and not only hold his own, but play really, really well for our team.

"I know some people were skeptical about his abilities, but he's proving himself."

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 12.06.2012

645799 Carolina Hurricanes

Cautious optimism in marathon NHL talks

By Chip Alexander - calexander at newsobserver.com

The National Hockey League may be edging closer to playing a season. Maybe a 54-game season. Maybe a season that begins just before or after Christmas.

Then again, two days of marathon negotiations may be all for naught.

A group of NHL owners and players put in another marathon collective bargaining session Wednesday in New York, not breaking up until 1 a.m. Thursday.

When it was over, Winnipeg Jets defenseman Ron Hainsey told reporters the two sides had "a series of candid discussions." NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly called it "good, candid dialogue" but also noted there are "critical open issues between the two parties."

Is the NHL closer to finally starting the season? It's still too early to tell. In an effort to agree on a CBA and end the lockout, other sessions have seemed promising and fallen apart with much rancor.

The two sides will meet again Thursday. The NHLPA will hold an internal meeting before the CBA session.

For the second straight day, six NHL owners and a group of players held collective bargaining meetings without NHL commissioner Gary Bettman or NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr in the room. For the second day, some apparent progress was made, with both the league and union making CBA proposals.

Both sides emerged from Tuesday's sessions feeling generally optimistic about the dialogue and exchanges. On Wednesday, the NHL held its scheduled board of governors meeting, and NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly gave an update on what had been said.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," Bettman told reporters after the governors meeting, without elaboration and without taking questions.

After the two-hour governors meeting, the six owners and the group of 19 players again met -- together and in separate groups -- Wednesday afternoon and then late into the night. Chicago Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews and Pittsburgh Penguins forward Craig Adams had to leave because of other commitments.

It's believed the league is seeking a 10-year CBA, while the union has proposed a shorter term, possibly five years.

There was speculation the two sides might be considering a 54-game season that would begin either just before or after Christmas.

The league is requesting an immediate 50-50 split of hockey-related revenue (HRR) and says it will "make whole" the players' existing contracts through deferred payments. The players received 57 percent of HRR last season -- about \$1.88 billion.

Carolina Hurricanes captain Eric Staal is not attending the meetings but said he received texts Wednesday from some of the players in New York.

"It's been up and down as we've gone on, but definitely positive vibes were coming out of (New York) and hopefully we can keep the ball rolling and get back to playing," Staal said after skating at Raleigh Center Ice. "The main thing is there was some positive progress that you hope continues and gets us back on the ice.

"I don't know exactly what's going to happen but I'm hoping something good is going to happen. There has been a lot of bad that has gone on the last while, and yesterday finally both sides felt like there was something created."

The idea of meeting without Bettman and Fehr was suggested by Bettman himself after federal mediators couldn't help end the impasse. The owners' group included four who had not been in any of the previous CBA negotiating sessions -- Ron Burkle (Pittsburgh Penguins), Mark Chipman (Winnipeg Jets), Larry Tanenbaum (Toronto Maple Leafs) and Jeff Vinik (Tampa Bay Lightning).

"Some new energy, some new voices in the talks hopefully can spur a deal getting done, because it looks to me that it's right there and can get closed out, hopefully," Eric Staal said.

Burkle, a multi-billionaire who has experience in resolving labor disputes and is considered one of the more moderate NHL owners. On the players' side was the Pens' Sidney Crosby, who has been a part of past negotiating sessions.

Jordan Staal, who helped the Pens win a Stanley Cup, was traded to the Canes in June. He said he liked the thought of Burkle being involved for the first time.

"I was happy that new ownership came into the room," Jordan Staal said. "(Burkle) is a great guy and understands what's going on in the business world. And he truly does care about us playing and getting the league back on the ice."

News Observer LOADED: 12.06.2012

645800 Carolina Hurricanes

Staals encouraged by 'positive vibes' from talks

By Chip Alexander - Staff writer

Eric Staal has plans to leave this week, taking his family to Thunder Bay, Ont.

The Canes captain would be happy to change those plans, of course. That could hinge on what's accomplished -- or not accomplished -- today in the CBA talks in New York and in the critical days to follow.

Staal was curious as to how productive the meeting of six owners and 18 players would be Tuesday. He said he was able to text with some of the players who were in the room.

"It's been up and down as we've gone on, but definitely positive vibes were coming out of it and hopefully we can keep the ball rolling and get back to playing," Staal said after skating at Raleigh Center Ice. "The main thing is there was some positive progress that you hope continues and gets us back on the ice.

"I don't know exactly what's going to happen but I'm hoping something good is going to happen. There has been a lot of bad that has gone on the last while, and yesterday finally both sides felt like there was something created.

"Some new energy, some new voices in the talks hopefully can spur a deal getting done, because it looks to me that it's right there and can get closed out, hopefully."

One of the new voices was Pittsburgh Penguins co-owner Ron Burkle, a multi-billionaire who has experience in resolving labor disputes and is considered one of the more moderate NHL owners. On the players' side was the Pens' Sidney Crosby, who has been a part of past negotiating sessions.

Jordan Staal, who helped the Pens win a Stanley Cup and was traded to the Canes in June, said he liked the thought of Burkle being involved for the first time.

"There are a lot of good people in that organization and lot of people who care about hockey," Jordan said. "For them to take a step and be more involved is great to see. I hope this traction will keep us moving forward.

"I was happy that new ownership came into the room and excited there was a lot of new players, as well. (Burkle) is a great guy and understands what's going on in the business world. And he truly does care about us playing and getting the league back on the ice. It's good to see him involved."

The NHL's board of governors met Wednesday morning. The groups of owners and players -- again without commissioner Gary Bettman or NHLPA boss Donald Fehr in the room -- were to have more CBA discussions Wednesday afternoon.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," Bettman told reporters after the governors meeting.

Eric Staal was about to begin his second year with the Canes in 2004 when a CBA fight resulted in a canceled 2004-2005 season. For Jordan Staal, this is a first and, he said, a learning experience he didn't ask for or want.

"For one, it's to be patient," he said. "It's a long and frustrating at times process. As for my career, it's upsetting obviously missing games. It's part of it. The (NHLPA) needs to be strong and protect the future of the players, but I think every player wants to get going."

Regardless of what's done in New York, the full NHL season will not be played. There could be 50 to 60 games -- there has been speculation today about a 54-game schedule -- but a part of the season has been lost.

"It's been such a rollercoaster ride and you have to do your best to keep an even keel," Eric Staal said. "We're in December. I'm still disappointed in the way it's gone, from both sides, and where we're at now."

"But right now we're getting the ball rolling and hopefully we'll continue these talks and close out a deal."

News Observer LOADED: 12.06.2012

645801 Chicago Blackhawks

Clendening leading Rockford's AHL surge

By Tim Sassone

Adam Clendening is hardly the sole reason why the Rockford IceHogs are in first place in the American Hockey League's Midwest Division, but he played a big role in them taking 6 out of possible 8 points last week.

The 20-year-old rookie defenseman from Boston University is tied for second on the team in scoring with 16 points, including 3 power-play goals. He had 6 points last week and has five multi-point games this season.

"He's gotten better and better as the year's gone on," said Rockford general manager Mark Bernard. "He's only a 20-year-old kid playing in this league. He makes plays a lot of defensemen won't even attempt at this level."

"He has the confidence and a little swagger about him that he knows he can do it. He has great vision and great hands, and he's only going to get better."

That's great news for the Blackhawks, who drafted Clendening in the second round (36th overall) in 2011. He should be in Chicago sooner than later, especially with the Hawks looking for a power-play quarterback.

Ever since Rockford coach Ted Dent switched his defense pairings and put Clendening with Nick Leddy, the Icehogs have taken off.

"It made sense to put them out there together 5-on-5 since they were playing the power play," Dent said. "Leddy is shooting the puck better. Clendening can shoot it as well, and it's opening up a lot of rebounds and tips for our forwards."

Clendening is going to be a good one, Dent thinks.

"He's progressing real well," Dent said. "He competes, he's got some offense to his game, and he sees the ice well. He's proving he's a good player in this league."

Bernard credits Leddy with being a good influence on Clendening.

"Nick, even though he's a young guy, he's got a lot of experience for a first-year player to learn from," Bernard said. "He's got lots of knowledge from the NHL level to teach and pass on to a guy like Adam, so it's been a good fit."

Jeremy Morin leads Rockford with 9 goals, including 5 on the power play, and he should figure into the mix at forward in Chicago once the lockout ends.

"Jeremy Morin has been very good over the last three weeks," Bernard said. "He's back to feeling like himself. He took a really hard hit here about two years ago and didn't train all summer. He still had a pretty good season last year with 18 goals, but he was behind the eight ball."

"This summer he trained all summer, and I think he's 100 percent. I think he's gotten stronger and stronger as we've gone along."

Ben Smith has 8 goals and 16 points, Kyle Beach 7 goals, Jimmy Hayes 6 goals and 15 points and Andrew Shaw 5 goals and 5 assists in just 15 games because of a pair of suspensions.

"I'm impressed with all our young guys," said Bernard, who also singled out defenseman Ryan Stanton for his strong play.

As for Beach, Bernard sees a guy making progress.

"Kyle is having a good season," Bernard said. "People think he's been around for seven or eight years, but it's only his third year pro. He lost a full year last year being injured."

"For Kyle to be successful he has to be that agitator out there, keeping his feet moving and causing that other team to dislike him because he has that ability that when he finished hits to get under the skin of the opposition."

"That's imperative for him to have success. He has great hands; when he can get a shot off it's usually in the back of the net."

Rockford just finished its busiest stretch of the season: seven games in 12 days with a record of 6-1-0-0, including taking three out of four games.

The power play has converted on 31.8 percent of its chances in the last four games, going 7-for-22.

"We've been playing a much more consistent team game," Dent said.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 12.06.2012

645802 Chicago Blackhawks

NHL talks continue with cautious optimism

TRACEY MYERS

There wasn't much commenting from commissioner Gary Bettman, nor team powers that be after the NHL Board of Governors meeting in New York this afternoon. But since talks are still ongoing inside closed doors, the lack of talking outside of them isn't so bad.

Bettman told reporters he was "pleased with the process that is ongoing" after meeting with the league's Board of Governors, and right before owners and players talked for the second consecutive day. Bettman didn't comment past that, "out of respect for that process."

The Blackhawks' Jonathan Toews and Jamal Mayers are part of the owner-player talks. Blackhawks owner Rocky Wirtz and president John McDonough were president for the BOG meeting.

It's the first sign of real optimism in some time. Owners and players met most of Tuesday in New York and did so again prior to the BOG meeting today. Columbus Blue Jackets president John Davidson told reporters, "we feel good about the information we got." CSNPhilly.com's Tim Panaccio learned that the BOG talked about a 50-60 game season.

Does that mean a deal is imminent? Well, let's just be very happy things are going in the right direction right now, and that another round of player/owner talks are currently in session this afternoon. The sense of urgency seems to finally be there -- then again, considering it's December, it ought to be.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.06.2012

645803 Columbus Blue Jackets

NHL: Lengthy talks lead to new hope

By Shawn Mitchell

A select group of NHL players and owners engaged in lengthy labor negotiations yesterday for the second day in a row, boosting hope that an 82-day lockout might soon be over.

The sides followed 8 1/2 hours of talks on Tuesday by reconvening in a New York hotel yesterday afternoon. The sides reportedly exchanged at least

one proposal and counterproposal during a back-and-forth session that still was in progress until after midnight.

The latest round of talks followed a previously scheduled NHL Board of Governors meeting yesterday morning, during which team governors were updated on the negotiating process.

"The meetings were good and we received a thorough update on where things stand, as well as other league matters," Blue Jackets president Mike Priest said.

Priest was accompanied in New York by majority owner John P. McConnell, president of hockey operations John Davidson and general manager Scott Howson.

NHL executives have faced the threat of fines for commenting on the labor situation, and Priest declined further comment.

"I'm hopeful something happens this week with what's been going on," said Blue Jackets forward R.J. Umberger, who has served as an Ohio State volunteer assistant men's hockey coach during the lockout. "But I have to refrain from getting too excited. I've had my hopes up before and things haven't worked out."

Labor and management were tight-lipped throughout the day, suggesting negotiations had reached a delicate stage. But team executives seemed optimistic after the governors meeting.

"We feel good about the information we got," Davidson told reporters as he left the hotel.

The six owners who participated in talks on Tuesday stayed for a second round of bargaining yesterday, including Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle. He and Penguins star Sidney Crosby were said to be instrumental in the progress made the previous day.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and players' union executive director Donald Fehr were not at the bargaining table on Tuesday. They were not part of yesterday's talks, either, but were in the building.

Bettman sounded optimistic as he delivered a brief statement to reporters after the Board of Governors meeting, although the positive vibe that followed Tuesday's talks reportedly turned tense last night.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," Bettman said. "Out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say."

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly and union special counsel Steve Fehr jointly addressed reporters for the first time on Tuesday, with Fehr saying that day's meetings were "the best we've had so far." There were no indications that an agreement is imminent, though the schedule of labor and management was cleared for more talks this week.

Members of both sides were expected to attend a hearing with the Quebec Labour Board today about the legality of locking out Montreal Canadiens players, but the board agreed to postpone the hearing to allow negotiations to continue.

There was at least one report yesterday that the NHL had offered a proposal that would last as long as 10 years. Another report indicated that at least some NHL coaches had begun to contact players, but a veteran player said he had not heard of any player on any team indicating they had had contact with team officials.

The apparent progress also spurred speculation about start dates and season lengths.

If an agreement is reached, it is assumed the league would need at least 10 days to prepare and conduct training camps before it could begin playing games. All games through Dec. 14 have been canceled, but teams still would be capable of playing 50 to 60 games if an agreement is reached in the coming days.

At least two members of a group of 18 players that participated in talks on Tuesday did not take part yesterday. They were replaced by free-agent defenseman Chris Campoli and Anaheim forward Daniel Winnik.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 12.06.2012

645804 Columbus Blue Jackets

By Aaron Portzline

As NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and players union executive director Don Fehr paced the halls of a New York hotel, six team owners and 18 players huddled in a boardroom to discuss the league's labor issues without filters or buffers.

The meeting lasted for more than eight hours over two sessions, and it might have been the most positive day of talks since the collective bargaining agreement expired on Sept. 15.

"It was a long day, a constructive day, the best we've had so far," union special counsel Steve Fehr said.

"I appreciate the efforts of the players," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said. "We're going to work hard and try to get a deal."

Perhaps most telling that progress was made is the fact that Daly and Fehr stood side by side at a podium to address the media. Previously, they have had separate sessions.

More good news: The two sides plan to meet again this morning.

The lockout, in its 81st day, has blown through many critical junctures on the NHL calendar, dates that were said to be so valuable to both sides that they would prompt a deal. But the Winter Classic has been canceled. So has the All-Star Game in Columbus. So have 422 regular-season games — more than a third of the schedule.

But if any semblance of a season is to be salvaged — the league played only 48 games in 1994-95 — this week figures to be crucial.

The sides plan to meet before the scheduled NHL Board of Governors meeting at 11 a.m., also in New York.

The Blue Jackets will be represented by all four of their governors — majority owner John P. McConnell, president Mike Priest, president of hockey operations John Davidson and general manager Scott Howson. This will be Davidson's first league meeting since joining the Blue Jackets from St. Louis in October.

"For certain we'll get an update on where things stand coming out of (last night's) meeting with the owners and players," Priest said. "I don't have any immediate expectations on what else is on the agenda, but the plan was for this to be a relative short meeting. So we'll see."

"I think it will be good to get an update face to face with our peers around the league. The league has done a very good job of keeping us informed whenever there is movement, or whenever there is a meeting planned. But it's always good to be in the same room together."

If the cautious optimism of last night does not last through today's governors meeting — there will be 30 clubs represented with almost as many different ideas for what the agreement should look like — the season could be in peril.

More games are likely to be canceled on Thursday and Friday. If the league cancels all games through December — 117 more games — the total would rise to 539.

The league waited until Feb. 19 to cancel the 2004-05 season. It's unclear how long they would wait this time.

At the meeting

- The owners present were 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 18 players, according to the Players' Association, were Craig Adams, David Backes, Michael Cammalleri, Sidney Crosby, B.J. Crombeen, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Shawn Horcoff, Jamal Mayers, Manny Malhotra, Andy McDonald, Ryan Miller, George Parros, Brad Richards, Martin St. Louis, Jonathan Toews and Kevin Westgarth.

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645805 Columbus Blue Jackets

NHL lockout: Talks take hopeful turn

Blue Jackets notebook: Five prospects could make world juniors

By Aaron Portzline

The Blue Jackets could have as many as five of the organization's 18- and 19-year-old prospects competing in the world junior championship later this month in Ufa, Russia.

Mike Reilly (United States), Boone Jenner (Canada), Lukas Sedlak (Czech Republic), Oscar Dansk (Sweden) and Joonas Korpi (Finland) are listed on their country's preliminary roster.

"We're proud and excited to have so many players potentially included," Blue Jackets general manager Scott Howson said. "We think these players have great promise, and it's great to see others agree."

The number would have been six if defenseman Ryan Murray (Canada) hadn't suffered a season-ending shoulder injury last month.

Jenner, who leads the entire Canadian junior system with 27 goals this season, was on the club last season and could serve as captain or an alternate this time.

Reilly, a fourth-round draft pick in 2011 and a college freshman at Minnesota, will compete for the final spot on the United States' defense at the team's camp in Tarrytown, N.Y., Dec. 16-18. The world junior championship will be held Dec. 26-Jan. 5.

Pride of Dublin

Defenseman Connor Murphy and forward Sean Kuraly, both from Dublin, were invited to the U.S. preliminary camp, too.

Murphy, the son of former NHL defenseman and Blue Jackets assistant coach Gord Murphy, was a first-round pick (No. 20 overall) of Phoenix in 2011. He currently plays for Sarnia in the Ontario Hockey League.

Kuraly was a fifth-round pick of San Jose in 2011. He's a freshman at Miami University.

Slap shots

Ohio State coach Mark Osiecki will be an assistant coach for the United States at the world juniors for the second time in three years. ... Thomas Nykopp, who played for the AAA Blue Jackets and attended Watterson High School in 2010-11, is on Finland's roster. ... Blue Jackets center Brandon Dubinsky, who suffered a broken finger last month when he was struck by a puck in an ECHL game, is still at least a couple of weeks away from returning.

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645806 Dallas Stars

Is NHL labor dispute drawing to close? Today's meeting could be key

MIKE HEIKA Staff Writer

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The NHL labor negotiations took a major step forward on Tuesday, as a group of owners and players got together in New York and met for eight hours. Reports are that Pittsburgh Penguins co-owner Ron Burkle and Penguins center Sidney Crosby played a big role in getting everyone on the same page.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA Executive Director Donald Fehr did not participate in most of the meetings \_ a move that many believe cleared the air.

However, the NHL Board of Governors meets in New York today, so how the Board views the meetings will go a long way in whether or not discussions continue.

Unlike the last lockout when Tom Hicks was a big player with the owners and Bill Guerin with the players, the Stars have a quieter role this time. Alex Goligoski is the Stars' leader as far as contacts with the NHLPA, but he has

not been in on any of the big meetings. Tom Gaglardi just bought the team, so he is seen as one of the newcomers to the old boy's club. Gaglardi, CEO Jim Lites and GM Joe Nieuwendyk are expected to be in New York for the Board of Governors meeting today.

There are some great stories out there this morning.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645807 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings players encouraged by progress in NHL talks

By Helene St. James

Negotiations between select NHL owners and players went well at times and worse at others as the sides seek a new collective bargaining agreement and an end to the lockout.

A group of six owners and triple the number of players met for a second straight day Wednesday, with talks again lasting deep into the night. Positive sentiment earlier in the day ebbed as talks went on, with one hurdle emerging as the league pushed for a 10-year agreement rather than the six years the NHL Players Association prefers.

As of late Wednesday night, a deal was not believed to be imminent.

The mere fact, though, that there has been so much traction this week has left players encouraged, though they tempered their comments because they had been instructed to do so by the NHLPA. Numerous Red Wings skated early in the day at Troy, and afterward expressed encouragement that maybe the 2012-13 season would start this month.

"Things are going better than they have," Wings player representative Danny Cleary said, "but I don't want to get fans too high and think something is going to happen. But we've definitely gained some ground in a lot of areas."

The sides are trying to figure out how to divide up what last season was a \$3.3-billion business. Players, led by executive director Don Fehr, are adamant they will not just be walked over, a point they've made clear during Tuesday's first meeting by announcing they're firm on players' contract rights and pensions.

After months of futile meetings between Fehr and league commissioner Gary Bettman, the sides tried something new and had six owners meet with 18-20 players.

The group met again Wednesday after a Board of Governors meeting attended by Wings general manager Ken Holland and senior vice president Jimmy Devellano.

If all continues to go well, there could be an agreement by the end of the week. The next step would be to bring back all the players who went overseas to play, including Henrik Zetterberg and Pavel Datsyuk. A schedule of 50 or so games is realistic.

"We've got to get some sort of training camp before we start," Justin Abdelkader said. "I think we're still a couple weeks out, probably, before we can get anything realistically started. ... You try to be encouraged, but still, it's hard to say what's going to happen."

Niklas Kronwall, another Wings player rep, echoed that "so far, it sounds pretty good. My understanding is, it's been good meetings, good discussions. That's a good sign, obviously."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.06.2012

645808 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings' Danny Cleary on NHL talks: 'I'm happy that things are going better'

By Helene St. James

Advised by their leaders not to sound overly enthusiastic, Detroit Red Wings players toed the line between optimism and realism regarding the latest developments in the effort to end the NHL lockout.

Danny Cleary, one of the Wings' player representatives, said today, "I don't know if the message should be the most optimistic. It was a good talk yesterday. Obviously, it's a big day today with the Board of Governors meeting."

"I mean, I'm happy. I'm happy that things are going better than they have."

Over the past 24 hours, a group of six owners and 18 players met face-to-face in New York, with talks going late into Tuesday night and slated to resume today. About 11 a.m. today, the NHL Board of Governors met, including Detroit's Ken Holland and Jimmy Devellano.

The NHL and NHLPA have been at odds since Sept. 16 over how to agree to a new collective bargaining agreement. After months of league commissioner Gary Bettman and PA executive director Don Fehr meeting and there being no progress, there was a decision made last week to get new faces involved.

One of the key members to be involved in Tuesday's owners-players meetings is Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, but Boston's Jeremy Jacobs also has been conciliatory. Players have been told by Fehr to temper their comments to media, but Cleary and company conceded there has been tangible progress.

"I guess it's somewhat positive, from what we've heard," Justin Abdelkader said. "Don't know anything for sure. But I think everything has been positive so far, and I think it's good they've met and they're meeting well into the early morning."

"I think both sides realize this is a time that we need to get a deal done if we want to salvage the season."

There are a couple of issues on which the players, Cleary said, stand fast: Player contracting rights, and pensions. Pensions is trickier to figure out because there are different laws to consider in the United States and Canada.

"I know one thing yesterday was, we told them what we were firm on, and they told us what they're firm on, and then we tried to work on a lot of the areas where we could work."

"Guys don't want to get too overly optimistic. You want to be cautious, like we've been saying. And let's see what happens."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.06.2012

645809 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings great Ted Lindsay fears for game's future

By Gregg Krupa

The Detroit News

Detroit -- A diminutive man of advanced age entered the Red Wings dressing room under the sign that reads, "To whom much is given, much is expected."

As they continued fielding questions, players looked beyond the media scrums in front of them, toward him.

At 87, Ted Lindsay remains an imposing figure. He carried a poster-sized photograph of one of the players. Lindsay was there, as he often is when the Wings are playing, for a visit and the autograph.

He uses the souvenirs to raise money for children in need, as part of the Ted Lindsay Foundation, which has raised millions for autism, financing research for a cure.

The players know he was once one of them, and among the greatest of all-time. They recall Lindsay's audacious assertion, almost alone and against some of the most powerful forces in sport a half century ago, of their right to associate for collective bargaining.

They know he now uses much of his time to benefit kids.

And they are also aware, as were players and hockey fans from World War II to the early 1960s, that on the ice, for his opponents, Lindsay could be absolute hell.

But, as he plans more charitable events for the months ahead, the Red Wings are not playing, and Lindsay is mightily concerned about his game.

"I love my game, but I hate like hell what I'm seeing now," said the principal pioneer in the formation of the National Hockey League Players Association, which is now bargaining with the owners who have locked out the players.

"It's players just as much as owners. But I really feel sorry for the fans. That's who I think about."

"And this thing's going to hurt. Because I think there are going to be lots of fans who are season-ticket holders who don't need this aggravation. They're thinking, 'I can put this money someplace else.'"

"I think that's going to happen. I hope it doesn't. But I think that's going to happen."

Over the airwaves

Those concerns seem a long way from the two natural ice rinks next to Kirkland Lake High School in northern Ontario where, as the Great Depression wore on and World War II started, Lindsay played a lot of hockey.

When he was a boy, a radio signal from Detroit came through like a clarion call, summoning him to the NHL team that immediately became his passion.

"The Red Wings used to be broadcast by WJR," Lindsay said. "On a clear, cold night, we could get WJR in Kirkland Lake like we were in downtown Detroit."

"And they had two tough defensemen, Jimmy Orlando and Jack Stewart. Good and tough. That was my kind of hockey."

In his first season playing for St. Michael's College in Toronto, a freak skate cut to a calf landed him in the infirmary.

Scouts from the Maple Leafs had heard that St. Mike's had a prospect. They had not been given a name, but a scout traveled to a game knowing he could pick him out.

But that player, Lindsay, was in bed, boning up on his studies, pining to return to the ice.

The Leafs never saw him.

Two months later, in an event Lindsay still recalls with enormous detail, a man with white hair stepped out of the darkness at an old arena in Hamilton, Ontario. He was Carson Cooper, the Red Wings' chief scout.

At age 19, Lindsay was in the big time.

As his promise became accomplishment, Conn Smythe, the owner of the Maple Leafs and one of the barons of the game, wondered how Lindsay — a kid from Ontario, playing college hockey in Toronto — could have escaped to a rival.

Unfairly, Smythe loathed Lindsay.

In 1947, Lindsay was on the left wing in Detroit, next to a future member of the Hockey Hall of Fame, Sid Abel. The third member of the line was a new kid out of Saskatchewan, Gordie Howe.

They became one of the greatest scoring lines in the history of the NHL, dubbed The Production Line.

Beyond prolific scoring, the hulking Howe and undersized Lindsay were feared for their fierce, intimidating play. While some players delivered crushing body blows, Lindsay often led with his elbow or a knee. Elbowing and kneeing were not penalties before he arrived in the NHL. Largely because of him, they are now.

He won four Stanley Cups with the Red Wings, and the Art Ross Trophy for leading scorer in 1950. He tallied 379 goals and 472 assists in his career. Lindsay also played in nearly every game for 17 seasons, while averaging 105 minutes in penalties.

The success, he said, was fine. But things bothered him.

He made \$7,500 per year, which he calls good money, for that day. But lesser players often earned a couple or a few thousand. Some players who bounced back and forth to the minor leagues were in even worse shape, financially.

Everyone's pension was paltry.

"I just saw what was happening at the time, and I figured we had to do something," he said.

Cast off to Chicago

Working doggedly and in secret while he played, Lindsay began organizing the National Hockey League Players Association. With the help mostly of one other player, Doug Harvey, the Canadiens defenseman, Lindsay challenged the richest, most powerful men in hockey.

Smythe, whose feud with Lindsay was already a decade old, was a millionaire patrician and war hero. Smythe did not own the Maple Leafs, he ruled them.

The Wings were owned by James D. Norris, whose "Norris Syndicate" owned a percentage of each of the four arenas in which the NHL was played in the United States. He also presided over much of boxing in the United States, a rough-hewn sport not always bound by ethics.

Against them, Lindsay and Harvey nearly prevailed, despite the fact that many players who supported them were sent to the minors. But they lost, in part, when a player essential to their efforts balked.

Cajoled by powerful interests, Howe came out against the union.

The owners used Howe and legal means to break the nascent union, and there was a breach in the relationship between Lindsay and Howe.

"It was a shame," Lindsay said, recalling their great accomplishments together.

"I'm a stubborn person. I always have been, and my stubbornness took us to where we couldn't communicate, and it took a number of years for that to disappear.

"But we should have been successful with the association, and we weren't," he said. "They destroyed it, and got rid of me out of Detroit."

The Wings traded Lindsay to the Blackhawks in 1957.

Despite being treated well in Chicago, his heart was not in it.

Tapping his heart and forehead with his index finger, Lindsay said, "I've got that wing-and-wheel crest tattooed here, and tattooed there, and tattooed on my backside, and in the guts and everywhere else."

After three years with the Blackhawks and at a comparatively early age of 35, Lindsay retired.

Four years later, Lindsay approached Abel, then the coach and general manager of the Red Wings, about a job in broadcasting.

"And Sid said, 'No, why don't you come back and play?'"

"And I laughed. And he said, 'No, seriously, I think you can help me, help the team.'"

It began what remains one of the most audacious comebacks in sports history. Many said it could not be done. Lindsay was 39.

Lindsay played all but one game that season, scored 14 goals and accounted for 14 assists. Only six Wings scored more points. He also accumulated 173 minutes in penalties.

The Red Wings won the regular season league championship for the first time 1956-57, Lindsay's previous season with the team.

Abel and Lindsay plotted to have him return for another season. Lindsay was gung-ho. He had to clear waivers, a prospect both men felt likely, given his age and long association with the team he loved from boyhood.

But Stafford Smythe, who succeeded his father, Conn, as owner of the Maple Leafs, claimed Lindsay.

He was still paying for supporting the NHLPA, which finally formed in 1967.

Lindsay fought far bigger men on the ice and far more powerful ones off it. But when it came time to recognize his achievements, the NHLPA replaced the name of one of the most influential Canadians of the 20th Century, the

prime minister and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Lester B. Pearson, with that of Ted Lindsay on its award for outstanding player.

But the current circumstances of the sport he dominated as a player and revolutionized as an organizer do not sit as easily with him.

He finds fault with the owners, but he also thinks some players are considerably over-paid. But mostly he worries about sports being priced out of the reach of most working families, and the loss of the magic that sport can visit on the young.

"No one ever thinks of the fans," he said. "All sports, not only my game, but even baseball, which was the family sport, aren't like that anymore. It's only corporations, and families can't go like they used to go. And it's a shame."

Detroit News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645810 Detroit Red Wings

It's now or never if NHL is to strike deal

Detroit In the boardroom, it appears they're no longer just skating in circles, going through the motions.

And on the ice, that appeared to be the case, too, as more than a dozen NHL players — most of them Red Wings — gathered for another informal workout Wednesday at the Troy Sports Center.

They've been at it three days a week for nearly three months now — this marked Day 81 of the lockout — but at times the numbers have dwindled, along with the hopes of ever putting a stop to this latest work stoppage.

On Wednesday, though, they had enough skaters to use the full rink with bench players to spare, and the 90-minute session looked suspiciously like a training-camp practice with a brisk pace and plenty of chirping. There was even a scrimmage to end it, using a running game clock and scoreboard.

Was it a sign that the ice might finally be melting on the NHL's frigid labor stalemate? Well, maybe.

"A little bit more hop in your step, I guess you could say," said Danny Cleary, the veteran Red Wings forward who has been heavily involved in these CBA negotiations. "But guys don't want to get overly optimistic. You want to be cautious, like we've been saying. And let's see what happens today."

And tomorrow, presumably. Because if there is one thing that all parties seem to agree on, it's that this week's earnest return to the bargaining table represents the last, best hope.

"Both sides realize this is the time that we need to get a deal done if we want to salvage the season," said Justin Abdelkader, another of the Red Wings union reps. "So I think it's good both sides are really putting forth effort to try to get something here."

Still work to do

It would've been better if they'd done that before the leaves turned, of course. Here and there, we've seen glimmers of hope this fall. But not until this week have the two sides genuinely treated the process with the proper urgency, or respect. For that, they all must share the blame — and the fans' ire.

Tuesday night, a group of 18 players met face-to-face with a half-dozen NHL owners — without the polarizing presence of commissioner Gary Bettman or NHL Players Association boss Donald Fehr in the room — to lay their cards on the table: Here's what we will not give up.

"We told them what we were firm on, they told us what they were firm on," said Cleary, who was still trying to decide if he'd head to New York to rejoin the fray this week.

Wednesday, the owners then met for a scheduled Board of Governors meeting, getting briefed on where the negotiations stood and discussing potential scenarios and scheduling options for a truncated season.

They're talking about 50-60 games, with the season starting as early as the end of this month, if a deal is struck in the coming days.

"I think we're probably still a couple weeks out before we can get anything realistically started," Abdelkader said. "But that's if we can get something done."

And that's still a big "if," as everyone watched the smoke signals, looking for signs of peace Wednesday night after new proposals were exchanged. The sides entered this round of talks still with significant gaps to bridge on the key issues — the share of revenue, player contract rights and pensions.

Sounds familiar

The rank-and-file say they've been fooled before, but haven't we all? If you'll recall, many thought a deal was close the last time around, in early December 2004, and they didn't play hockey for another 10 months after that as talks collapsed and an entire season was lost.

But Tuesday's session clearly helped moved this process forward, with new faces — most notably Penguins co-owner Ron Burkle — and a new format, "just talking straight from owner to player," Red Wings defenseman Niklas Kronwall said.

There are gag orders, and there are marching orders. Only one side in these talks has issued both, which is why the owners and general managers remained mum — on the record, at least — as they left Wednesday afternoon's board meeting in New York.

This time, though, even the guys in the black hats kept their mouths shut.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," Bettman told the gathered media in a scheduled briefing that was over as soon as it began. "Out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say."

Likewise, the players were trying their best to say as little as possible.

Neither side wants to sound too eager at this point, for fear that it'll be read as weakness and exploited at the bargaining table.

"Obviously, it's a big day today," Cleary said, catching his breath after practice.

"I mean, I'm happy. I'm happy that things are going better than they have. But I don't want to get fans too high and think something's gonna happen."

Something gonna happen here. Good or bad, it has to at this point.

"I mean, listen, it's the first week of December," Cleary agreed. "I think everybody wants to play now. So, we'll see. The time is now."

Detroit News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645811 Detroit Red Wings

NHL owners, players engage in another marathon bargaining session in attempt to save season

By Ansar Khan | akhan1 at mlive.com

A second consecutive day of marathon collective bargaining talks Wednesday in New York between NHL players and owners lasted past midnight as the sides worked feverishly to salvage the season.

A player told M-Live.com: "The process has been painfully slow. A deal isn't imminent. Still hurdles to climb but made some strides in some major areas. Will know more tomorrow."

The meeting ended at approximately 12:50 a.m. The sides plan to meet Thursday.

"We had good, candid, dialogue," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told reporters covering the talks. "There continue to be some critical, open issues between the two parties and we understand the union should be getting back to us tomorrow on some of those issues."

NHL Players Association special counsel Steve Fehr, who along with Daly participated in the meetings, did not make a statement.

If a deal is done soon, an abbreviated schedule of between 54 and 60 games is likely.

Damien Cox of the Toronto Star tweeted Wednesday that the season might start on Christmas Day. That would follow in the footsteps of the NBA, which launched its abbreviated 66-game schedule on Dec. 25 last season, following its lockout.

The previous NHL CBA precluded teams from playing or practicing on Dec. 24 or 25.

Earlier in the day, several Detroit Red Wings said they were encouraged by the latest developments and cautiously optimistic that a deal could be done to end a lockout that began on Sept. 16.

The key, they said, was the inclusion of some moderate owners in the talks, particularly Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, described as a deal-maker who wants to play.

"Having new faces on the ownership side was important," Red Wings forward Danny Cleary said. "With Burkle and some other guys, they were pretty adamant about getting something done, and I think there's a lot of traction made."

After several meetings that included NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Don Fehr, the sides agreed to meet without their leaders, as six owners talked directly to 18 players.

"Just talking straight from owner to player, I'm sure that's been somewhat of an advantage," Red Wings union representative Niklas Kronwall said. "I think when we found out there were going to be some new owners there that definitely helped the conversation to go forward."

No Red Wings were involved on either side of the bargaining table, but the union kept all players updated.

"(On Tuesday), we told them what we're firm on, they told us what they're firm on and then we tried to work on the areas that we could (compromise) on," Cleary said. "So there's a few big issues — the (revenue) share, player (contracting) rights and the pension (plan)."

Wednesday's talks began around 2:30 p.m. and featured several breaks for caucuses. Late in the evening, the talks reportedly were scaled down to three owners and a smaller group of players.

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.06.2012

645812 Detroit Red Wings

New Red Wings arena in Detroit Ok'd by Michigan Senate

By David Eggert | deggert1 at mlive.com

LANSING, MI - A divided Michigan Senate on Wednesday approved fast-tracked legislation that the Ilitch family says is needed for an events center that could house a new Red Wings arena in downtown Detroit.

The proposed mixed-use development would be funded by private investment and existing dollars collected by the city's Downtown Development Authority. No new taxes would be needed to build the development, but lawmakers are passing a bill to allow the DDA to continue to get money for these kinds of developments.

The legislation was sent back to the House for final action before year's end.

Senate Minority Leader Gretchen Whitmer, D-East Lansing, opposed the legislation, saying Detroit's school district was due to get \$12.8 million more per year after nearly two decades of seeing it diverted to cover bond obligations.

"My Republican colleagues realized public schools - Detroit Public Schools - were about to receive more money and now they're swooping in," she said. "This is a direct subsidy by school kids to allow a billionaire to build a hockey arena. What does that say about your values?"

Her proposal to tie the legislation to a Democratic-backed college funding plan was rejected.

Senate Majority Leader Randy Richardville, R-Monroe, countered that the project would create 8,300 construction jobs, have a \$1 billion economic impact and "requires no new taxes."

The exact location of the district has not been determined, but will be centrally located in the downtown area.

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.06.2012

645813 Detroit Red Wings

Paul Coffey's "own" goal against Red Wings in 1996 playoffs ranked among worst of all-time

Brendan Savage | bsavage at mlive.com

But it's probably not something he looks back on fondly.

The website is counting down "The 50 Worst Own Goals in NHL History" and the Hall of Famer has checked in at No. 21, according to Yahoo!.

Coffey's "goal" came 44 seconds into the second period of Game 1 in the 1996 Western Conference Finals with the Red Wings leading 1-0.

During a 2-on-1 break, the Avalanche's Stephane Yelle attempted to pass the puck into the slot but it instead ended up on Coffey's stick. Rather than sending it into the corner, however, Coffey buried it in the empty side of the Red Wings' net.

Here's how Yahoo! describes the play:

"Paul Coffey was a finisher. When he got a pass on a two-on-one, he buried it. Unfortunately, on this occasion, he slipped into "finisher" mode when he was supposed to be taking the pass away. What amazes me is that the second Avalanche player actually quit skating. If Coffey wasn't there to finish off the play, no one else would have been. Watch for the moment right after he buries it when he realizes he was supposed to do the opposite of that."

Coffey ended up with an unlikely "hat trick" since he scored both Detroit goals.

The Red Wings lost the game 3-2 in overtime and ended up losing the series in six games.

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.06.2012

645814 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings have more 'hop in their step' at workout, encouraged by positive turn in NHL labor talks

Ansar Khan | akhan1 at mlive.com

on December 05, 2012 at 2:25 PM, updated December 05, 2012 at 2:46 PM

TROY – Wednesday's informal Detroit Red Wings practice more closely resembled a regular practice.

More players showed up. They used the whole sheet of ice. They were skating at a much higher pace. They even turned on the clock and the scoreboard at the Troy Sports Center.

This was a group seriously preparing for some real hockey. And the players were much more optimistic that a labor agreement can be reached soon and the season can be salvaged.

"A little more hop in your step, you could say, but guys don't want to get overly optimistic," forward Danny Cleary said. "We want to be cautious and see what happens today."

After a long and highly productive day of talks directly between six owners and 18 players Tuesday in New York, more optimism spread Wednesday morning and afternoon following the NHL board of governors meeting. The players and owners are meeting again Wednesday at 2:30.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman told reporters covering the meetings. "Out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say."

Players who've been let down before don't want to get overly optimistic that the 80-day lockout will be ending soon, but their mood clearly has shifted in a positive direction.

"It was a good talk (Tuesday); obviously, it's a big day today," Cleary said. "I'm happy that things are going better than they have. I don't want to get fans too high, but we definitely gained some ground in a lot of areas."

"It's first week of December, I think everybody wants to play now. The time is now."

Forward Justin Abdelkader said this is the most encouraged he has been.

"I think everything's been positive so far and I think it's good that they've met and they're meeting," Abdelkader said. "Both sides realize this is the time to get a deal done if we want to salvage the season, so I think it's good both sides are really putting forth effort to try to get something here."

Red Wings player representative Niklas Kronwall said he didn't have many details but that "it sounds pretty good."

"So far, my understand is it's been good meetings, good discussions, the best one so far," Kronwall said. "It's a good sign."

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.06.2012

645815 Edmonton Oilers

MacKinnon: Deal or no deal, this lockout is disgraceful

By John MacKinnon

EDMONTON - Hold your applause.

Come to think of it, don't hold your breath, either.

The NHL and the NHL Players' Association have been saying some encouraging things the last couple of days during their meetings in Manhattan. Perhaps the most encouraging sign has come from what they have not been saying. No gratuitous insults or summary rejections of each other's proposals on a new collective bargaining agreement.

Small victories; small mercies.

After a nearly three-month long, totally unnecessary lockout, no one deserves any congratulations for taking some stutter steps toward a resolution.

If the parties somehow do reach agreement on arcana like the "make whole" concept, then perhaps all concerned soon can turn their attention to addressing the deepening goodwill deficit the NHL has with its own fan base.

Or should have, at any rate. In Canada, the last time we endured this rodeo, the fans went tripping gaily back to the arenas, filling the seats, night-after-night right up until, well, until this lockout.

Never mind the players and their justifiable concerns about receiving full compensation for contracts signed under the previous CBA, how will the players and owners go about delivering a "make whole" offering to their fans?

Following the 2004-05 lost season, the NHL produced a far superior brand of hockey, having redrafted some rules to create more flow, eliminate much of the hook-and-hold gridlock the league had devolved into. They introduced the shootout to break ties — an innovation loved by some, hated by others.

Still, the league improved its product, which may not have assuaged all the hurt of a lost season, but it was significant and largely successful.

At the level of individual clubs, the Oilers literally rolled out the red carpet for their fans in October 2005. Fans were handed miniature replica Stanley Cups as they entered Rexall Place, along with one of those little fan towels you wave.

There was an on-ice message of thanks. And the Oilers won, in the bargain.

A 4-3 victory over Colorado kicked off a season which would end in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup final in Raleigh, N.C., as the Oilers came achingly close to hoisting another Cup, and not a replica, either.

The opening-night presentation back in '05 also included a half-hour video peppered with thankful testimonials from the likes of Ryan Smyth, Ethan Moreau and Jason Smith.

Thank you, fans, for your unwavering support. How very magnanimous.

Listen, season-ticket holders who now have lived through the equivalent of two unplayed seasons since 1994-95 probably have an entirely different understanding of this "make whole" euphemism.

For starters, never mind thanking the fans, an empty gesture if ever there was one.

No, in the interest of accountability, how about a sincere apology from the players and ownership for having subjected their fans to this entirely unnecessary and destructive head-butting exercise over how to split up a \$3.3 billion pie?

It's hard to offer a public apology, but that's the point isn't it? Who said accountability was ever easy? The hockey people talk a great accountability game all the time. Let's see them walk that talk.

How about a healthy refund opening night, and two other nights besides? How about making three games totally on the house, one for each month of the lockout?

Perhaps Oilers executives Kevin Lowe and Patrick LaForge can mull such matters over as they digest what they learned at the NHL board of governors meeting on Wednesday.

The fans should seriously consider their response to a potential resumption of on-ice hostilities, as well.

If they return like trained seals to fill up Rexall Place this time around like they did in '05, they abdicate the right to complain about being taken for granted, or overpaying to watch a non-playoff team and much else.

And I know, I know. I'm not holding my breath on any of these suggestions.

But, deal or no deal, this lockout has been disgraceful. Is it too much to ask for the parties involved to acknowledge that and make amends to the fans?

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645816 Edmonton Oilers

Barons likely to lose five players to NHL's Oilers if lockout ends

By Jim Matheson,

EDMONTON - Oklahoma City Barons head coach Todd Nelson is making his list and checking it twice, with Christmas less than three weeks away and a possibility that the NHL lockout may soon end as well.

How many players on his American Hockey League team will depart for Edmonton for a short Oilers training camp if the work stoppage was suddenly over? Five players? More than that?

Jordan Eberle, Taylor Hall and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins are a certainty to head back to the Oilers. So is Justin Schultz, the league's top scorer on the back end for the Barons, Edmonton's AHL affiliate.

Six NHL team owners and 18 players are currently talking in New York. They got the ball rolling on a new collective bargaining agreement on Tuesday.

Would the Oilers also bring back Teemu Hartikainen and Magnus Paajarvi or just one of those forwards? How about the abrasive Colten Teubert? He has 88 penalty minutes this season on defence because Andy Sutton is on the shelf with a broken bone in his femur.

"I am keeping an eye on it (the lockout) for sure," said Nelson.

The Barons have some extra bodies — Brandon Davidson (testicular cancer surgery), Tanner House (concussion), Antti Tyrvainen (broken wrist) and Ryan Martindale (knee sprain) — who could be inserted into their lineup in time if the lockout ended and there was a week or so of training camp. They also have wingers Toni Rajala and Phil Cornet playing with the Stockton Thunder in the ECHL.

But Nugent-Hopkins, Hall and Eberle comprise Nelson's best line and Hartikainen and Paajarvi are on the second line with Anton Lander.

Schultz might be the best player in the entire AHL right now and Teubert is Nelson's second-best defender.

So the Barons could lose five players to the Oilers — a conservative estimate — with Hartikainen's stock possibly higher than Paajarvi's right now because the Oilers need a banger with a scoring touch.

Nelson is already prepared to lose Nugent-Hopkins to the world junior championship in Ufa, Russia, even if the lockout, which is more than 80 days long, doesn't end shortly. The Barons will play 14 games during the worlds, with centre Mark Arcobello likely moving to the No. 1 line if Nugent-Hopkins plays for Canada.

"I told Ryan we'd support him if he wanted to play in Russia or if he doesn't (and the lockout continues). He understands our position," said Nelson.

Nugent-Hopkins, who's dying to play in the worlds, is in Edmonton strengthening his left shoulder with an exercise program. He's planning to give Hockey Canada an answer before the evaluation camp opens in Calgary on Monday.

He's on a mini-point drought in Oklahoma City and is scoreless in three straight games.

"Funny thing is he's been playing very well," said Nelson. "You could see his frustration when he was in a shootout (last weekend against the Aeros in Houston) and he lost the puck," said Nelson.

Hall, who knocked out Aeros defenceman Jonas Brodin for eight to 12 weeks with a broken clavicle after a hellacious shoulder-to-shoulder hit a month ago, has left the club to get treatment — not in Edmonton — on the shoulder he had repaired last season. He will play against the Rampage in San Antonio Saturday night. So will Eberle, who was getting his No. 7 Regina Pats Western Hockey League jersey retired Wednesday night.

"Jordan actually said he was looking forward to seeing some snow. Taylor's therapy was scheduled a long time ago when we saw the (week) break," said Nelson.

Nelson could have put captain Josh Green between Hall and Eberle this weekend in San Antonio, but will opt for Arcobello at centre.

"Josh is back (rib cartilage, he was out for seven weeks), but I'll probably throw Arcobello there. He's a pretty creative guy and there was some chemistry with Arcobello and Taylor (in practice before Hall's first game in November). We're waiting on Tyler Pitlick (who's out after taking a head shot) to see if he's cleared. If so, he'll play with Josh and Curtis Hamilton."

Nelson will keep Hartikainen, Paajarvi and Lander together. He likes the line's puck-possession time, but wants the linemates to shoot considerably more.

Paajarvi has 44 shots — fourth most on the team — but just two goals, only one at even-strength. Lander has just 18 shots in 16 games and one goal. Hartikainen, a bull in the corners, has 41 shots and six goals.

Generally, Nelson wants more pop from the trio.

"That line has a lot of good zone time and that's fantastic because you're wearing the other team down. But you're not generating anything," said Nelson. "Hartikainen will have the puck stuck to him for a good 10 seconds in the corner, but once you beat a guy, take it to the net.

"These guys have a puck a lot, but they get tired, too, and if the puck's turned over, it's a long backcheck of 200 feet."

And ...

Barons defenceman Brandon Davidson is practising and taking contact. "Physically, he's fine but Brandon has to decide on a next course of action (after his surgery). He's getting some opinions from doctors. For now, he's just practising," said Nelson, who liked the rookie's play before the cancer diagnosis. "Turned his world upside down," said Nelson.

Blue-liner Dan Ringwald went into the boards at a weird angle and broke a bone in his wrist. He had surgery and he can't do anything for at least two months, then there's rehabilitation.

Hartikainen showed his gumption in Houston fighting Aeros tough guy Drew Bagnall after Bagnall didn't like a hard hip-check he delivered on a teammate. "Harty went after Bagnall, dropping his gloves first. Kudos to him," said Nelson.

Tyrvaainen is skating, but can't handle a stick with his wrist.

The Barons play 11 games in December, all but one (Peoria Rivermen, in Illinois) against either San Antonio, Houston or the Texas Stars.

Oilers prospect Kristians Pelss, now with the Thunder, has been suspended for 21 games by the ECHL for hitting an opponent with a two-handed slash, resulting in an injury.

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645817 Edmonton Oilers

Editorial: Oilers no longer the toast of the town

Staff

Three months ago, when the prospect of a season without NHL hockey was still just an idle threat, a national poll suggested more than half of Canadians didn't care one way or the other about the league's latest labour dispute.

Imagine how many more Canadians now feel unmoved by it all, 80 days into the NHL lockout, with negotiations going nowhere and the strong possibility that another block of games will be cancelled at week's end. That final straw you often hear about? It is a past tense for countless fans. Their backs have already been broken, as has that unspoken pact they had with the NHL that hockey really is important enough to justify all the attention it gets and the money the players are paid.

You know the NHL is in trouble in Edmonton when the big Oilers story the first week of December is the all-points bulletin the police issued on a couple who lifted a signed Ryan Nugent-Hopkins jersey from a sports store on St. Albert Trail.

Author and sportswriter Roy MacGregor wrote recently that the NHL lockout is actually beneficial to Canadians in that it breaks us from an unhealthy addiction. A year without hockey could put back into balance a seriously off-kilter nation, "where it can be argued, with some pitiful justification, that the average parent would choose having a child play a single game in the NHL than become a neurosurgeon for life."

It is that waning devotion for Canada's game that should most alarm both sides in the ongoing labour dispute. New sessions in New York Tuesday were to put six NHL owners and six players, including Sidney Crosby, the league's most recognizable star, on the battle lines, and temporarily relegate to the bench those two immovable forces — Gary Bettman, the league commissioner, and Donald Fehr, head of the players' union.

If there is not already sufficient need for urgency from both sides, let them consider this. A study issued Monday on the lockout's commercial fallout has confirmed what most of us might have guessed: merchants located near NHL arenas are really feeling the pinch without hockey.

Overall food and drink spending at venues near arenas has decreased more than 11 per cent from a year ago on a game day, according to the report by credit and debit card processor Moneris. Edmonton merchants suffered the largest impact with business dropping off 27 per cent.

This latest finding comes hard after an announcement by Molson Coors Brewing Co. that beer sales across the country have fallen dramatically in the absence of NHL games.

Beer and hockey are hard habits to break, but it's happening out there. The NHL and its players ignore that at their peril.

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645818 Edmonton Oilers

How are Bettman and Fehr taking their sideline duty?

By Jim Matheson

So if all it took to see some welcome light in the numbing NHL-Players Union fight was for the two generals—Gary Bettman and Donald Fehr—to step aside and be like parents huddled on the sidelines at a kids' soccer game, what took so bloody long?

Why didn't they do this six weeks ago? Was it sheer pride on Bettman and Fehr's part that they were the appointed leaders of their two armies, so they weren't letting the players and the owners try for an armistice. Give Bettman credit for having the stones to ask his nemesis Fehr, who was running the players' battalion, if maybe it was a good idea if he were a spectator now. Give Fehr credit for not digging in his heels and saying "I'm still leading my team into this battle, baby."

Bettman, for sure, looks about 10 years older after this, most recent labour stoppage—his third in his 20 years running the NHL. He has a reputation as a guy who can get by on three or four hours sleep a night at the best of times, but was he even getting an hour during this insane labour battle (billionaires vs millionaires)? Fehr hasn't looked all that happy, either, these last few weeks, although his face hid it better than Bettman's.

The best thing Bettman did was assemble his Group of Six on the owners side, especially bringing in Ron Burkle, the Penguins' owner (nobody's sure how much money he has in the team and how much Mario Lemieux has). Burkle got his start as a bag-boy in a grocery and has made a fortune as a wheeler and dealer. He has a well-earned rep for getting things done, and doesn't seem to be a my way or the highway guy. He sold his Wild Oats natural foods stores and farmers markets to the giant Whole Foods chain, for instance, for more than \$550 million.

He's an eclectic guy. He raised a bundle for Hilary Clinton's Democratic Party run for president and Hilary's hubby Bill Clinton is on the board of Burkle's Yucaipa Investments. He also financed Al Gore's TV network, and invested in P.Diddy's clothing line, amongst other things. He's at home with politicians, grocery store folks, Hollywood people, media interests, also athletes.

He's tight with Lemieux and Sidney Crosby, the lead dog on the roster of 18 players negotiating now.

Bettman and his second-in-command had absolutely no objection to 18 players showing up to talk to six owners (Burkle, Mark Chipman, Winnipeg, Jeff Vinik, Tampa, Larry Tannenbaum, Toronto, Murray Edwards, Calgary and Jeremy Jacobs, Boston). The more the merrier. Bettman could have said, "no, no, that's too many" but he didn't.

Crosby is getting most of the attention during these last two days of talks because he's the best player in the game and he's got fellow team captains Jonathan Toews and Shane Doan on board, but really it's the foot soldiers like Crosby's teammae Craig Adams and the moustachioed George Parros and Manny Malhotra and Kevin Westgarth (a Princeton alum like Parros), who've been involved in most of the union stuff for months on end. They're third and fourth-liners.

Deep down, Bettman might not like being a spectator right now. Same with Fehr. They're used to being in charge.

But, give both credit for looking at the big picture. They've been roadblocks in this labour fight. Now, they're on the side of the road. Nothing wrong with that, as far as I can see.

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645819 Minnesota Wild

Delicate, marathon negotiations end just before 1 a.m. ET; Bouchard, Granlund updates

Posted by: Michael Russo

It's 1 a.m. in the East, and the NHL and the NHL Players' Association just broke up for the day. They are expected to meet again Thursday afternoon -- a third day in a row between a select group of owners and players.

That's a good thing because about two hours ago, it nearly blew. But the two sides are working through what's been a tense-filled, yet productive day

as they work toward trying to reach a collective bargaining agreement and end the now-82-day lockout.

Good morning. I will be in studio on KFAN on Thursday morning from 9-9:35 a.m. CT.

But, ...

After the Board of Governors meeting earlier Wednesday, players and owners gathered in Manhattan at 2 p.m. The players made a proposal. The owners countered an hour later. The players spent time putting together a response, and that was presented after dinner. The owners quickly left the room, came back, and so on and so on.

Basically, the excitement and optimism of yesterday turned into natural difficulty at times today as both sides got down to the nitty-gritty. I am told there were some very tense exchanges, some near blowups, but they patched that together and were still working with smaller groups until 1 a.m.

Ron Hainsey told reporters on the scene they had a series of "candid discussions."

I've talked with both sides of the aisle about an hour ago and there was a lot more positivity than I was hearing earlier in the day. But the way it's being described from people very much involved is "delicate juncture" and at a "serious point."

Said Deputy Commissioner: "There are critical open issues between the two parties."

Details of the offers weren't revealed, but they surrounded the core economic issues separating the two and contracting rights. It's believed owners gave on some things, although contract lengths (5 years max, 7 to sign own free agents) and variance of salaries (5% max) are critical issues to them. I know they piled more money on "Make Whole."

The NHL also proposed a 10-year term to the CBA; the union has balked thus far. The hope is that if a CBA can be reached soon, the NHL could conduct a 50- to 60-game season, but things again are at a delicate juncture.

The NHLPA will meet internally in the morning, but the sides are expected to meet again.

Dallas Stars defenseman Alex Goligoski, a former Gopher, is on the NHLPA negotiating committee. Goligoski, who was not in New York, cautioned earlier Wednesday that there has been false hope throughout the lockout.

"It is positive that some progress was made, but until you're in the final stages of this thing and things are agreed on by both sides, it's almost foolish to be too optimistic," Goligoski said. "As a player, it's just foolish to do that to yourself. The way things go, there's good days and bad days. [Tuesday] seemed to be a good day. Hopefully it's not followed by a bad one."

Last week, when mediation failed between the NHL and NHLPA, Commissioner Gary Bettman made the suggestion that he and Executive Director Don Fehr remove themselves from the room. The roster of players and owners has largely been recast, with superstar Sidney Crosby entering the fray.

"It's been so close all along that we just needed guys to sit down in a room and be real honest about it," said Wild veteran Matt Cullen. "The guys that care about the game have finally found their way into the room on both sides. We have some guys that are maybe thinking about the game more than the bottom line for just a second here."

Wednesday, a bunch of NHLers skated down at Ridder. It was an up-tempo skate followed by several players putting in extra skating work. It almost looked like they were cramming for an exam. After all, they better be in shape if training camp is on the horizon.

"You get the sense there's a little more urgency from both sides, and it's good to see," Kyle Brodziak said. "I mean, finally. Finally there's a little bit of hope ... . It makes these scrimmages a lot easier to get ready for what possibly could be the real thing.

"You're training and you're training to stay in shape, but you don't really know what for."

Added Wild goalie Niklas Backstrom: "Every time we hear something good, practice is better. It's funny how it goes."

Matt Cullen can't see how at this juncture things can fall apart.

"If both sides take a small step toward each other, you're really close, you're right there," Cullen said this morning. "You get to this point, it seems ridiculous that you'd ever walk away from it now."

More Thursday.

Wild forward Pierre-Marc Bouchard, who sustained a season-ending concussion last December, has been practicing all week with the American Hockey League Houston Aeros.

"We're trying to see if he can take the next step and get used to some contact again," General Manager Chuck Fletcher said. "He's not where we need him to get, but hopefully he can make progress."

Bouchard hasn't played a game in nearly a year, so it's uncertain if he would be ready if training camp begins soon. Bouchard wasn't cleared to play in October, meaning he is being paid his \$4.3 million salary during the lockout.

In other Aeros/Wild news, center Mikael Granlund, a roster candidate in Minnesota if the lockout ends, will return Friday at the Texas Stars. He missed 12 games with an ankle injury.

USA Hockey unveiled a new "Heads Up, Don't Duck" instructional video featuring Olympians Jenny Potter and Ryan Suter, the new Wild defenseman.

The "Heads Up, Don't Duck" safety initiative dates back to 1996 and is aimed at reducing spinal cord and other debilitating injuries.

"Dr. Ashare, the current chair of our safety and protective committee, helped launch this important program nearly two decades ago," said Dr. Michael Stuart, chief medical officer of USA Hockey. "The basic premise of the program has not changed, however, we created this updated video piece to ensure that every player and coach understands the importance of keeping your head up."

"We've been out in front on safety issues over the course of our history," said Dave Ogrea, executive director of USA Hockey. "Heads Up, Don't Duck has long been one of our signature safety programs and is part of our broad SafeSport program that addresses both on and off-ice safety of our participants."

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.06.2012

645820 Minnesota Wild

NHL talks go deep into the night; players optimistic

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO , Star Tribune

With daily skates getting torturous during an excruciating lockout, more than two dozen NHL players skated with renewed purpose Wednesday morning.

It was intense, fast and physical as players ramped it up with the hope that there actually was light at the end of the tunnel and training camps could be around the corner.

"You can see some excitement with the boys out there," Wild center Kyle Brodziak said. "There's definitely a different feeling."

The NHLers tore up the Ridder Arena ice one day after there was traction and "cautious optimism" created by a marathon negotiating session in New York between players and owners. The hope was the traction would filter into Wednesday.

It clearly did. After an update was provided to the Board of Governors by the NHL, the nearly 20 players and six owners spent hours Wednesday exchanging proposals for a collective bargaining agreement. They still were going at 1 a.m. Eastern time Thursday.

It started with a player offer that was countered by the NHL an hour later. The players spent time putting together a response and presented that to the league after dinner. The owners briefly left the room, then returned for a meeting. And, so on.

Tuesday, sides talked generally. Wednesday, things became more difficult as the NHL and NHLPA got down to the nitty-gritty. There were tense moments. But both sides kept at it.

"We had good, candid dialogue, [but] there are critical open issues between the two parties," Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said.

Details of the offers weren't revealed, but they surrounded the core economic issues separating the two sides and contracting rights. It's believed owners gave on some things, although contract lengths and variance of salaries are critical issues to them.

The NHL also proposed a 10-year term to the CBA; the union has balked thus far. The hope is that if a CBA can be reached soon, the NHL could conduct a 50- to 60-game season, but things still were at a delicate juncture late Wednesday.

Dallas Stars defenseman Alex Goligoski, a former Gopher, is on the NHLPA negotiating committee. Goligoski, who was not in New York, cautioned earlier Wednesday that there has been false hope throughout the lockout.

"It is positive that some progress was made, but until you're in the final stages of this thing and things are agreed on by both sides, it's almost foolish to be too optimistic," Goligoski said. "As a player, it's just foolish to do that to yourself. The way things go, there's good days and bad days. [Tuesday] seemed to be a good day. Hopefully it's not followed by a bad one."

Last week, when mediation failed between the NHL and NHLPA, Commissioner Gary Bettman made the suggestion that he and Executive Director Donald Fehr remove themselves from the room. The roster of players and owners has largely been recast, with superstar Sidney Crosby entering the fray.

"It's been so close all along that we just needed guys to sit down in a room and be real honest about it," Wild veteran Matt Cullen said. "The guys that care about the game have finally found their way into the room on both sides. We have some guys that are maybe thinking about the game more than the bottom line for just a second here."

Wednesday's up-tempo skate was followed by several players putting in extra skating work. It almost looked as if they were cramming for an exam.

"Finally there's a little bit of hope," Brodziak said. "It makes these scrimmages a lot easier to get ready for what possibly could be the real thing."

Added Wild goalie Niklas Backstrom: "Every time we hear something good, practice is better. It's funny how it goes."

Cullen can't see how at this juncture things can fall apart.

"If both sides take a small step toward each other, you're really close, you're right there," he said. "You get to this point, it seems ridiculous that you'd ever walk away from it now."

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645821 Minnesota Wild

Motivated, optimistic NHL players have intense skate in Minnesota

Posted by: Michael Russo

More than two-dozen locked-out NHL players skated with clearly renewed vigor this morning at Ridder Arena with word that there may finally be some traction in negotiations to end the 80-plus-day lockout.

I was shooting the breeze with Adam Nugent-Hopkins, the 24-year-old brother of Edmonton Oilers star youngster Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (drafted first overall right here in Minnesota in 2011), during the skate and he made note of this fact when Colorado's Erik Johnson sprawled to block a shot late in the scrimmage.

"When a guy goes down to block a shot three feet in front when a guy's shooting from the high slot, the tempo's picking up and so is the intensity," Nugent-Hopkins said.

Wild center Kyle Brodziak concurred.

"You can see some excitement with the boys out there," Brodziak said. "There's definitely a different feeling. You get the sense there's a little more urgency from both sides, and it's good to see. I mean, finally. Finally there's

a little bit of hope from what it looks like right now anyway. It makes these scrimmages a lot easier to get ready for what possibly could be the real thing.

"When there's no end in sight like it's felt like the last two, three months, it's Groundhog Day. You're training and you're training to stay in shape, but you don't really know what for. But when you hear some kind of positive news like yesterday, it makes it a little more fun to come to the rink."

Added Wild goalie Niklas Backstrom: "Fingers crossed because this is getting old. I think everyone feels the same. Every time we hear something good, practice is better. It's funny how it goes."

Still, Dallas Stars defenseman Alex Goligoski is on the NHLPA negotiating committee and is as plugged in as anyone. The former Gopher cautioned to just remain calm.

"It is positive that some progress was made, but until you're in the final stages of this thing and things are agreed on by both sides, it's almost foolish to be too optimistic.

"As a player, it's just foolish to do that to yourself. The way things go, there's good days and bad days. Yesterday seemed to be a good day. Hopefully it's not followed by a bad one."

The NHLPA, led by 18 players including stars Sidney Crosby, Jonathan Toews and Brad Richards, is expected to make a proposal to the six NHL owners this afternoon. The NHL Board of Governors meeting just wrapped up.

"I've been pretty optimistic throughout, but I do think it's been so close all along that we just needed guys to sit down in a room and be real honest about it," said Wild veteran Matt Cullen. "The guys that care about the game have finally found their way into the room on both sides. We have some guys that are maybe thinking about the game more than the bottom line for just a second here."

Added Erik Johnson, the former Gopher and No. 1 pick from St. Louis, about guys like Crosby being in the room: "I think the owners definitely have big respect for some of the guys sitting in that room, and vice versa. Anytime you get new blood in there, I think it helps and hopefully we see some momentum come out of it."

Wild veteran Matt Cullen remained optimistic and looked reinvigorated on 2-on-1's with Zach Parise on Wednesday.

"We've been skating for so long now with no light at the end of the tunnel, so you kind of have a sense that it could be right around corner here. We all know that if an agreement is reached, it's going to be a quick turnaround, so we have to be ready. Going to the gym before, you've got a new purpose and feel rejuvenated."

Cullen can't see this falling apart: "We finally take a look at the big picture, it's not that far apart. If both sides take a small step toward each other, you're really close, you're right there. You get to this point, it seems ridiculous that you'd ever walk away from it now."

Caution though: Still a long way to go.

By the way, a funny aside, the losing team has to pay the \$200 an hour ice at Ridder. Keith Ballard's been handling the payments and says he's usually the one to foot the bill because not all players pay up: "Like, how do you forget your wallet everyday?" joked Ballard. "Apparently they think I'm still getting paid."

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645822 Minnesota Wild

NHL players, owners back at it today

Posted by: Michael Russo

The 18 locked-out players and six NHL owners who met until midnight Eastern last night will be back at it today in New York City.

The sides gathered soon after 8 a.m. CT for internal meetings. At 10 a.m., the NHL is holding a Board of Governors meeting.

But it sounds like the two sides will meet again formally this afternoon after the meeting without Gary Bettman and Donald Fehr in the room. That is why it appears as if Bettman will now not hold his pre-announced news conference at noon CT.

That's a good thing. That means there's momentum that he doesn't want to risk dousing.

The NHLPA reportedly has a proposal to present, so it sounds like we are still very much in a give and take stage of this process.

This was a pretty positive symbolic moment. Typically meetings have ended throughout this process with the NHL and NHLPA meeting separately with the media and taking potshots at each other. As recent as last week, Steve Fehr and NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly did coinciding radio interviews on the Fan in Toronto where they took potshots at each other.

Now, they were standing side by side in front of an NHLPA backdrop saying both sides wanted to make a deal. It's clear the Pittsburgh Penguins, led by Sidney Crosby and his billionaire owner, Ron Birkle, have taken control of this process.

Basically, the tone and the mood have changed. Owners and players were seen conversing, players left smiling. etc.

Players had a very positive conference call between sessions. Owners will get their first real update during the very critical board meeting. To me, this is still delicate because we're all hearing optimism and progress, and yet Bettman and Donald Fehr haven't been in the room yet, proposals haven't formally gone back and forth and the owners are about to get their first update.

Again, lots of work to be done, but it sounds like both sides spent yesterday's meeting compromising, with the owners relenting on some of the contracting changes they were seeking.

So stay tuned, but at least both sides are working for the common good now. I'll be back on later, but it'll have to be after Gophers availability today. Will it be for the last time?

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645823 Montreal Canadiens

Duhatschek: Crosby's presence heightens hope for deal

ERIC DUHATSCHKEK

In 1994, when NHL players were locked out the first time by commissioner Gary Bettman, the reigning star of the day, Wayne Gretzky, put pressure on the league by organizing an all-star tour of Europe with some of his friends. It was mostly a public-relations exercise, designed to cast the players as the aggrieved parties in the dispute, but did little to actually resolve the lockout.

From Gordie Howe to Gretzky to Mario Lemieux, the crème de la crème of NHL players have a long history of staying on the sidelines during labour conflicts, preferring to leave the heavy lifting to others.

It is why Sidney Crosby's involvement in the current dispute represents such an unusual departure. Crosby, like Gretzky, zealously guards his reputation. Both learned at an early age that their every move is scrutinized with a microscope, and thus they've aimed to stay squeaky clean, above the fray, everywhere except perhaps in their relationships with NHL referees.

But Crosby, likely thanks to a small push from a man he trusts implicitly, agent Pat Brisson, jumped into the fray with both feet this past week after being part of the process on the edges. It was his presence at Tuesday's meeting, opposite Pittsburgh Penguins owner Ron Burkle, that helped the process gain a small bit of traction after a long stalemate.

There are no guarantees that it'll turn into anything tangible, but it is almost unprecedented for someone of his stature to get so actively involved in the negotiations rather than abdicating the responsibility to obscure enforcers with Ivy League degrees, or fringe players who aspire to study law.

Starting next year, Crosby will be under contract to the Penguins for 12 more years at a cost of \$104.4-million (U.S.) to the organization. NHL

contracts are guaranteed so that means Crosby will get his money no matter what happens with his health.

When a team makes that sort of a financial commitment to a player, they effectively become business partners.

Crosby may not have an official ownership position with the Penguins, but he is a de facto shareholder in the enterprise. Nowadays, players with that sort of stature and financial clout are usually involved in any major discussions about the organization's future, including whom to sign as a free agent. They are often asked to help recruit talent on behalf of the organization, and they always become part of the organization's marketing team. In short, they understand that the player and team are in it together, with the unified goal of helping the team win and make money.

It is why NHL players who've had a field day badmouthing Bettman have mostly steered clear from criticizing the owners that sign their individual paycheques. They know they have a working relationship with them, one that will resume once the lockout ends, and one in which they trust each other. Trust between the two sides has been in short supply during these negotiations. Accordingly, when two powerful voices from opposite sides of the bargaining table can get together and exchange ideas in a civil manner, it provides a frisson of hope in a dispute where hope has been in short supply as well.

Maybe their discussions focused only on broad philosophical lines that will need to be turned into something more tangible by the lawyers and accountants. That's okay. That should be their function in this process anyway – to provide the fine print, when the larger issue of how to divide the spoils of a \$3.3-billion business are determined by the people with a financial stake in the industry.

It's too bad that other players on the same sort of long-term deals as Crosby – the Washington Capitals' Alex Ovechkin, the New Jersey Devils' Ilya Kovalchuk, the Nashville Predators' Shea Weber – aren't front and centre. Still, Crosby is the face of the NHL, and the NHL should have learned long ago that you don't go to war with the man who will be in all your Game On! marketing campaigns that would follow a successful resolution to the dispute.

The frustrating, maddening, mind-boggling part about getting fresh voices into the sessions is that it took the two sides nearly three months to get to that point. What a waste, and all because the principals at the bargaining table were too wrapped up in the dance of the negotiations that they didn't spend enough time pondering the art of the deal.

After all, making concessions to arrive at an equitable agreement is a necessary step in the negotiating process, not a sign of weakness or wavering resolve.

Until they digest and absorb that basic notion, nothing's really going to change.

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645824 Montreal Canadiens

Significant progress reported without Bettman and Fehr in the room

JOANNA SLATER AND DAVID EBNER

The NHL and NHLPA are closing in on a deal after a long and bitter lockout, the stalemate seemingly broken by two long days of direct talks between players and owners without commissioner Gary Bettman or union head Don Fehr in the room.

On Wednesday, players and owners exchanged proposals and stayed in talks for almost nine hours before concluding after midnight, as they did on Tuesday when their eight-hour session ended around midnight. The Wednesday meetings were preceded by a midday gathering of the league's board of governors, who were briefed on the situation – though not in detail – and discussed scenarios.

Key issues to be settled are length of player contracts and length of the collective agreement, with owners gunning for a decade and players thinking half that. While the momentum in the player-owner talks was positive, the situation is "fluid," several sources said.

Should a deal be done in the next three to five days, the governors are looking at a "50-something" game schedule, said a person who was at the board meeting. There was optimism but there was also a worry that a misstep in talks could be severe and lead to a lost season. Still, pessimism was fading on Wednesday.

"I think the dynamic has changed," the source said of the player-owner talks. "It's always good to get the two guys out of the room. I think there's trust there now, instead of listening to Gary and Don talk, who are never going to make a deal."

Toronto Maple Leafs minority owner Larry Tanenbaum expressed optimism. He is one of four owners who are new to the negotiating table, joining mainstays Jeremy Jacobs of Boston and Murray Edwards of Calgary.

The sessions are a small conclave with about 18 players. The group includes Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby and Penguins owner Ron Burkle, who have received credit for helping bring the sides together.

Tanenbaum said the sides were resolved to find a solution.

"There was very nice chemistry," Tanenbaum said after the board meeting and before the players-owners meeting began. "We're going to continue to talk up until we get a deal." He added the NHL could be "back on the ice hopefully soon" and noted, "When you talk, you're hopeful."

Wednesday was the 81st day of the lockout and talks seem set to extend into Thursday. Through Wednesday, secrecy pervaded the negotiations. They took place at the Westin hotel, as they did on Tuesday, a location two blocks north of the offices of the NHL's counsel, Proskauer Rose LLP, which played host to the midday board of governors meeting.

At the Westin, the owners left the meeting with players to caucus among themselves several times during the afternoon before returning to the bargaining table, the talks unfolding over the four hours. After a dinner break, the meetings briefly reconvened around 9 p.m. ET. The owners left the room after 15 minutes, and then soon returned.

In Vancouver, at a road hockey game organized for a TSN shoot, Canucks players avoided the topic. Defenceman Kevin Bieksa said he had received "a little of an update" from teammate Manny Malhotra, one of the players meeting in New York, but gave no comment. Ryan Kesler was the same. "I can't talk about the [collective agreement]," Kesler said.

While Bettman and Fehr were not at the bargaining table on Tuesday or Wednesday, they were on the premises and, according to one expert, remain critical to any deal.

With the addition of new faces, "the room may be quieter and there may be more communication," said Ronald Shapiro, a lawyer and sports agent who heads an institution devoted to negotiation training. But "in the final analysis, the players have placed their faith in Don Fehr and the owners have placed their faith in Gary Bettman."

On Wednesday, the commissioner spoke only briefly.

After the board of governors meeting, Bettman said: "We are pleased with the process that is ongoing, and out of respect for that process I don't have anything else to say."

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645825 Montreal Canadiens

'Give Bettman credit for taking ego out'

By Brenda Branswell,

MONTREAL — Hockey fans weighed in online about the latest round of talks in the National Hockey League's labour dispute. Here's a sampling of their comments from The Gazette's [www.hockeyinsideout.com](http://www.hockeyinsideout.com):

Cal: "My fingers are crossed. Of course, it's been months now and they're becoming arthritic, but that's another story."

HabinBurlington: "So when the groups get together again (Wednesday) afternoon they are keeping Fehr and Bettman out again. Keep going with the hot hand boys and keep those two far away!"

Ian Cobb: "I think both the owners and the union reps are losing their grip, and for the better! Level heads will prevail in the end. Only thing is, when will the end come???"

Thomas Le Fan: "So ... if they settle and have a season after all, are we all to go running back to the NHL like faithful little lemmings? Both sides have p---ed me off to some degree with their own little stupidities. Greedy and Greedier? How do we as the long suffering fans react to this? How do we ensure that this isn't repeated in a few years when whatever kind of agreement that gets signed expires? Does there not have to be some message sent to both of these parties that they can't just continue to take us for granted? How is it done, if we all go running back like some poor schmuck whose girlfriend's cheated on him but now calls him back saying it's all been a mistake? We'll deserve what we get."

ont fan: "If you don't want this again in 5 years, the paying public better send a message. That means tickets and merchandise. Until that happens you get what you deserve."

Blondi: "Umm, if we, the fans, punish the NHL by not buying tickets and merchandise and have an impact on profitability what do you think will happen in five years?"

Teams will still be losing money, the owners will want to take it out of the players share again, and we'll be right back where we are now.

I think a good, hearty booing – 3 minutes worth – at the start of each and every game, including playoffs, would go further to shame them into behaving."

wjc: "As a long suffering fan, when they go back to playing, I will immediately forget about all of this. I will forgive and forget.

You cannot assure lockouts/strikes will never happen, so why waste your time and energy.

This "poor schmuck" will cheer until I am hoarse, and squeal like (a) crazy person with (the) first goal scored by the "blue, blanc, rouge or whatever. Naa na nan na hey hey .... hello."

shiram: "I won't fly the "happy flag" until the NHL is back in action, positive signs are just that, and as it's been posted, once Bettman and Fehr get involved again they might lose all the progress made.

As for the money part, I don't buy souvenirs, but I'll gladly pay for my entertainment, I don't need 200-400\$ tickets to enjoy a game, and it's always a good time watching the game at home on the big screen with the boys."

Marc10: "Gotta tip my hat to Super Mario, Burkle, Crosby and Pat Brisson if they get the parties over the line. And if I'm the Habs, I'd find a way to acknowledge their contribution when the Pens come to town ... Like honoring them at center ice for bringing common sense back. It's about time!"

Dust: "This meeting, having Bettman and Fehr out of it, was Bettman's idea. Give the guy some credit. He was able to take his ego out of it and be willing to step out of the negotiating room for progress. I'll still boo him like normal, but I give him credit for this idea."

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645826 Montreal Canadiens

Sévigny immortal, without playing a game

By Dave Stubbs,

MONTREAL — The names of 36 members of the 1978-79 Canadiens are engraved on the Stanley Cup, filling 12 lines on a sterling band.

Richard Sévigny is No. 35 on the list, appearing in front of only assistant trainer Pierre Meilleur.

Not that Sévigny is complaining about this fact 33 years later, the former Canadiens goaltender having the distinction of being immortalized on hockey's grandest trophy before he'd played a single game in the National Hockey League.

That R. Sevigny is on the Stanley Cup recognizes a 21-year-old third-string netminder being pressed into emergency backup duty for Game 2 of the Stanley Cup final against the New York Rangers, the simple act of pulling on a jersey making him eligible for engraving.

Sévigny chuckles at the memory today, recalling the horror he felt when scheduled starter Michel (Bunny) Laroque went down in warm-up, drilled in the head and sent to the hospital by teammate Doug Risebrough.

"I remember those guys in practice," Sévigny said with a laugh — now — of at least some of the Canadiens forwards. "If they weren't going well in games, they'd just stand 10 or 15 feet in front of their own goalie in practice and blast away."

Sévigny was skating with the Canadiens in the 1979 playoffs, having been called up from the team's American Hockey League Nova Scotia Voyageurs farm club to serve as a practice goalie. There was no suggestion he'd get so much as a sniff of a game roster.

And then Risebrough decked Laroque, putting Ken Dryden back in goal for Game 2 at the Forum. Dryden had surrendered four goals on 13 shots during a 4-1 Game 1 loss, yanked after 40 minutes with Forum fans nearly booing him out of the building.

Sévigny recalls being near the dressing room while Laroque was flat on his back, counting stars, and being told to suit up immediately.

He was on the end of the bench when the Rangers scored two goals before the game was 6½ minutes old, the abuse raining down on Dryden again.

"And I'm just saying, 'No, there's no way do I want to go in!'" Sévigny said, laughing again. "I was 21. I was just ... there. I had no idea what I was doing."

Coach Scotty Bowman stuck with his future Hall of Fame goaltender, who already was a five-time Stanley Cup champion. Dryden settled down to anchor the Canadiens' 6-2 win and played every minute the rest of the way, Montreal beating the Rangers in five games to win their 22nd championship.

"In those days, all you had to do was dress for one game in the final to get your name on the Cup," Sévigny said. "You could play 39 games in the regular season but not dress for the playoffs and not qualify."

The 55-year-old netminder will be back in his equipment on Bell Centre ice on March 24 for the 2013 All-Star Classic, a fundraising game featuring some big and/or familiar NHL names from the 1980s and '90s. He plays some 50 games per year with the Canadiens alumni.

Sévigny is still 5-foot-8 if a few pounds heavier than the 172 he weighed during his 176-game NHL career, begun in Montreal and ending with the Quebec Nordiques in 1986-87.

You won't hear him talking much about his name on the Stanley Cup, or the 1981 Vézina Trophy he shared with stablemates Laroque and Denis Herron, Sévigny seemingly forever part of a three-goalie rotation.

Five years ago, in a passionhockey.com interview, he spoke of the life lessons that transcended any statistics or trophies:

"My career and my trophies are behind me, of no importance. Even my Stanley Cup ring is in a drawer somewhere. What's important to me is that I played 11 years as a pro and experienced everything possible in hockey: I travelled, met many people, became a coach, learned English and worked with young players. All that I achieved as a player is very secondary."

Sévigny nodded as the quote was read back to him, translated from its French.

"Nothing's changed," he said. "Come to my place (past Repentigny east of Montreal) and the only thing that says I was an NHL goalie is a poster of me looking like Superman, flying in the crease (completely parallel to the ice)."

"I was lucky to play in the 1980s in both Montreal and Quebec. When I signed for four years with the Nordiques, a fan there accused me of still being a Canadien. In Montreal, they were upset I left for Quebec. Now that was a rivalry."

"(Netminding legend) Jacques Plante was my goalie coach in my last year in Montreal."

Sévigny is fiercely proud of one game in particular — he was the only Canadiens goalie to beat the Russians at the Forum, backstopping a 4-2 win on New Year's Eve 1979, just a handful of games into his NHL career.

"Bunny was pissed I got the start," he said, grinning. "But a week later, they sent me back to the minors. I was on a two-way, paid \$65,000 to play in the NHL, \$14,000 in the AHL. 'Bye, kid!'"

Sévigny played a role in making goaltending a more colourful position, literally. He wandered across the street from the Forum to Diny's garage, co-owned by Larry Robinson and Donnie Cape, and had the paint-shop specialist airbrush the white fibreglass mask with some red, blue a few stars and the Canadiens logo.

"The guy handed me a \$300 bill for the work, so I gave it to the Canadiens trainer (Eddy Palchak)," Sévigny said. "Eddy just looked at me, pretty upset. But he paid it. At least it was just one mask. In those days, you had one mask and one pair of pads. If you asked for a second pair, the first one had better be no good."

Sévigny persuaded his pad-maker, Canadien, to dress those up with some colour, too. "I told them that kids would go nuts," he said. "The first pair they brought me ripped after two shots with the paint on the leather. But look at what companies do with pads now. It's crazy."

Not that Sévigny will be wearing space-age gear when he skates into a Bell Centre net come March.

"The new stuff's too big for me," he said, while marvelling at the size, fitness and technical skill of modern goaltenders. "I like to poke-check, like (Toronto legend) Johnny Bower. Johnny's always happy to see me because of that."

"Today's goalies are so big they can just stand back there and get hit by pucks. Look at me in the crease and it looks like there's a soccer net behind me."

When he returns to Montreal ice, Sévigny can look overhead to see his Canadiens jersey number celebrated in the arena rafters — even if he pretty much just warmed up No. 33 for a guy named Patrick Roy.

"Nobody knows this one: the first time they called me up from the minors to sit on the bench, I wore No. 32," Sévigny said brightly.

That was sometime between Dave Lumley and Denis Herron, a fact recorded only in the memory of a still-proud former Canadien whose name you'll find deep on the Stanley Cup.

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645827 Montreal Canadiens

NHL labour board hearing postponed

By Brenda Branswell,

MONTREAL — Another day, another flicker of hope for a break in the logjam in the National Hockey League's labour dispute.

Instead of squaring off at Quebec's labour relations board on Thursday and Friday, the NHL and NHL Players' Association plan to concentrate on negotiations.

The Commission des relations du travail postponed the hearing about the legality of the NHL lockout in Quebec at the request of the parties.

The players' association, the NHL and Canadiens jointly asked the judge to postpone the hearing so that the league and players' association could focus on bargaining, the NHLPA said.

The news came Wednesday as players and a select group of team owners resumed talks in New York. The two sides huddled for about eight hours on Tuesday, which sparked some cautious optimism. They met again briefly on Wednesday morning before the league's board of governors meeting and resumed talks in the afternoon.

The lockout has sparked the cancellation of 422 games from Oct. 11 through Dec. 14. The outdoor Winter Classic between the Detroit Red Wings and Toronto Maple Leafs on Jan. 1 in Ann Arbor, Mich., has been scrapped along with the All-Star Game planned for Columbus.

The NHLPA and 16 Canadiens players filed an application with the Commission des relations du travail a few days before their collective bargaining agreement expired on Sept. 15. They sought a provisional order to prevent the NHL and Canadiens from locking out the team's players. They also asked the board to declare that any lockout imposed on the team's players would violate Quebec's labour code and to order them not to authorize such action.

Judge Andrée St-Georges rejected the request for a provisional order but said the two sides would be called to a hearing on the merits of the question. The hearing was scheduled for Thursday and Friday this week.

The NHLPA also challenged the legality of the NHL lockout in Alberta, but the province's labour board dismissed the application.

"Those manoeuvres are all simply to try and create pressures and get leverage in the negotiation," contends Richard McLaren, a law professor at Western University who is a listed arbitrator for the NHLPA for disputes between players and agents.

"They're not of themselves going to result in any breakthroughs or major impacts," McLaren said this week.

The hearing at Quebec's labour relations board could still resume at a later date unless they are able to reach a deal, the NHLPA said.

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Pat Hickey: Hudon could be draft sleeper

By Pat Hickey,

MONTREAL — Martin Lapointe is hoping Charles Hudon makes the final cut for Team Canada at the World Junior Hockey Championship this month in Russia.

"He's the type of player who needs to be playing with top players to stand out," said Lapointe, who has been keeping tabs on Hudon in his role as the Canadiens' director of player development. "I'd like to see what he can do with Team Canada."

Hudon, who is one of 37 hopefuls invited to Team Canada's final training camp next week, may be the sleeper among a highly prized group of players drafted by the Canadiens in June. Director of amateur scouting Trevor Timmins was delighted Hudon was still available in the fifth round (122nd overall).

"I thought I would go in the second round," Hudon said over the phone from Chicoutimi, where he has bounced back from early season injuries to lead the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League's Saguenéens with 17 goals and 18 assists in 25 games. "But I was glad that I was drafted by the Canadiens."

Hudon said he was disappointed the National Hockey League lockout deprived him of the chance to attend his first professional training camp.

"There's nothing I could do about that and it was good to be in Chicoutimi and concentrate on this season and the world juniors," he said.

Hudon said he's confident going into the final Team Canada camp. He has played well on the international stage and was the second-leading scorer at the International Ice Hockey Federation under-17 championship two years ago with 11 points in six games.

"I did well in the camp in August and I played well in the Subway Series against Russia and I know what I need to do to make the team," he said.

Hudon is 5-foot-10 and 170 pounds, which might be the reason why he dropped in the NHL draft after being projected as a third-rounder. But Lapointe said size isn't as big a concern in today's NHL.

"He's a smart player who sees the ice well and he's working to add some strength," Lapointe said. "He has to be more explosive at the next level, but he has a good attitude and that will help him."

Hudon was the QMJHL's rookie of the year in 2010-11 as well as the league's top offensive rookie. Those honours hint at what kind of role he may play in the future at the pro level.

"He's not a fourth-line player," Lapointe said. "He needs to be with top players for him to stand out."

But Lapointe said Hudon could find employment in the NHL as a third-line player and there are numbers to back up that projection. Hudon is defensively responsible, posting plus-26 and plus-28 in his first two seasons with Chicoutimi.

Two other members of the Canadiens' 2012 draft class are in line for trips to Ufa in Russia.

Alex Galchenyuk, who was the No. 3 overall pick, is on the preliminary roster for the United States team. He has been tearing it up with the Sarnia Sting and sits third in the Ontario Hockey League scoring race with 20 goals and 29 assists in 28 games.

Galchenyuk was the best forward at the U.S. team's summer training camp in Lake Placid and the only thing that will keep him off the team is a call from the Canadiens. General manager Marc Bergevin has said Galchenyuk will probably be invited to training camp if the lockout ends.

Lapointe believes Galchenyuk will also benefit from having better players around him. He noted that Galchenyuk has great vision on the ice, but there are times when he passes up opportunities to shoot.

"I've told him that he has to get into the habit of shooting quickly when the chance is there because he won't have as much time at the next level," Lapointe said.

And Sebastien Collberg, who was the Canadiens' second-round pick, is back with the defending champions from Sweden. He is playing for Vastra Frolunda in the Swedish Elite League and has two assists in 16 games.

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Galchenyuk part of new-look U.S. juniors

By Pat Hickey,

MONTREAL — Once upon a time, the United States would go to the World Junior Hockey Championship with a mismatched collection of college players with home addresses in Minnesota or Massachusetts.

But the changing face of U.S. hockey is reflected in the preliminary roster for this year's world junior championship.

For starters, there's a geographical diversity. There are three players from Minnesota, but there are as many players from Plano, Tex., (two) as there are from Massachusetts. Thirteen different states are represented, including California and Florida.

Sixteen of the 27 players attend colleges in the U.S., but 11 others have joined the growing wave of U.S. players who are opting to play for major-junior teams. The Canadian Hockey League has been selling U.S. players on the virtues of junior hockey as the best preparation for a National Hockey League career and six of the eight first-round draft choices on the U.S. team have gone the junior route. That group includes Canadiens prospect Alex Galchenyuk, who was the third overall pick in June and is playing for the Ontario Hockey League's Sarnia Sting.

The U.S. team also has defenceman Seth Jones, who is being touted as a possible No. 1 overall pick next June. The 6-foot-4, 194-pounder lists his address as Plano, but he caught the hockey bug in Denver while his father, Ronald (Popeye) Jones, was playing for the National Basketball Association's Nuggets. Jones is now playing for the Portland Winterhawks of the Western Hockey League.

The first-rounders include three players who were born in the U.S. while their fathers were playing professional hockey.

Galchenyuk's father, Alex Sr., is a Belarusian who was playing from Milwaukee in the Central Hockey League when Alex Jr. was born. The

younger Galchenyuk grew up in Russia and Italy before returning to the Chicago area to play midget hockey.

Galchenyuk's Sarnia teammate, defenceman Connor Murphy, is the son of former NHL defenceman Gord Murphy. The younger Murphy was born in Boston while his father, a Toronto native, was playing for the Bruins. Connor Murphy was drafted 20th overall by Phoenix in 2011.

Stefan Matteau, who is playing for the Blainville-Boisbriand Armada in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, was born in Chicago while his father, Stéphane, was playing for the Blackhawks.

The younger Matteau was drafted 29th overall by the New Jersey Devils in June. There was a touch of irony to that pick because Stéphane scored two overtime goals, including one in the clinching game, when the New York Rangers eliminated the Devils in the 1994 Eastern Conference final.

Stefan played at Notre Dame College in Saskatchewan before joining the U.S. national team development program, but was unable to represent the U.S. at the world under-18 championship because he failed to meet the International Ice Hockey Federation residency requirements. He originally committed to the University of North Dakota before joining the Armada.

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Commodore brings leadership to Bulldogs

By Pat Hickey,

MONTREAL — Mike Commodore and the Hamilton Bulldogs are a marriage made in hockey heaven.

The 33-year-old defenceman is an unrestricted free agent who wants to get his career back on track. And the Bulldogs are a struggling, young team that can benefit from having a savvy veteran in the lineup.

Commodore signed a professional tryout contract two weeks ago and made his debut with the American Hockey League team last weekend when the Bulldogs travelled to the West Coast and split a pair of games against the Abbotsford Heat.

"He's been skating with other locked-out players, but it's not the same as being in game shape," Hamilton coach Sylvain Lefebvre said. "He skated with us for a week and then he played two games in two nights, which is the best thing for him. He's still not there, but he's doing extra work and his attitude is good."

Said Commodore: "It's going to take a few more weeks to get up to speed, but I'm staying at the hotel here and I have nothing to do but to work out."

Commodore finished last season with the Tampa Bay Lightning and became an unrestricted free agent. He said a couple of teams expressed interest in the summer, but with a lockout looming there were no firm offers.

"Guys in my position have to wait," Commodore said. "I was skating with the other locked-out guys in Tampa, but I knew I had to play somewhere. The last two years haven't gone well and I didn't want to turn 34 next summer not having played for a year. I set a deadline of American Thanksgiving or Dec. 1. I thought I might have to go to Europe because AHL teams might not be interested because I'm not a prospect, but we sent a memo to all the AHL clubs and Hamilton said they were interested."

Commodore's contract covers 25 games, but he's hoping a job will open up in the National Hockey League when the lockout ends. In the meantime, Lefebvre is happy to take advantage of Commodore's experience. He has played 484 regular-season games with seven different NHL teams and can pass on some of the knowledge he has acquired to a Bulldogs defence corps that includes five rookie pros.

"They have a lot of young kids here and I hope to help them out," Commodore said.

The Alberta native helped the Carolina Hurricanes win the Stanley Cup in 2006 and said he was playing the best hockey of his career after signing as a free agent with the Columbus Blue Jackets in 2008. He averaged close to

23 minutes of ice time in his first season with the Blue Jackets and helped the team to its only playoff appearance.

"I had some groin problems the next season, but I still played close to 60 games," Commodore said. "I was playing my best hockey, but that gets forgotten in a hurry."

Scott Arniel took over as head coach of the Blue Jackets in 2010 and Commodore spent most of the season as a healthy scratch. He was happy to sign as a free agent in Detroit the following summer and, while he enjoyed his teammates and the organization, there were few opportunities to play. He was traded to Tampa Bay at the deadline.

The Bulldogs are currently near the bottom of the AHL's Western Conference, but Lefebvre was encouraged by the split against the Heat, which is currently the best team in the league. Penalties hurt in a 5-1 loss Friday, while goaltender Cedrick Desjardins had a 3-0 shutout Saturday.

"We found ourselves behind early in that first game," Lefebvre said. "They scored on a 5-on-3 and then on a 5-on-4 and we're down 2-0. We just took too many penalties. They scored four power-play goals, and if you take those away it's a 1-1 game."

Commodore was in the penalty box for two of those goals.

"I skated three or four times and I played a lot in those two games," Commodore said. "I remember looking at the clock in the first game and thinking it was going too slow. But I needed those games."

Lefebvre said Commodore can expect another busy weekend as the Bulldogs go on the road again to play Syracuse Friday and Hershey Saturday.

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Late-Night Talks Fail to Resolve N.H.L. Stalemate

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

Published: December 6, 2012

It was an abrupt ending, replacing a day and night of growing optimism with an early morning of sobering realism. After almost nine hours of hard negotiation at a Midtown Manhattan hotel that lasted until 12:45 a.m. Thursday, the N.H.L. and the players' association gave reporters curt, noncommittal statements that indicated the two sides still have significant differences.

"We had a series of candid discussions tonight and we plan on meeting tomorrow," Winnipeg defenseman Ron Hainsey said and departed. He took no questions. It turned out to be the union's only statement.

Other players present for the talks, including Rangers forward Brad Richards and Buffalo goalie Ryan Miller, also left without comment. Donald Fehr, the executive director of the players' association, departed via elevator.

"You need different jobs," Fehr told reporters, who had been camped out for almost 12 hours to cover the talks, as he left.

About 45 minutes later, Bill Daly, the league's deputy commissioner, addressed reporters but did not take questions.

"We had a good, candid dialogue, a lot of issues," Daly said. "There continue to be some critical open issues between the two parties. We understand they should be getting back to us tomorrow on some of those issues."

A union spokesman, Andrew Wolfe, said that the players would meet internally Thursday before noon, but no time was scheduled to meet with the owners.

The sudden end tempered the hopefulness that had prevailed throughout the day Wednesday, when it seemed that a settlement to save the N.H.L. season was within reach and the owners and the players' association exchanged proposals.

Daly and six owners shuttled back and forth hurriedly between league conference rooms and those of the union well into the evening, a sense of urgent momentum suffusing the talks for a second straight day after 11 weeks that had produced mainly stalemate and rancor.

Among the league negotiators conferring with the union were Jeremy Jacobs, the hard-line owner of the Boston Bruins; Ronald Burkle, the moderate co-owner of the Pittsburgh Penguins; and Jeff Vinik, the moderate owner of the Tampa Bay Lightning.

As the talks ground late into the night, only three owners remained on the league side, and the original cast of players was reduced from about a dozen to roughly half that number.

Neither side was offering specifics on the proposals or what progress had been made. But the apparent intensity of the negotiating suggested that the two sides had gotten down to the hard business of hammering out a settlement.

Reports emerged afterward indicating that tensions had been high at times during the long day and night of talks. Jacobs and Miller, one of the more militant members of the players' union, reportedly both lost their tempers during an angry exchange.

Earlier Wednesday, the mood had been far lighter.

Commissioner Gary Bettman and club officials attended a meeting of the N.H.L. Board of Governors and offered encouraging signs that the long-deadlocked talks were warming up in the 81st day of the lockout.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing, and out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say, and I'm not going to take any questions," Bettman said in a brief statement to reporters. "See you later."

While union officials offered no comment throughout the day, club officials leaving the governors' meeting also sounded a note of optimism in similarly brief remarks.

Lou Lamoriello, the Devils' president and general manager, said: "I'm encouraged. I've always been hopeful of having a season till we have one. But right now, we have to leave it in the hands of the people who are talking."

The hopeful tone was set Tuesday, when 6 owners and 18 players met at the hotel for eight hours without Bettman and Fehr. Four of the six owners were new to the talks, changing the composition of the league's negotiating team.

According to participants, Burkle, one of the owners new to the talks, and his star player Sidney Crosby helped the two sides find common ground.

When the talks ended at midnight Tuesday, Steve Fehr, the union's special counsel, said, "I'd say it might be the best day we've had."

He and Daly stood alongside each other, the first time the union and league had given a joint statement since the lockout began on Sept. 15.

By Wednesday evening, fans and reporters who had been discussing the season's possible cancellation were instead focused on when training camps would open if a deal was struck by Friday, and whether a regular season of 56 or 60 games would open before, or just after, Christmas.

But the abrupt break in negotiations early Thursday served as a reminder that it is not a quick and simple matter to solve an N.H.L. lockout.

The 2004-5 lockout, which wiped out a season, was not settled until the two sides held 10 consecutive days of talks in July, capped by an all-night session at the league office.

The 1994-95 lockout was settled after 11 straight days of bargaining.

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Suddenly, Optimistic Signs Abound in N.H.L. Talks

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

Published: December 5, 2012

Amid growing optimism that a settlement to save the N.H.L. season was within reach, the owners and the players union exchanged proposals as negotiations accelerated Wednesday night.

Six team owners and Bill Daly, the league's deputy commissioner, shuttled between their conference rooms and the union's rooms at a Midtown hotel as an urgent sense of momentum suffused the talks for a second straight day after 11 weeks of stalemate and rancor.

Neither side offered specifics on the proposals or on what progress had been made, but the apparent intensity of the negotiating suggested that the two sides were serious about hammering out a settlement.

Earlier Wednesday, Commissioner Gary Bettman and club officials attended a meeting of the N.H.L. Board of Governors and offered encouraging signs that the long-deadlocked talks were warming up in the 81st day of the lockout.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing, and out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say, and I'm not going to take any questions," Bettman said in a brief statement to reporters. "See you later."

While union officials offered no comment throughout the day, club officials leaving the governors' meeting also sounded a note of optimism in similarly brief remarks.

"We feel good about the information we got," said John Davidson, the Columbus Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations.

Lou Lamoriello, the Devils' president and general manager, said: "I'm encouraged. I've always been hopeful of having a season till we have one. But right now, we have to leave it in the hands of the people who are talking."

The union made a new offer after negotiations reconvened Wednesday afternoon. The owners caucused over the proposal for the rest of the afternoon, then offered a counterproposal.

League negotiators came down to the union conference rooms to talk to officials. Among the league negotiators conferring with the union were Jeremy Jacobs, the hard-line owner of the Boston Bruins; Ronald Burkle, the moderate co-owner of the Pittsburgh Penguins; and Jeff Vinik, the moderate owner of the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The sudden turn from gloom to optimism began Tuesday, when 6 owners and 18 players met at the hotel for eight hours without Bettman and Donald Fehr, the executive director of the players union. Four of the six owners were new to the talks, changing the composition of the league's negotiating team.

According to participants, Burkle, one of the owners new to the talks, and his star player Sidney Crosby helped the two sides find common ground.

When the talks ended at midnight, Steve Fehr, the union's special counsel, said, "I'd say it might be the best day we've had."

The change in tone could be attributed to a combination of factors: the leadership of Burkle and Crosby; the exclusion of Bettman and Donald Fehr; the ascendance of more moderate owners; and the sidelining of the Minnesota Wild owner Craig Leipold, who irritated the players.

Another upbeat sign: the league and the union requested an adjournment of Thursday's hearing before the Quebec Labor Board. The board was to decide whether the lockout is legal in Quebec.

Union officials have long believed that Bettman and the owners had a date at which they planned to change tactics and begin pursuing an agreement. That date may have come, as games through Dec. 14, the Jan. 1 Winter Classic and the All-Star Game have been canceled. Last month Bettman said the league was losing \$18 million to \$20 million a day.

Until the progress Tuesday, the subject of Wednesday's board meeting was believed to be whether to cancel the 2012-13 season, just as the 2004-5 season was canceled because of a lockout.

But instead, talk Wednesday night focused on when training camps would open if a deal was struck by Friday and whether a regular season of 56 or 60 games would open before, or just after, Christmas.

Such talk may be premature, but the mood among owners and executives emerging from the board meeting was markedly more upbeat than on previous occasions during the lockout.

With an N.H.L. fine of as much as \$1 million still in place for unauthorized remarks by team officials, most leaving the meeting refused to speak to reporters beyond exchanging quick greetings.

"We're going to continue to talk, up until we get a deal," said Larry Tanenbaum, the Toronto Maple Leafs' owner. "As long as we're talking, we're hopeful."

New York Times LOADED: 12.06.2012

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N.H.L. Talks Postponed Until Afternoon

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

Talks between the league and the players' union scheduled for Wednesday morning at a Midtown hotel were postponed until after the afternoon, following the conclusion of the N.H.L. Board of Governors meeting slated for 11 a.m.

A person on the union side said the talks were put off to avoid haste, and that the players would have something to present to the owners later in the day. The person, who said the players and owners had touched base in the morning, was not authorized to speak publicly.

The contact on the morning of the 81st day of the N.H.L. lockout followed a long Tuesday of bargaining that lasted until midnight and that both sides described as encouraging. Steve Fehr, the union special counsel, said "it might be the best day we've had," and Bill Daly, the league's deputy commissioner, said he "appreciated" the efforts of the players.

It was the first time in the lockout that league and union gave a side-by-side statement.

Commissioner Gary Bettman was scheduled to address reporters after the board of governors meeting Wednesday, which was being held at the offices of the law firm Proskauer Rose. However, league officials said Bettman might not address reporters, depending on the status of negotiations.

At the governors' meeting, club owners, officers and general managers were expected to hear a briefing on the Tuesday bargaining session. Bettman was expected to inform them on whether a date for cancellation of the season had been set should no collective bargaining agreement be struck between the two sides.

The progress at Tuesday's bargaining session was made without Bettman and Donald Fehr at the negotiating table. Fehr, the union's executive director, and Bettman were present throughout the eight hours of talks for internal meetings.

New York Times LOADED: 12.06.2012

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NHL commissioner Gary Bettman says he's 'pleased with the process that is ongoing'

Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

There was optimism from NHL owners and, to a somewhat lesser degree, players Wednesday that a 54-game season might be salvaged after both sides seemed to creep closer to a new collective bargaining agreement after two key huddles in New York.

During a board of governors meeting held at the offices of the league's legal team, Proskauer Rose, commissioner Gary Bettman briefed the 30 clubs on the state of negotiations.

Afterwards, Bettman said he and the board members were "pleased with the process that is ongoing" but he refused to comment further.

Devils general manager Lou Lamoriello said he was "encouraged" and suggested talks with the players were substantive, while Columbus Blue

Jackets president of hockey operations John Davidson said of Bettman's message: "We feel good about the information we got."

Davidson flashed a thumbs-up sign as he left.

The board of governors meeting was followed by talks involving 19 players and six owners. It was the second such get-together in as many days, with neither Bettman nor NHL Players' Association executive director Don Fehr being directly involved.

Negotiations stretched deep into the night again, this time in fits and starts.

It wasn't until midnight Tuesday that talks wrapped up, and all signs indicated last night's discussions could go as late or later.

Very little information leaked out of the meeting room, but it is believed that each side submitted proposals to the other and spent lots of time apart discussing what was offered.

Daly and the small group of owners are believed to have proposed a 10-year CBA, which would likely come with some concessions on issues such as length of contracts if the players are to agree to a long deal.

NHLPA special counsel Steve Fehr and Daly attended the afternoon negotiating session, which included players Sidney Crosby, Jonathan Toews, Brad Richards, Shane Doan, Ryan Miller, Martin St. Louis, Craig Anderson, David Backes, Ron Hainsey, Manny Malhotra, B.J. Crombeen, Mathieu Darche, George Parros, Kevin Westgarth, Daniel Winnik, Jamal Mayers, Shawn Horcoff, Mike Cammalleri and Chris Campoli.

The owners were represented by Ron Burkle (Penguins), Jeremy Jacobs (Bruins), Murray Edwards (Flames), Jeff Vinik (Lightning), Mark Chipman (Jets) and Larry Tanenbaum (Maple Leafs).

Jacobs and Burkle were said to be particularly instrumental in pushing the negotiations forward.

While some progress seemed evident, both sides tried to tone down their excitement. Nick Kypreos of Sportsnet reported that some NHL coaches began calling players with instructions to be ready to report to their teams in the next few days. It was later suggested that coaches were told not to call players.

And one Devils player who has remained in the loop during the entire process, said of the last two days: "I have no idea about the meetings, so I don't really know (if there is reason for optimism)."

The old CBA expired on Sept. 15 and regular season games have been canceled through Dec. 14. If a new deal is reached, a reworked schedule must be drawn up and there has been speculation that it would be between 50 and 62 games for each team within its own conference.

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NHL lockout update: Meetings between players and owners continue; NHL reportedly makes offer to NHLPA after players' make proposal

Charles Curtis, NJ.com

We've reached another dinner break after a second straight day of marathon talks between owners and players. It's been a busy day, with more optimism coming out of the meetings.

After the NHL's Board of Governors met, commissioner Gary Bettman addressed the media and didn't say anything of note beyond this statement: "We are pleased with the process that is ongoing, and out of respect for that process I don't have anything else to say."

As for the team governors who attended the meeting? Former Rangers great and new Blue Jackets president John Davidson said, via Newsday's Steve Zipay, "We feel good about the info we got."

Devils GM Lou Lamoriello also talked briefly to the media. "I've always been hopeful there'd be a season until there is, but right now, we just have to leave it in the hands of the people that are talking," he said, according to The Sporting News' Sean Gentile.

When talks, which were slightly delayed by the BoG meetings, finally resumed, there were reports that the NHLPA made a proposal. Then came word of an NHL offer right back. It would appear the ball is back in the players' court.

"Although it is not believed the proposals are the formal, all-encompassing offers that have been traded -- and subsequently rejected -- in recent months, the NHL and NHLPA exchanged ideas on key issues in multiple brief sessions," Katie Strang of ESPNNewYork wrote.

By no means is anything done by this point. But former NHL player Matthew Barnaby had this to say on Twitter: "Just got a text from owners side that his guess is season starts on dec 26th."

The only thing that's certain at this point? The discussions will continue, potentially tonight.

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NHL lockout: Optimism from league and players

Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said he and the league's board of governors are "pleased with the process that is ongoing" in an attempt to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement.

However, Bettman would not comment further after today's board of governors meeting in New York. He called the meeting an "update" for the 30 teams.

There is optimism from both the league and its players after two positive days. Devils general manager Lou Lamoriello said he was "encouraged" and Columbus Blue Jackets executive John Davidson said, "We feel good about the information we got."

Davidson flashed a thumbs-up sign as he left. Few of the governors said anything to the media since only Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly are technically allowed to talk about the lockout.

One Devils player, who has remained on top of the entire process up until the last two days, said: "I have no idea about the meetings, so I don't really know (if there is optimism)."

Day 2 of talks between small groups of owners-- without Bettman and NHLPA executive director Don Fehr are expected to begin within the half hour. The players may not make a formal proposal.

There has even been talk today that if a settlement is reached in the next day or two, a 54-game season could be played.

ESPN reported that 19 players and six owners attended today's meeting.

Players: Sidney Crosby, Jonathan Toews, Brad Richards, Shane Doan, Ryan Miller, Martin St. Louis, Craig Anderson, David Backes, Ron Hainsey, Manny Malhotra, B.J. Crombeen, Mathieu Darche, George Parros, Kevin Westgarth, Daniel Winnik, Jamal Mayers, Shawn Horcoff, Mike Cammalleri and Chris Campoli.

Owners: Ron Burkle (Penguins), Jeremy Jacobs (Bruins), Murray Edwards (Flames), Jeff Vinik (Lightning), Mark Chipman (Jets) and Larry Tanenbaum (Maple Leafs).

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645837 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout: Board of governors meeting; CBA talks will follow

By Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

The NHL's board of governors began their meeting at the Manhattan offices of the league's legal representatives, Proskauer Rose at 11 a.m. today.

Having already briefly touched base with the NHL Players' Association this morning, league negotiators will get together with the union's leaders to resume negotiations on a new collective bargaining agreement.

Although there were plans to talk at 9 a.m., it was decided to postpone the talks until after the board of governors meet. The players, led by NHLPA executive director Don Fehr, may have a new proposal to present in the afternoon get-together in New York.

The NHL has been without a CBA since the old deal expired on Sept. 15. With the board of governors meeting and then talks resuming, the feeling is that this could be a pivotal day in whether a partial 2012-13 season can be saved.

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645838 New Jersey Devils

NHL owners, players exchange proposals; keep talking

Wednesday December 5, 2012, 8:57 PM

By TOM GULITTI

NEW YORK – With the lines of communication finally open, the NHL and its players got down to serious work Wednesday trying to hammer out an agreement that will end the owners' lockout.

The cautious optimism sparked by nearly eight hours of meetings on Tuesday was followed by an exchange of proposals as the sides put in writing some of the concepts they discussed.

Negotiations resumed at approximately 2:30 p.m., with the players going first in submitting their proposal. After taking a break to meet internally and review what the players offered, the owners countered with their own proposal. The sides then broke for dinner while the players discussed what the owners presented to them.

They resumed talking at 8:45 p.m.

Reports indicated the owners are now looking for a 10-year collective bargaining agreement – they previously had not made a proposal for more than seven seasons (including option years). Not only would that provide a decade of labor peace, which the fans would welcome, but it would also allow the league to spread out the make-whole provision it proposed to pay off the players' existing contracts with some deferred payments.

It was unclear whether the players wanted to go that many years on the next CBA, though. Their longest previous proposal was six years, including an option year.

After making progress Tuesday without NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHL Players' Association executive director Donald Fehr in the room, that was the set-up again Wednesday with six owners, accompanied by NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly, meeting with a group of players and union special counsel Steve Fehr.

An individual familiar with the proceedings called the next 48 hours "critical" as far as this round of negotiations leading to a deal, but didn't think the season would be lost if talks broke down again without an agreement being reached.

The sides had originally planned to meet before the NHL Board of Governors' 11 a.m. meeting Wednesday, but decided it would be better to wait until the afternoon rather than rush through things.

Bettman briefly addressed the media after the governors' meeting, which lasted about two hours.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing and out of respect for that process I don't have anything else to say," Bettman said.

The players caucused internally while waiting for the owners to return from the governors' meeting, which took place a couple of blocks away at the law offices of Proskauer Rose LLP. Devils president and general manager Lou Lamoriello, who represented the team at the governors' meeting along with managing partner Jeff Vanderbeek, said he was "encouraged" by the progress in negotiations.

"I've always been hopeful there's going to be a season until there isn't, but right now, we just have to leave it in the hands of the people that are talking," Lamoriello said. "They're talking and that's the most important thing."

Among the topics discussed by the governors was the possible length of the schedule if a deal with the players is made soon. A source said that it would be between 54 and 60 games — 56 if the season starts around Christmas and 54 if it starts around Jan. 1.

The league has already canceled its regular-season schedule through Dec. 14, which covers a total of 422 games, and also axed the Jan. 1 Winter Classic outdoor game and All-Star weekend in Columbus.

Bergen Record LOADED: 12.06.2012

645839 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout remains unresolved, but league waiting to hear on critical issues after second straight marathon session

Owners and players met deep into night for the second straight day, breaking up just before 1 a.m.

By Pat Leonard / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Using Tuesday's marathon talks as an encouraging foundation, the NHL players and owners spent Wednesday in Manhattan revisiting the gritty details holding up a deal to end hockey's lockout.

Meetings lasted eight hours into Thursday morning until about 12:50 a.m., and while neither party had much to say after, NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said a gap remained on some major issues.

"We had good candid dialogue on a lot of issues," Daly said. "There continued to be some critical open issues between the two parties, and we understand that the union should be getting back to us tomorrow on those issues."

With a third straight day of meetings scheduled for Thursday, Winnipeg Jets player representative Ron Hainsey said only: "We had a series of meetings tonight, very candid discussion, and we plan on meeting again tomorrow."

Earlier in the day, commissioner Gary Bettman had presided over a two-hour Board of Governors meeting and emerged before 2 p.m. with no game cancellation announcements or drop dead date — only a desire to return immediately to negotiations with the players' association back at a New York City hotel.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing, and out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say," Bettman said. "And I'm not going to take any questions, and we'll see you later."

There were encouraging signs that the parties were getting closer to a deal, such as a SportsNet report that NHL coaches had begun to contact players overseas telling them to return home. But SportsNet reported coaches quickly had been told to cease making contact.

A scout's report also said coaches had been texting players overseas that they should return to the United States and that a deal was "on the horizon," a claim one player told the Daily News was "laughable."

Devils president and GM Lou Lamoriello said: "I've always been hopeful there's going to be a season until there isn't, but right now, we just have to leave it in the hands of the people that are talking."

Columbus president John Davidson, the ex-Rangers goalie and color analyst, said simply: "We feel good about the information we got."

Garden chairman and Rangers owner James Dolan, Garden president Hank Ratner and Rangers GM Glen Sather attended the Board of Governors meeting to represent the franchise, but none of them spoke to the media.

The two sides will meet again today, and perhaps into the weekend in order to reach an agreement.

The NHL already has canceled the Winter Classic, All-Star Game and all regular-season games through Dec. 14.

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645840 New York Islanders

Encouraging signs in NHL labor talks Wednesday

By STEVE ZIPAY steve.zipay at newsday.com

If yesterday's developments in the ongoing NHL lockout are indicative of anything, each side is trying hard to make a deal to salvage a 50-60 game season. But as has been the case throughout this process, it won't be easy.

On the second consecutive day of bargaining between a group of players and six owners -- and without commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr -- the sides exchanged written proposals, met back and forth over the course of the day in a midtown hotel, and the league's board of governors was briefed. The discussions concluded at about 12:55 this morning after ending at midnight on Tuesday. Talks are to resume Thursday.

"There continue to be critical open issues between the two parties," said deputy commissioner Bill Daly, who added that he expects to hear back from the players association Thursday on those issues.

Ron Hainsey, a Winnipeg Jets defenseman who was in the sessions, said: "We had a series of meetings, very candid discussions."

Earlier in the day, the Leafs' Larry Tanenbaum, one of the six owners in the direct talks, said after the two-hour board of governors meeting in Manhattan, "We're going to continue to talk up until we get a deal."

Bettman also was positive. "We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," he said.

It is believed that a segment of big-market owners -- which includes the Rangers, Canadiens, Flyers and Red Wings -- would like to reach a compromise quickly. But the union will not be pressed into what they believe might be an unfair deal.

The sticking points in the impasse, which has caused the cancellation of 422 games, the Winter Classic and All-Star weekend, are how to divide hockey revenues 50-50 while honoring existing player contracts and solve individual player contract issues, such as extending free-agency eligibility and contract limits of five years, which the NHL wants. That final element was discussed Wednesday night.

Some governors and alternates were hopeful after leaving the board meeting at 1 p.m. Columbus Blue Jackets president John Davidson gave a thumbs-up through his car window and said: "We feel good about the information we got."

Said Devils president and general manager Lou Lamoriello: "I've always been hopeful there'd be a season . . . but right now, we just have to leave it in the hands of the people that are talking.' They're talking and that's the most important thing."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 12.06.2012

645841 New York Rangers

NHL owners and players resume bargaining Wednesday morning in Manhattan, seeking to build on marathon Tuesday session

By Pat Leonard

The NHL players' association and the league's owners reconvened as promised on Wednesday morning at a Manhattan hotel, seeking to build on progress made in Tuesday's marathon session prior to an 11 a.m. NHL's Board of Governors meeting down the street.

NHLPA special counsel Steve Fehr called Tuesday's seven-and-a-half hour negotiation "constructive" and said "it might be the best day we've had." NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said it was "encouraging" to see "everybody wants to get a deal done" and hoped for "more progress" on Wednesday.

Commissioner Gary Bettman and union executive director Don Fehr were on hand Wednesday morning but stayed out of the large group meeting, just as they had on Tuesday, according to the league.

Bettman had suggested last Thursday, after federal mediation concluded unsuccessfully, that the parties' next meeting occur without him or Fehr in the room. So they have remained available for internal caucuses only.

Bettman was originally scheduled to speak to the media Wednesday at 1 p.m., after the Board of Governors meeting, but the league is now saying there is a good chance Bettman could cancel that media availability in favor of going right back to collective bargaining negotiations.

The NHL already has cancelled the Winter Classic, All-Star Game and all regular-season games through Dec. 14. Wednesday was Day 81 of the NHL lockout.

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645842 New York Rangers

NHL players and owners table negotiations until after Board of Governors meeting to avoid rushing critical exchange

By Pat Leonard

Wednesday morning's discussion between the league and players was brief, but only because the parties decided they didn't want to rush their talk prior to an 11 a.m. Board of Governors meeting.

Commissioner Gary Bettman stopped and told reporters from TSN in Canada, as he and the league's owners snuck past most of the media out of the hotel, that nothing negative had transpired in the morning.

Yahoo! reported the meeting was brief because originally the players had planned to have something for the owners in the morning but didn't want to rush their offering. Most of the 50 minutes or so of meeting time, therefore, was spent with both sides meeting internally, not together.

Bettman was originally scheduled to speak to the media Wednesday at 1 p.m., after the Board of Governors meeting, but he almost certainly will cancel that media availability, since the plan is now to continue negotiations with the players' association afterwards. That said, the black NHL podium is resting on stage in the press conference area at the hotel, so perhaps the commissioner does intend to provide a quick update for the cameras.

The NHL already has cancelled the Winter Classic, All-Star Game and all regular-season games through Dec. 14. Wednesday was Day 81 of the NHL lockout.

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645843 New York Rangers

Gary Bettman 'pleased with the process' but limits comments after Board of Governors meeting as NHL, NHLPA return to talks

By Pat Leonard

Gary Bettman and some NHL owners shared either reserved optimism or no message at all after the league's Board of Governors meeting Wednesday afternoon in Manhattan, determined not to let rhetoric get in the way of progress in negotiations with players that were set to resume shortly after.

Bettman returned from a two-hour Board of the Governors meeting that he called "basically an update" for the NHL's 30 franchises and said: "We are pleased with the process that is ongoing, and out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say, and I'm not going to take any questions, and we'll see you later."

Owners and front-office NHL officials normally are forbidden from speaking to the media, but exiting the Board of Governors meeting, Devils president and GM Lou Lamoriello was asked whether he's optimistic a season will take place:

"I've always been hopeful there's going to be a season until there isn't, but right now, we just have to leave it in the hands of the people that are talking," Lamoriello said.

Lamoriello's first response was: "They're talking, and that's the most important thing." Then he was asked whether there had been any substance to the talks: "Well as long as you keep talking, there has to be substance."

Columbus Blue Jackets president John Davidson said simply: "We feel good about the information we got."

Garden chairman and Rangers owner James Dolan (above, with hat), Garden president Hank Ratner, and Rangers GM Glen Sather (above, grey suit) all attended to represent the organization at the Board of Governors meeting, but none of them spoke to the media on their way out.

The Canadian Press and Sportsnet reported that the Quebec Labour Board granted another postponement to the NHL and players' association of their next hearing to settle the dispute of whether hockey's lockout is legal in that province. NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly was scheduled to attend that hearing, originally scheduled for Thursday, so the hope is this postponement keeps Daly in New York and that collective bargaining negotiations with the players continue and draw closer to a resolution.

Wednesday morning's discussion between the league and players was brief, but only because the parties decided they didn't want to rush their talk prior to the Board of Governors meeting. Bettman stopped and told reporters from TSN in Canada, as he and the league's owners snuck past most of the media out of the hotel, that nothing negative had transpired in the morning.

Yahoo! reported the meeting was brief because originally the players had planned to have something for the owners in the morning but didn't want to rush their offering. Most of the 50 minutes or so of meeting time, therefore, was spent with both sides meeting internally, not together.

A seven-and-a-half-hour marathon of meetings on Tuesday generated cautious optimism, particularly when NHLPA special counsel Steve Fehr called the day "constructive" and said "it might be the best day we've had."

The NHL already has cancelled the Winter Classic, All-Star Game and all regular-season games through Dec. 14. Wednesday was Day 81 of the NHL lockout.

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645844 New York Rangers

NHL expects union to get back to league on 'critical open issues' when meetings continue Thursday, per Bill Daly

By Pat Leonard

The league's owners and players met for more than eight hours beginning Wednesday afternoon and lasting into early Thursday morning until about 12:50 a.m. They emerged with little to say, other than NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly reminding the media that while positive signs emerged at points throughout the day, there were still major points of contention.

"We had good candid dialogue on a lot of issues," Daly said. "There continued to be some critical open issues between the two parties, and we understand that the union should be getting back to us tomorrow on those issues."

Winnipeg Jets player representative Ron Hainsey was even more brief in his statement prior to Daly's: "We had a series of meetings tonight, candid discussion, and we plan on meeting again tomorrow."

Neither Daly nor Hainsey took questions. Meetings will resume on Thursday.

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645845 New York Rangers

Leetch is no fan of owners

By ZACH BRAZILLER

That's Rangers great Brian Leetch's take on the NHL lockout.

"It makes me shake my head," the 44-year-old former defenseman told The Post yesterday in New Rochelle, where he signed autographs as part of Steiner Sports Marketing and Memorabilia's 25th anniversary event.

"I was involved in the last one, where basically the owners broke the union and were able to get a deal they believed was fair, changed the whole structure of the system. And now to be in this again, where they are basically trying to redo it again and hammer the union, it's disappointing.

"The fans gets taken for granted now," he added. "I just think they're getting taken advantage of in this situation."

Mike Richter, Leetch's longtime teammate who also was at Steiner Sports' headquarters, was more diplomatic. He understands the owners' side of not wanting to go further into debt, which many have claimed under the current financial model.

"If I'm an owner and I'm losing money under the present circumstances, I'm going to say, 'look, we have to change it,'" he said. "You'd think you could've come to this point before you start hurting the league, before the season started. Of course nothing really seems to get done before the 11th hour. For me, it was in August. For them, it might be last actual moment, which could be the start of the new year. Part of getting a deal is compromise. Both sides have to bite the bullet, probably accept things they normally wouldn't want and figure it out."

Richter, 46, also is optimistic a deal will eventually get done before the season is lost.

"I think they have to and I think they will," Richter said. "There's too much at stake. ... I don't think the players have a lot of upside for waiting and I know the league doesn't, either. ... The bottom line is it's a tremendous sport, they have a tremendous product on the ice. Nobody wants to see them lose time. If there's enough NHL teams losing money, then you have to look at the business model and figure it out. I think the players are willing to do that."

New York Post LOADED: 12.06.2012

645846 NHL

Uncle of NHL star Byfuglien killed when ATV hits car

Article by: PAUL WALSH , Star Tribune

An uncle of professional hockey star and Roseau native Dustin Byfuglien was killed while riding an ATV on a highway frontage road in the far northern Minnesota town, authorities and family said Wednesday.

Don A. Byfuglien, 53, died after the recreational vehicle he was operating hit a car Tuesday afternoon on the north frontage road for Hwy. 11, according to the State Patrol.

He was thrown from the four-wheeler. He had on no restraint devices and no helmet, the patrol said. Court records show him being ticketed twice three days apart in April 2011 for failure wear a seat belt.

The car's driver, Joann J. Eisele, 51, of Middle River, Minn., was not hurt.

Dustin Byfuglien grew up in Roseau and is an NHL veteran who starred for the Chicago Black Hawks when they won the Stanley Cup in 2010. He now plays for the Winnipeg Jets. He was traveling from the Twin Cities to northern Minnesota on Wednesday and was not immediately available for reaction to the death of his mother's brother.

Don Byfuglien took the side-by-side Polaris Ranger from the shop to run a quick errand for a mechanic at D & E Sports when he was hit, said Dale Smedsmo, who owns the dealership and is the longtime boyfriend of Dustin Byfuglien's mother.

"He was running to get a pop for one of our mechanics," Smedsmo said. "He just came across the road, and [the car] pulled out in front of him."

Don Byfuglien was returning from the hardware store on the south side of the highway, according to the patrol. When the off-road vehicle reached the frontage road north of the highway, it struck an eastbound car that had just left a car wash.

The crash occurred about a half-mile from a Polaris manufacturing plant, a major employer in the small town with a rich high school hockey heritage.

"Donny probably had more friends in Roseau than most people," Smedsmo said. "He was really good friends with my mechanics. He hung around here, and when someone needed a helping hand, he'd chip in."

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.06.2012

645847 NHL

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PAUL WALSH ,

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Star Tribune LOADED: 12.06.2012

645848 Ottawa Senators

Scanlan: Finally, some hope on Day 82

By Wayne Scanlan,

Honest to goodness communication. Back and forth dialogue. Real negotiation.

So, why didn't the NHL think of this a little sooner than Day 81 of the world's most unnecessary lockout?

It did, of course. But the league wasn't very interested in giving in, even slightly, until it felt good and ready, until the players had suffered a little more, until the NHL season really was at stake.

By the first week of December, with the 2012-13 NHL campaign on the brink, with two months of games, plus the all-star game and the Winter Classic already cancelled, league owners and players have settled in to legitimate good-faith bargaining, perhaps for the first time in nearly three months.

Where it ends, we can't be sure, but for the first time in weeks there was belief that this season will not be lost after all, not with the sides relatively close to an agreement.

As the meetings raged into Wednesday evening in New York City, such was the optimism that those who make their living in hockey dared to imagine a new collective bargaining agreement before this week ends. Others thought next week was a better bet. The larger point: Against all odds, optimists have not grown extinct during this madness.

If it's true that the end of the lockout is near, if it's not some sort of cruel deception, the most genial of hockey fans would call it an "early Christmas" present.

Less kind observers would term the pending return of NHL action this way: "ABOUT TIME!!!"

In either case, there may yet be something made of the NHL this winter, a reduced regular season, with the Stanley Cup playoffs to follow — but no hockey in July (a line drawn in beach sand). That is, if it isn't too dangerous to glean from the positive vibe out of talks in New York City this week.

If all goes well in the days ahead, the biggest concern for fans of the Ottawa Senators might soon be the state of the defence ... and the learning curve of those forward prospects ... and the fierce goaltending battle behind Craig Anderson. Will that be big Ben Bishop or Robin Lehner? With the potential end of the lockout in sight, the season-ending hip surgery to defenceman Jared Cowen could take on new meaning in a hurry.

Given the darkness at Scotiabank Place and 29 other NHL venues over the past three months, concerns about a player injury will go down as a smaller problem in a bigger picture.

How anxious are NHL club owners, players, broadcasters, fans and media to get the party started? As usual, many of the above, especially in the fans and media categories, were getting slightly ahead of themselves on Wednesday, during a second day of meaningful CBA talks without the main adversaries — NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA chief Donald Fehr — in the room.

The twitter world was abuzz with cart-before-the-horse speculation on all manner of startup details, including: a reduced schedule ranging between 56 and 60 games; a puck drop somewhere around late December, after players are given a few days to get home to their respective NHL cities, followed by a one-week camp.

"I will be back in Scottsdale soon," tweeted Paul Bissonnette (aka BizNasty2point0) of the Phoenix Coyotes to one of his female followers. "I think Crosby may have saved the season (is there anything he can't do?)."

The reference, of course, was to the Pittsburgh power play on display in Tuesday's talks. And no, not the one that usually scores points on the ice — Evgeni Malkin, Crosby, Kris Letang etc. This Penguins connection included co-owners Mario Lemieux and Ron Burkle. Burkle was one of six NHL club owners who first met with 18 players, Crosby included, in lengthy talks on Tuesday, with Bettman and Fehr conspicuously absent.

"It might be the best day we've had," was how Steve Fehr, Don Fehr's brother and assistant, characterized it. Burkle, a billionaire businessman with a reputation for being friendly to unions, was considered an important new voice in the proceedings.

The goodwill from that session carried over into Wednesday's midday board of governors' meeting, running headlong into the more difficult to-and-fro between owners and players Wednesday afternoon and evening, sandwiched around a dinner break.

Shortly past 8 p.m., they reconvened, the thrill of having an opponent willing to negotiate fading somewhat in the detailed debates over contract terms and dividing revenue, each side requiring a willingness for flexibility from the other. It was reported in the afternoon that the league was pitching a 10-year CBA, causing a celebration in social media — no more lockouts for a decade! — although players were said to be seeking a shorter term.

Back and forth it went.

An offer by players, a counter by the league.

It could be a while yet before Jason Spezza flies home from Switzerland and Daniel Alfredsson skates with linemates not playing for the CIS Carleton Ravens, but it's finally possible to imagine these moments.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 12.06.2012

645849 Ottawa Senators

Julien, with some time to spare, honoured in Gatineau

By Ken Warren,

Claude Julien was being honoured Wednesday at Gatineau's Robert Guertin Arena, where his impressive coaching career began with the Olympiques 18 years ago, but he wasn't mincing words.

In his perfect world, he would have been behind the bench for his Boston Bruins at the TD Garden in Beantown. Or barking instructions to the Bruins at Scotiabank Place. Or doing the same at one of the NHL's other 28 arenas.

"I'm as frustrated as the fans are," Julien said, keeping his fingers crossed that the end to the NHL lockout is imminent, that talks between players and owners Wednesday could lead to a new collective bargaining agreement. "We're all creatures of habit, and right now I should be coaching and doing my work. And I'm not. So, it has been a tough year."

Due to the lockout, Julien has spent more time with family and watched plenty of American Hockey League action — Providence, Worcester, Portland and Springfield are all within easy driving distance of Boston — but coaching is where it's at for him.

When and if the NHL returns, he has a Plan A and a Plan B — probably even a Plan C — in place to handle a brief training camp that would involve countless moving parts as players arrived from Europe, the AHL and possibly from junior.

"I haven't heard a thing. I haven't even got a phone call from Peter (Chiarelli, Bruins general manager) yet," Julien said in the early evening. "Peter knows I'm here. If there's something going on, Peter would reach out to me. But I'm hearing the same things as you guys (in the media) are. People are optimistic about the negotiations."

Of course, Julien, who won the Jack Adams Trophy as NHL coach of the year in 2008-09 and led the Bruins to the Stanley Cup in 2011, is fully aware that he would never be in his lofty position, waiting for the NHL's return, without the training provided by the Olympiques. He won the Jack Adams Award as NHL coach of the year in 2008-09 and led the Bruins to the Stanley Cup, but the bench work started innocently enough.

Following his 11-year professional playing career, which included one assist in 14 NHL games with the Quebec Nordiques, Julien spent two years as an assistant coach in Hull with the Olympiques.

In 1996-97, his first season as head coach, he promptly won the Memorial Cup. With a severely depleted lineup the following season, the Olympiques made the playoffs. And the year after that, with a lineup still short on talent, he led the Olympiques to the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League final.

All told, Julien had a 141-109-16 record in five seasons as head coach. He had a brilliant playoff mark of 42-21.

Leaving for the pro ranks — with Hamilton of the AHL, then Montreal, New Jersey and Boston in the NHL — was not easy.

"This is probably the toughest decision I ever had to make, going forward," Julien said. "I was surrounded by great people in the front office, the hockey people, the scouts and a GM (Charlie Henry), who I consider the best general manager ever in junior hockey."

"He gave me guidance and made me a better coach along the way because of the way he handled me. I don't think I could have asked for anything better. Everything, I remember, was first class. The organization knew how

to run a hockey club and was successful year after year. I'm extremely pleased to be part of that."

Julien, 52, says he was "humbled" by the pre-game ceremony in his honour, claiming it was a "privilege" to coach the Olympiques.

Chris Kelly, the former Senator and current Bruins centre, says Julien is widely respected, and not just because of his 347-218-83 record as an NHL coach.

Kelly still remembers the way Julien handled him when he was traded from the Senators to the Bruins before the trade deadline in 2011. At the time, Kelly didn't know much about Julien or the Bruins.

"It was a tough move, being traded for the first time, and he called me that night," said Kelly, who returned Saturday from a one-month stint in Switzerland. "He didn't really bring up anything to do with hockey, it's just that he understood that I had a young family. He said, 'If you need anything ...' It was more about family and personal things than anything to do with hockey.

"I thought that was pretty neat, that there's more to this game than just skating up and down the ice. That's what I found pretty special."

So, too, was Wednesday's ceremony. Julien arrived on the back of a white convertible, with Queen's We Are the Champions playing over the loudspeakers. Julien was at centre ice when testaments from former players played over the PA system, praising him for his coaching abilities and the "family atmosphere" he brought to the team.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 12.06.2012

645850 Ottawa Senators

Giroux on the mend in Ottawa

By Ken Warren

Claude Giroux was wearing a Carleton Ravens sweater on the ice Wednesday, but that meant Philadelphia Flyers management and fans were breathing a little easier.

Giroux, the Flyers star centre who grew up in Orléans and starred with the Gatineau Olympiques, was practising with the Ravens and fellow locked out NHL players; the first time he has skated since suffering a neck/shoulder injury while playing for the Berlin Polar Bears three weeks ago.

"I'm doing better, but it's a process and I need to understand that," said Giroux, who finished third in NHL scoring behind Evgeni Malkin and Steven Stamkos last season, scoring 28 goals and 65 assists in 77 games.

"(Tuesday) was my first day back in the gym and today was just a little skate, some flow drills and stuff. It was good, and hopefully, it keeps getting better."

Giroux was on the ice for the full 90 minutes of the spirited workout, but he's making no predictions on when he might possibly be ready to return to action, whether that's in Philadelphia (if the NHL lockout ends) or back in Europe (if the lockout drags on).

"It's hard to say right now," said Giroux, who scored four goals and 15 assists in nine games with Berlin. "Obviously, I'm doing something every day to make sure I get back in game shape and I still have some things to make sure I'm 100 per cent."

The incident which caused the injury wasn't obvious to rinkside observers, but Giroux knew something was wrong immediately. He didn't return to the ice.

"It was just a faceoff and I turned around and a guy — I don't know if he saw me or not — elbowed me kind of in the neck and shoulder and right away I knew something was wrong," he said, unsure whether the contact was accidental or not. "I didn't want to risk anything and I wanted to make sure I'm 100 per cent if I do play."

Giroux has since travelled to Atlanta to visit with neck specialist Dr. Ted Carrick. Pat Brisson, the agent for Giroux, has publicly said there are no concerns that he had suffered a concussion.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 12.06.2012

645851 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL and players express cautious optimism as talks continue

Sam Carchidi, Inquirer Staff Writer

Posted: Thursday, December 6, 2012, 1:33 AM

NEW YORK - If the NHL and the players' union come to terms on a collective bargaining agreement - and they tried to inch toward one as they met again Wednesday in New York - Pittsburgh Penguins co-owner Ron Burkle figures to get lots of the credit.

The sides continued to be cautiously optimistic Wednesday, the 81st day of the lockout and the second straight day of meetings between owners and players - and again without the leaders, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and Donald Fehr, executive director of the NHL Players' Association.

Burkle, 60, would be an unlikely hero if the season is indeed saved.

The billionaire built his fortune on a California grocery empire, has friendships with people such as Bill Clinton and Mick Jagger, and had little interest in hockey until he and Mario Lemieux spent \$107 million and purchased the Penguins out of bankruptcy in 1999.

But Burkle, who rarely attends Penguins games, has a reputation as an expert negotiator, having handled numerous deals with unions in the grocery business.

Former Gov. Ed Rendell praised Burkle for his negotiating work as the Penguins sought funding for Consol Energy Center in 2007. "Neither Bettman nor Fehr could possibly be a tougher negotiator than Ron," Rendell told the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

From all accounts, Burkle brought a sense of calmness and created a great rapport with the 18 players at Tuesday's breakthrough meeting. That session included the Penguins' Sidney Crosby, the face of the league, a close friend of Burkle's, and a vocal leader for the union.

Steve Fehr, general counsel for the NHLPA and Donald's brother, said the meeting produced perhaps the most progress since this nasty labor dispute started in September.

Both sides were trying to build off that momentum as they met late into Wednesday night and had almost the same contingent as Tuesday: six owners, 19 players (one more than Tuesday), NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly, and Steve Fehr.

There are many issues, including how to divide hockey-related revenue, free agency, length of player contracts, and length of the CBA. The owners apparently now want a 10-year CBA, while the union wants a five-year pact.

Owners and team executives were updated at a board of governors meeting earlier Wednesday. When the meeting ended, there were positive vibes.

Asked if he thought a settlement was near, Columbus president John Davidson said: "We feel good about the information we got."

"I'm encouraged," said Lou Lamoriello, the Devils' president and general manager.

One league source said the owners would stay in New York as long as it takes to get a deal done.

Sportsnet (Canada) reported that some coaches had called players, asking them to be ready for an imminent return.

If a CBA is in place in the next week - and that's a big if - and the season starts on, say, Dec. 22, it would give the NHL a 16-week schedule. Playing four games a week, which would create a 64-game schedule, would be too exhausting for the players. It's likely the NHL would have teams play three games in one week and four in the next, creating a 56-game schedule.

But that's jumping too far ahead. A lot more negotiating has to be done.

That said, at least a sense of optimism is being generated, and Burkle, who briefly had interest in buying The Inquirer and Philadelphia Daily News in 2010, is a big reason for it.

Giroux skates. Flyers center Claude Giroux, who injured his neck while playing in Germany on Nov. 17, returned to the ice Wednesday and skated with some NHL players in Ottawa.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645852 Philadelphia Flyers

Claude Giroux skating again after neck injury

AFTER SUSTAINING a neck injury while playing in Germany on Nov. 17, Flyers star Claude Giroux was back on the ice in Ottawa on Wednesday.

Giroux, 24, participated in a 90-minute skate at the Carleton Ice House in Ottawa, where he makes his summer home.

"I skated for the first time today," Giroux said in a message to the Daily News. "It was a slow skate. Just trying to get the legs going again."

Giroux is not fully recovered and said he had "no idea" when he would be back at 100 percent.

On another front, Flyers forward Matt Read is also returning to North America. Read, 26, collected 21 points in 18 games with Sodertalje in Sweden's second division.

- Frank Seravalli

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645853 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL owners, players exchange proposals

Frank Seravalli , Daily News Sports Columnist

Posted: Wednesday, December 5, 2012, 11:27 PM

NEW YORK - If you've ever purchased a car, you will recall the haggling process before the papers are signed and you're handed the keys.

Throughout the negotiating, the car salesman will pause and take a break, depending on your demands. "Let me check with my manager to see if we can do that," is the customary response, while he or she leaves you waiting.

That's exactly what went on at the NHL's second straight day of marathon negotiating at the Westin New York at Times Square in Manhattan, where the two sides again met from 2 o'clock in the afternoon through press time late Wednesday night.

In other words, the NHL and its Players' Association each traded proposals, briefly adjourned meetings to caucus with executives and then returned to continue the discussion.

The format of bargaining - which on Wednesday included 17 players and the same six owners - remained unchanged from Tuesday, in that they did not formally include NHL commissioner Gary Bettman nor NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr.

For the first time this week, the two sides swapped written proposals. The NHLPA first offered one in the afternoon, and after reviewing it for nearly an hour, the NHL countered. The two sides took a dinner break and then resumed the closed-door, tight-lipped negotiations.

Few details have been leaked to the media. Neither side wants to risk blowing up the progress made at such a delicate and fragile stage of the

process. Quite literally, the 2012-13 season is teetering on the edge - and there is no hyperbole there.

Both sides have made such a momentous push - likely with concessions from each - to bridge the gap that it would not be a stretch for either one to throw their hands up in the air and walk out if it appears no deal can realistically be brokered this week.

The best way to describe the scene would be "tense."

As a car buyer, that's easy to understand. You want to save the most money you can. The dealer wants to make as much as possible. And even if you drive a Maybach, you probably can't conceive the amount of money at stake.

From an economic standpoint, the biggest sticking point of the lockout is the division of hockey-related revenue between players and owners. They're fighting how to split a \$3.3 billion pie. Since reports on Wednesday noted that the NHL's offer was on a 10-year Collective Bargaining Agreement, we could be talking about a total of \$45.6 billion over the lifetime of the deal, assuming a 5 percent growth rate.

That's an incredible amount of money. And it does not factor for inflation. Who knows what the American and Canadian dollars will look like in a decade?

Yes, there was extreme positivity following Tuesday night's breakthrough between players and owners, led by Sidney Crosby and Penguins co-owner Ron Burkle. Ideas from Tuesday needed to be translated to paper on Wednesday.

Each side is still looking for leverage in some way. The simple approach would be to say that players need to bend on economic demands and owners need to concede on contractual demands.

It's not really that easy because, in a negotiation, what you're getting in one area might affect what you're willing to give more in another.

To watch the "reporting" and the ebb and the flow from social media on Wednesday was an act of high comedy. Media members are not privy to details. Most are trying to gather anything they can from any source - be it from players walking into or out of a room, discussing details at a dinner break, or even the placement of a podium in a room.

Nothing positive or negative can be truly deduced from those insights. Social media wasn't made for high-stress negotiations. The truth is positivity and negativity probably waned throughout the day in the actual meeting rooms.

Grinding through months worth of hard lines is not easy. Especially not while the clock is ticking.

Many believe the NHL would like to have a new deal in place by Friday. That could allow for a 60-game season, which is believed to be the magic number that would allow the league to collect full sponsorship revenue for an entire season. Any number of games played under that, the thinking goes, would require a prororation of dollars.

Deadlines have been bluffed before in this process - and that's important to keep in mind. But if those numbers are true, it would be in the best interest of both sides to come to a deal, since that means a bigger, healthier pie to divide.

If a deal is brokered, it would take 2 or 3 days for players to return from Europe, plus a week to 10 days for training camp, before a season could start.

Yes, it is true that a deal is a deal. True negotiators, though, say that the sign of a good deal is when both sides are a little unhappy in the end.

Wednesday was a sweaty, frustrating day for both stubborn sides. No one will deny that. But as any car buyer knows, taking a momentary pause to check flexibility is not a sign of weakness or negativity. Not if the salesman returns to the table, as each side did faithfully.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645854 Philadelphia Flyers

Giroux skating again

After sustaining a neck injury while playing abroad in Germany, Flyers star Claude Giroux was back on the ice in Ottawa on Wednesday.

Giroux, 24, participated in a 90-minute skate at the Carleton Ice House in Ottawa, where he makes his summer home and starred nearby with the Gatineau Olympiques in junior hockey.

"I skated for the first time today," Giroux said in a message to the Daily News. "It was a slow skate. Just trying to get the legs going again."

Giroux is not fully recovered. He said he had "no idea" when he would be back at 100 percent.

Giroux suffered the injury as a result of a check to the head on Nov. 17 with the Berlin Polar Bears. He told the Ottawa Citizen's Ken Warren on Wednesday that the check came off a faceoff.

The injury was serious enough to return to North America to visit with noted chiropractic neurologist Dr. Ted Carrick in Marietta, Ga. Carrick also treated NHL stars Sidney Crosby and Jonathan Toews, both of whom share the same agent as Giroux in CAA Sports' Pat Brisson.

The Senators' Chris Neil, Chris Phillips, Peter Regin and Winnipeg's Grant Clitsome were among the NHL players who have skated regularly at Carleton.

Giroux has kept close tabs on the NHL lockout since returning. With optimism in the air in New York, Giroux's next game played - whenever he is healed - could be with the Flyers. He has not completely ruled out a return to Germany, where teammate Danny Briere is still playing, if the lockout continues to drag on. Giroux's agent, Brisson, was a major power player in terms of getting talks back on track on Tuesday.

**READ COMING HOME:** His timing is certainly interesting, given the apparent progress in NHL labor negotiations, but Flyers forward Matt Read is also returning to North America. Read, 26, collected 10 points in 8 games with Sodertalje in Sweden's second division. His team thanked him in a press release, saying his compensation didn't even cover his own costs to play there. Read netted 47 points in 79 games for the Flyers last season.

Frank Seravalli

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645855 Philadelphia Flyers

'Cautious optimism' describes meetings

December 05, 2012|Frank Seravalli, Daily News Staff Writer

**NEW YORK** - Since Sidney Crosby joined the NHL, Flyers fans have loved to hate him.

Now Flyers fans may have reason to cheer him - if only momentarily, should his recent efforts actually help bring hockey back to the ice this season.

Crosby and Pittsburgh Penguins owner Ron Burkle were reportedly the big players in Tuesday's marathon bargaining session, which continued past the printing of this edition at the Westin Hotel in Times Square.

Last week, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman suggested that the best way to perhaps jump-start negotiations in the 81-day lockout would be to remove himself and his adversary, NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr, from the bargaining table.

On Tuesday, with Bettman, Fehr and most of the lawyers patiently waiting on the sidelines, the two sides gathered for the first time since Nov. 21 and met well into the night.

At press time, 18 players and six owners were still meeting to try and move closer to a deal. Deputies to the power players, the NHL's Bill Daly and NHLPA's Steve Fehr, were also part of the negotiations.

Steve Fehr characterized the proceedings as "the best day we've had so far."

According to the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, Crosby and Burkle flew cross-country together from California with powerful agent Pat Brisson to try and come up with a game plan for the meetings. The Tribune-Review said Burkle, co-owner Mario Lemieux and Crosby have "privately discussed plans to bridge the gap between players and owners" after "growing frustrated with the lack of progress."

They finally got their chance. Lemieux was also spotted at the Westin. Previously, contact between players and management had been prohibited according to league rules during the lockout.

"Cautious optimism" was the phrase sprinkled heavily throughout the night, especially after a break for dinner around 8 p.m., which came after nearly 6 hours of closed-door discussions. Tuesday's talks will set the tone for Wednesday's all-important Board of Governors meeting in New York, when all 30 team owners will meet for an update from Bettman.

It is expected that the NHL's governors would formulate some sort of longer-term plan, and possibly discuss drop-dead dates for a cancellation of the season, if there was no sign of progress.

Caution is a necessity because it has appeared that progress had been made before during this lockout, only to have both sides come back to spin their rhetoric.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645856 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL, union find urgency

**NEW YORK** - The momentum from Tuesday's productive meetings between NHL owners and players stalled a bit on Wednesday as both sides got into a sometimes-heated, grind-it-out bargaining session that totaled almost nine hours.

Give the sides credit for their persistence and sense of urgency. Finally. They worked until 1 a.m., trying to hammer out a settlement.

Bill Daly, the NHL's deputy commissioner, said there was "good, candid dialogue" and that the union would get back to the NHL on some "open issues" that were discussed.

He apparently was referring to the NHLPA having a night's sleep to think about a proposal made by the NHL. It will make its response Thursday.

There are many issues, including how to divide hockey-related revenue, free agency, length of player contracts and length of the CBA. The owners now want a 10-year CBA (with an "escape" clause after eight years), while the union seeks a five-year pact.

Wednesday's meeting had almost the same contingent as Tuesday's: Six owners, 19 players (one more than Tuesday), Daly, and Steve Fehr, special counsel for the players' union.

Oh, and no NHL commissioner, Gary Bettman, or union boss Donald Fehr. Again.

Without those two leaders, there was much more progress made Tuesday, perhaps more than at any time in this 81-day lockout.

Throughout Wednesday's sessions, the parties would meet for a while and then break into a caucus in another room, discussing the proposals among themselves.

Much earlier Wednesday, owners and team executives were updated at a Board of Governors meeting. When the meeting ended, there were positive vibes.

Asked if he thought a settlement was near, Columbus president John Davidson said, "We feel good about the information we got."

"I'm encouraged," said Lou Lamoriello, the New Jersey Devils' president and general manager.

One league source told me the owners will stay in New York as long as it takes to get a deal done.

Sportsnet (Canada) reported that some coaches are calling players, asking them to be ready for an imminent return.

If there is a new collective bargaining agreement in place in the next week \_ and that's a big IF \_ and the season starts on, say, Dec. 22, it would give the NHL a 16-week schedule. Playing four games a week, which would create a 64-game schedule, would be too exhausting for the players. It's likely the NHL would have teams play three games in one week and four in the next, which would create a 56-game schedule.

One unconfirmed report said the league would like to open the season on Christmas Day. (What a dumb idea.)

But that's jumping too far ahead. For now, there is a lot more negotiating that has to be done.

That said, there at least is a sense of optimism being generated around the NHL.

Bettman said he was "pleased with the process that is ongoing, and out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say."

Boston Bruins owner Jeremy Jacobs, a hard-liner and a staunch Bettman supporter, declined comment before heading into the meeting between players and owners.

Giroux returns. Flyers center Claude Giroux, who injured his neck while playing in Germany on Nov. 17, returned to the ice Wednesday and skated with some NHL players in Ottawa.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.06.2012

645857 Philadelphia Flyers

PARENT: NHL deal close, but Gary Bettman, Donald Fehr lurking

By ROB PARENT

If not for Twitter, how would anyone following the "progress" of the NHL contract talks with its players union know when one person or another involved in the negotiations would be taking either a dinner or bathroom break?

Aside from on-the-spot reports from hotel rest rooms by journalists who normally specialize in the art of play-by-play, only a small amount of real news has leaked out the past two nights from the Westin Times Square, the hotel where rich men and poor men and women have only a closed meeting room door separating them.

Apparently, the dolts who decide how to run things every eight to 10 years or so, when the NHL tries to implode, figure that with a full two months of the season burned and counting, it's time to stop sniping at each other through the media and actually sit down and talk.

You know, between buffets.

Ah, but danger lurks around every mezzanine floor corner, since it's always possible that the progress made the past two days in these talks can be poisoned by a couple of shadowy figures — commissioner Gary Bettman and union leader Donald Fehr. The idea, apparently, is keeping hope alive by keeping them out of the bargaining ballroom.

Unless those two foaming-at-the-mouth figureheads figure out another way to screw it up, it appears Sidney Crosby — who every Philadelphia fan secretly admires as the best player in the world — has deemed it appropriate to act as a hammer in an honest attempt to bang out an agreement. Oh, and to find a creative way to mask the truth, which is the players are close to caving yet again.

So as the NHL lockout passed its 81st day, it started to become clear that at some point an agreement to "save the season" really can be reached. Maybe it didn't overnight, and maybe it won't by Friday. But the makings of a real deal are on the table (though not for the first time, if you ask a lot of insiders), and we may be mere weeks from kicking off a 56-game or so regular season.

Just like in 1995, when they went 48 games over the course of about three months before the playoffs, it'll be an intense 2013 winter-into-spring ride, with teams playing three to four games a week, and with more hamstrings snapping, ligaments crackling and groins a-poppin' than ever before.

It'll create a playoff that will be nothing more than a chaotic mess of injury-burdened teams fighting each other and fighting through exhaustion to see if they can survive four more rounds.

Sounds awful.

But it would be beautiful to watch. You know, until the next implosion comes along.

If they don't implode this week, that is.

This just in: Joe Blanton — two years, \$15 million from the Angels.

Read that again, then consider it a prime candidate for the Winter Meetings' Ridiculousness Award. But I'll still take Shane Victorino's heist in Boston (3 years, \$39 million) as the leader.

Hey, since time is clearly running out on a favorite hobby of mine, please allow me just one more time to write some of my favorite local sports phrases:

"Time's yours."

"Listen ..."

"Gotta do a better job."

"We look forward to the challenge of playing (insert winning team here)."

Ah, much better. Thanks.

Anyway, about Andy Reid ... His Redness told his adoring media public Wednesday that while he really is looking forward to the challenge of playing the Buccaneers, there is plenty for his Eagles to watch out for.

Listen, Reid said before declaring this about the Bucs: "They're a 6-6 football team, (a) good football team and we'll get a good week of preparation in and get ourselves ready to play against a good football team."

Really, what more do you need to know?

QUOTE OF THE WEEK: It's from newly named starting quarterback for the rest of the season Nick Foles, who looks more like an NFL quarterback every week, even if he still looks like a frat house plebe. But his sound is purely professional: "I think just staying true to who I am," Foles said when asked about the task of balancing his rookie status with his new leadership role. "In any position, don't try to be something you're not. I'm just going to be me."

Delaware County Times LOADED: 12.06.2012

645858 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL sides swap offers during lengthy talks

NEW YORK -- Traction and positive vibes continued to gain momentum Wednesday night as a group of NHL owner and players worked toward ending the lockout, which entered its 82nd day on Thursday.

Both sides would like a deal by the weekend, but one league source said the owners don't view that as a realistic deadline.

"We had a series of candid discussions tonight and we plan on meeting again tomorrow," player rep Ron Hainsey said in a brief statement shortly before 1 a.m.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly had a slightly longer statement soon after.

"We obviously had a number of meetings today," Daly said. "Over many hours and it didn't start until after our board meeting but obviously, we had a couple of sessions with the players association.

"We had a good, candid dialogue on a lot of issues. There continue to be some critical open issues between the two parties and we understand the union should be getting back to us tomorrow on some of those issues."

The union, which is expected to meet internally on Thursday morning, made an offer and at the same time said it was now willing to consider a 10-year agreement, something both sides reportedly discussed earlier.

ESPN.com reported that the league countered the union's offer. Much of the night was spent with the two sides moving in and out of caucus sessions, a sign of progress and true negotiations.

"I think the players, as well as the owners, don't want to go through this again," said one league source.

The source added that to his knowledge a 10-year CBA term was still in the discussion stages, but had not been put to paper.

In September, NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said that hockey's last CBA of seven years benefited the players too much. The difference here is that with a 50/50 revenue split, the deal would allow the league to re-establish its brand name, reputation and build its revenue base with some amount of stability guaranteed behind it.

The union doesn't want to go past six years, but in the interest of forging a deal, would consider 10.

From a club vantage point, such a term would allow for financially-strapped franchises to see profits instead of red ink once combined with greatly increased revenue sharing.

Both sides talked about "cautious optimism" on Tuesday night (see story). That continued on Wednesday as a number of owners were caucusing in the hallways of the Westin New York, including hardliner Jeremy Jacobs from Boston.

Jacobs was with Jeff Vinik (Tampa Bay), Ron Burkle (Pittsburgh) and league deputy commissioner Daly.

"If they're smiling, that's a good sign," said one source.

Another item on the table, according to the Toronto Star, was staging games on Christmas Day. That makes little sense given that date has belonged to the NBA for decades, while the NHL made great strides in recent years with its Winter Classic on Jan. 1 as its own "special" day.

When talks resumed late Wednesday, the mood was a tad more businesslike and tense as both sides realized the give and take of their proposals would be examined in detail.

One union source said it was "too early" for their side to comment on whether the day's events were as positive as the BOG members portrayed them.

Shortly before 10 p.m., work crews at the hotel re-assembled the podium after having taken it down earlier in the night, an indication that a news conference was coming.

Media took pictures of the podium being prettied up and posted them on Twitter. Within an hour, "at NHLPodium" had over 6,400 followers and had gone viral.

Now, if there is one thread that has emerged ever so infrequently during this 81-day NHL lockout, it's that when there are talks followed by silence or very little said, progress seems to be made.

That was again the case in the early afternoon as Bettman briefed the media following a Board of Governors meeting in Manhattan, in which he made it clear progress was being made without fanfare.

"We just completed a two-hour Board of Governors meeting, which was basically an update," Bettman said of the collective bargaining talks.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing. Out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say and I'm not going to take any questions. See you, later."

Six owners and the select group of players, numbering 19, reconvened CBA discussions shortly after 2 p.m.

They met briefly around 9 a.m., then caucused separately at the Westin, before agreeing to sit down again for longer discussions after the BOG session.

Most of the governors had little or nothing to say when leaving their meeting.

One of the topics discussed at the BOG meeting was an abbreviated schedule of 50 to 56 games "if" a deal is reached sometime this month. Jan. 1 would see a 54- to 56-game schedule, according to one source.

Several owners, club presidents and general managers expressed optimism coming out of the BOG meeting.

Flyers chairman Ed Snider, however, declined comment.

New Jersey GM Lou Lamoriello said he was "encouraged" that things were finally moving in the right direction.

"I've always been hopeful of having a season ... but right now, we have to leave it in the hands of the people who are talking."

Newly-named Columbus team president John Davidson echoed that.

"We feel good about the information we got," Davidson said, climbing into his limo.

Toronto club chairman Larry Tanenbaum added, "We're going to continue to talk until we get a deal and that's all I'm going to say."

Tanenbaum was one of the six owners involved in the direct talks with the union this afternoon.

The BOG meeting, which began shortly after 11 a.m., was two blocks away at the league's law offices of Proskauer Rose on 8th Ave.

The mood going into the BOG meeting seemed upbeat.

"Everybody seems positive," one BOG source said. "But who knows?"

The league and union met twice on Tuesday for eight hours.

Daly and union special counsel Steve Fehr, speaking jointly afterward, agreed that progress had been made, but no deal was imminent.

Fehr, incidentally, handed out pizza to reporters late Wednesday night, who were milling about the hotel's hallway awaiting word on when the talks would end.

Tim Panaccio

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.06.2012

645859 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL owners, players return to bargaining table

NEW YORK -- If there is one thread that has emerged ever so infrequently during this 81-day NHL lockout, it's that when there are talks followed by silence, progress seems to be made.

That was again the case on Wednesday as NHL commissioner Gary Bettman briefed the media following a Board of Governors meeting in Manhattan, making clear that progress was being made without fanfare and he wanted it kept that way.

"We just completed a two-hour Board of Governors meeting which was basically an update," Bettman said of the collective bargaining talks.

"We are pleased with the process that is on-going. Out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say and I'm not going to take any questions. See you later."

Six owners and the select group of players, now numbering 19, reconvened CBA discussions shortly after 2 p.m. this afternoon at the Westin New York in Times Square.

They met briefly early this morning around 9 a.m., then caucused separately at the Westin, before agreeing to sit down again for longer discussions after the BOG session.

Most of the governors had little or nothing to say when leaving their meeting.

It is believed one of the topics discussed at the BOG meeting was an abbreviated schedule of 50-56 games if a deal is reached sometime this month. Jan. 1 would see a 54-56-game schedule, according to one source.

Several owners, club presidents and general managers expressed optimism coming out of the BOG meeting.

"Everybody is feeling positive and we could get 50-60 games in," said one governor. "No drop dead date has been discussed."

Flyers chairman Ed Snider, however, declined comment.

New Jersey GM Lou Lamoriello said he was "encouraged" that things were finally moving in the right direction.

Newly-named Columbus team president John Davidson echoed that.

"We feel good about the information we got," Davidson said, climbing into his limo.

Toronto club chairman Larry Tanenbaum added, "We're going to continue to talk until we get a deal and that's all I'm going to say."

Tanenbaum was one of the six owners involved in the direct talks with the union this afternoon.

Ron Burkle (Pittsburgh), who along with Sidney Crosby, has been cited as having played an integral part in moving the process forward during Tuesday's lengthy meeting and producing cautious optimism, was also present.

The other owners on that negotiating team are hardliner Jeremy Jacobs (Boston), Mark Chipman (Winnipeg Jets), Murray Edwards (Calgary Flames) and Jeff Vinik (Tampa Bay Lightning).

The BOG meeting, which began shortly after 11 a.m., was two blocks away at the league's law offices of Proskauer Rose on 8th Ave.

There were conflicting reports whether the union had a proposal to offer, but given the morning time constraints, opted not to present it until after the BOG met.

If the NHL is going to salvage the season, there needs to be several days of consistent talks where both sides see progress.

The mood going into the BOG meeting seemed upbeat.

"Everybody seems positive," one BOG source said. "But who knows?"

The league and union met twice on Tuesday for nearly eight hours.

Both NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly and union special counsel Steve Fehr, speaking jointly afterward, agreed that progress had been made but no deal was imminent.

Tim Panaccio at tpanotch at comcast.net

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.06.2012

645860 Pittsburgh Penguins

Kovacevic: Penguins, Bettman best buds

By Dejan Kovacevic

Updated 6 hours ago

NEW YORK — As the narrative has turned in this interminable, indefensible NHL lockout, the Penguins suddenly are the good guys in some grand, mutinous adventure.

Notice that?

They're being cast as the ones swooping down from the clouds to save the day. The ones with Ron Burkle, the billionaire owner with the common touch who has restored sanity to the process. The ones with Mario Lemieux and Sidney Crosby riding white horses of their own, albeit from different sides.

It's truly fantastic stuff.

Penguins vs. Gary Bettman.

Penguins vs. Jeremy Jacobs, the Bruins' cheapskate owner.

Penguins vs. ... I don't know, Lex Luthor and the Legion of Doom.

The whole picture seems too wholesome to be true, right?

Well, not exactly.

In all seriousness, the positive stuff about the Penguins' role in what I see shaping up as breakthrough week here is all legit. And I'd be the last one to knock it after criticizing all concerned for doing so little beforehand.

Burkle really has been the buzz of this round of talks that began with eight hours Tuesday and rolled into another marathon Wednesday. Players were praising him as if he'd KO'd an Islanders goalie with one punch.

Lemieux really has been tugging strings behind the scenes, from testing other teams for alliances to straying from his norm and showing up on the national stage when the sport needs him.

Crosby, always above and beyond in any walk of life, really has been prodding on his own fronts, even flying to Phoenix last week to urge a group of players training there to keep the faith. The Kid's been doing more calling and texting than a dozen pre-teens combined.

Good for them.

And good for team president David Morehouse, COO Travis Williams and GM Ray Shero for accompanying them to make for a tour de force — volume and voice — unmatched by any team at these talks.

But it's the rest of that narrative that's a little off, based on a few puzzle pieces I've been able to assemble here.

Rewind to early summer.

That's when Bettman and the owners began laying out their wishes for this labor agreement as well as plotting a course to achieve it. You know the first part: 50/50 split of revenues, all that. You probably know the second, too, if you've paid attention to the same five to six owners Bettman had been bringing to every round of talks. All of them were hard-liners, led by the especially intransigent Jacobs.

The Penguins weren't wild about the plan but neither were they pounding desks. Fact is, they'd benefit, too, if those hard-liners succeeded.

But they didn't. Just before Thanksgiving, talks broke off completely when Bettman and his men bolted out of a meeting after just 10 minutes. They were furious at three flimsy proposals made by union chief Donald Fehr, two of which looked like they cost a quarter at Kinko's, the other verbal.

The lockout hit its low.

So did Bettman.

Make no mistake: Part of his plan always was to play at least part of a season. No matter the posturing, no commissioner wants to be connected to two completely lost seasons. That's not a legacy. That's an epitaph.

He and the owners had believed, albeit privately and tentatively, that the union would crack by Thanksgiving. And when it didn't, he asked for "a few days" of zero contact between the sides. It was a bizarre idea to put forth in what should have been a dire time, but he needed to regroup.

Enter the Penguins. Smartly sensing the situation, Burkle reached out to Bettman.

Bettman hadn't fully shut them out before this, but he hoped to stick by Jacobs and Co. as long as he could for all they'd contributed and because he'd already won one lockout by being stubborn.

Now he was listening.

The other dynamic: Bettman had done plenty to help Burkle, Lemieux and the Penguins, from pushing hard for Consol Energy Center to landing the Winter Classic and NHL Draft.

He knew he could expect help.

It's an odd dichotomy, for sure, but the timing and mutual needs were perfect fits. No team is better positioned to lead the way now than the one with the biggest stars, biggest local TV ratings, endless sellouts and, above all that, the one man guaranteed never to see a door slam in his face. No one on the league's side, not the commissioner or his deputies, certainly no other owner, can come close to the clout offered by Lemieux.

Think Lemieux flew up here because he thought there might be some small chance he might play some small role?

No way. That happened at Bettman's behest.

Better question: Still think the Penguins are Bettman's enemy?

Think again.

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.06.2012

645861 Pittsburgh Penguins

After promising start, NHL labor negotiations produce more of the same

By Rob Rossi

NEW YORK — Tension ramped up in the back-and-forth NHL labor saga.

Again.

Owners and players — without the presence of NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and union executive director Donald Fehr for a second consecutive day — exchanged specifics during meetings Wednesday at the Westin Times Square hotel. An afternoon session lasted nearly four hours, and talks resumed late after a two-hour dinner break.

Still, the sides were no closer to a new labor contract, and the remaining December schedule is in peril if significant progress is not made by the weekend.

A group of moderate owners, led by Mario Lemieux and Ron Burkle of the Penguins, have pledged to remain in New York until the next labor contract is agreed upon in principle. But even those moderates — the Penguins, Tampa Bay, Winnipeg, Toronto and Los Angeles — have held firm with hard-line clubs, such as Boston, that owners need immediate financial relief in the next contract.

Players hoped to hear something different from the likes of Burkle, especially after his cool and measured delivery at meetings Tuesday generated traction for stalled negotiations.

Instead, even from Burkle, they heard more of the same.

Owners want an immediate 50/50 division of revenue and some changes in the definitions. They claim a daily \$20 million loss because of the lockout has lessened money available to honor current players' contracts. Also, they are seeking changes to free agency and max contract term limits.

The talks Tuesday struck positive notes because there was little vitriol, mostly thanks to the example set by Burkle and Penguins franchise player Sidney Crosby. Burkle and Lemieux have hoped to parlay their like-minded thinking with Crosby into progress between owners and players.

So far, no good.

The sessions Wednesday were similar to failed federally mediated negotiations last week. Common ground is scarce, and there remains deep distrust from players because of past labor disputes, including one from 2004-05 that forced the cancellation of the entire season.

Negative reaction by sponsors and fans to another labor dispute only eight years later is a concern to Burkle, who told players Wednesday he favors a 10-year contract that would guarantee a lengthy period of stability.

The union has not proposed a contract longer than five years.

A previously scheduled Board of Governors meeting was held before the owners-players meetings, and the Penguins were represented by Lemieux, Burkle, CEO David Morehouse, COO Travis Williams and general manager Ray Shero.

The Penguins and Flyers, bitter on-ice rivals but occasional teammates on league issues — most recently realignment — were the last clubs to leave the Governors meeting.

Bettman, who last week suggested these talks not include him and Fehr, said after the Governors meeting that he was "pleased with the process that is ongoing."

A few hours later the process seemed to be going nowhere.

Again.

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.06.2012

NHL lockout: Progress made, but still far from a deal

By Dave Molinari / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Tuesday might have been the sugar high in the NHL labor negotiations.

The day when, after months of frustration, there was a rush of optimism and hope, even giddiness. When it suddenly seemed likely that a season that had looked to be in mortal jeopardy just a day earlier was about to be saved.

That might well prove to be the case, too, because the past couple of days of meetings between players and owners have generated more good feelings than all of their previous sessions, combined.

But it remains that the sides still have much work to do to craft a collective bargaining agreement to replace the one that expired Sept. 15, and there's still no guarantee it will happen.

That presumably is why Penguins player representative Craig Adams, who sat in on a full day of negotiations Tuesday and some of the talks Wednesday before having to leave because of a personal obligation, was so guarded in his assessment of what went on.

He balked at saying that anything he witnessed made him more optimistic than he had been at the start of the week that a settlement is possible in time to save a portion of the 2012-13 season.

"I don't know," Adams said. "I think we're certainly at the point where we've had enough ups-and-downs that I think I'm kind of done with that.

"I'm done trying to be optimistic or pessimistic or predict where (the talks) are going. I think I'll reserve judgment on that."

The sides were in and out of meetings and caucuses until nearly 1 o'clock this morning. -- "We had a series of very candid discussions," Winnipeg defenseman Ron Hainsey told reporters in New York after the session ended -- and are scheduled to meet again later today.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said there had been a "good, candid dialogue" with the NHLPA, but added that there still are "critical open issues" to be resolved.

Adams left the meetings in mid-afternoon, not long after the NHL Players' Association submitted a proposal believed to touch on at least the major issues in the dispute.

The NHL countered that a few hours later, and the sides discussed those issues deep into the night.

Wednesday's meetings featured, for the most part, the same casts that had gotten together the previous day.

Although Adams left early, Penguins captain Sidney Crosby and co-owner Ron Burkle continued to be involved -- and to earn praise for the part they played in jump-starting the negotiations Tuesday.

Carolina center Jordan Staal, traded from the Penguins to the Hurricanes in June, told the Raleigh News&Observer that Burkle "really understands the business world and he truly does care about playing and getting back on the ice."

Adams, meanwhile, said that the players involved in the talks have a particular appreciation for what Crosby has contributed to getting the talks moving in a positive direction.

"He's been very involved in the process throughout," Adams said. "Obviously, he continues to stay involved and engaged. The other players are glad to have him in there."

But despite the efforts of Burkle and Crosby -- and all the other owners and players who joined the talks this week -- there was little to suggest that the parties are close to resolving the major issues, such as the division of revenues and the structure and length of contracts.

Indeed, even the length of the next CBA has been a point of contention. The NHL has floated the idea of a 10-year agreement, and apparently would be willing to make some concessions if the players agree to make such a commitment, but the NHLPA prefers something shorter.

There have been reports that the NHL might be flexible on some issues pertaining to the structure of contracts, such as restrictions on how much a player's salary can vary from year to year.

That's become a major issue because some clubs have front-loaded contracts, putting a lot of money in the early years and relatively little in the later seasons. That reduces the overall salary-cap hit, but assures the player will get the bulk of his money even if he retires before the deal expires.

The 12-year contract Sidney Crosby signed in July, when the now-expired CBA was in effect, illustrates that approach. Crosby will be paid \$12 million in each of the first three seasons, but \$3 million in each of the final three.

When his dozen seasons of pay are averaged out, Crosby's contract carries a cap hit of \$8.7 million.

NOTE -- Evgeni Malkin had one goal and four assists in Metallurg Magnitogorsk's 7-2 victory against Dinamo Riga in a Kontinental Hockey League game Wednesday. Malkin has 41 points in 28 games, including nine in the past two, to rank second to teammate Sergei Mozyakin in the KHL scoring race.

Post Gazette LOADED: 12.06.2012

645863 San Jose Sharks

NHL appears closer to ending the lockout

By David Pollak

Changing the faces at the NHL bargaining table so far appears to be having the desired effect.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and union executive director Donald Fehr have stayed out of negotiations for the past two days as owners and players try to end the 82-day lockout that has forced cancellation of nearly one-third of the regular season.

But while the tone of the sound bites has been more upbeat than usual over the last 48 hours, the rank-and-file say they are keeping their hopes in check.

"Until they get this thing signed, sealed and delivered, I'm not getting excited," Sharks defenseman Dan Boyle said Wednesday in a text.

Added veteran forward Patrick Marleau: "I wouldn't say I'm more optimistic, but it's good that there is a dialogue."

The dialogue behind closed doors in a New York hotel is a direct exchange between six owners hand-picked by Bettman and as many as 18 players, with no Shark on either side. All are trying to avoid the consequences of losing an entire season for the second time in eight years.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing. And out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say," Bettman said after Wednesday morning's NHL governors' meeting.

That meeting -- with general manager Doug Wilson and chief counsel John Tortora both representing the Sharks -- came after more than eight hours of negotiations Tuesday. After the governors were briefed, labor talks continued the rest of the day.

Each side's second-in-command, NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly and union special counsel Steve Fehr, have been at the table. The fact that the two were sharing a podium late Tuesday was seen as a symbolic breakthrough.

"Might be the best day we've had, still a lot of work to be done," Steve Fehr said before adding he didn't want to "paint too rosy of a picture."

Daly noted that he thought "everyone wants to get a deal done, so that's encouraging."

Some 422 regular-season games through Dec. 14 have been canceled and Bettman has ruled out a full 82-game season. But the league has not set an absolute deadline before the entire 2012-13 season -- as well as projected revenues of more than \$3 billion -- will be lost.

Multiple reports from New York say the goal is to have a new agreement in place by Friday, but history shows more time is available. The entire 2004-05 season was not canceled until Feb. 16; when a 48-game season was salvaged in 1995, that announcement came Jan. 11.

Few specifics of the latest proposals were leaked, but several reports said the NHL was seeking a 10-year agreement.

The two sides had agreed to a 50-50 split of hockey revenue, but they could not agree how to reach that divide from the previous agreement that gave players 57 percent. Also, players want existing contracts to be fully honored. Other divisive issues include limits on the length of contracts and free agent eligibility.

Media accounts of the sessions give much credit for whatever progress is being made to the Pittsburgh Penguins, with co-owner Ron Burkle and captain Sidney Crosby displaying leadership abilities.

Other NHL owners at the table are Jeremy Jacobs of the Boston Bruins, Mark Chipman of the Winnipeg Jets, Murray Edwards of the Calgary Flames, Larry Tannenbaum of the Toronto Maple Leafs and Jeff Vinik of the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Other players included Craig Adams, David Backes, Michael Cammalleri, Chris Campoli, B.J. Crombeen, Mathieu Darche, Shane Doan, Ron Hainsey, Shawn Horcoff, Jamal Mayers, Manny Malhotra, Ryan Miller, George Parros, Brad Richards, Martin St. Louis, Jonathan Toews, Kevin Westgarth and Daniel Winnik.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 12.06.2012

645864 St Louis Blues

Any hope for hockey this season?

4 hours ago • BY DON REED dreed at post-dispatch.com

QUESTION OF THE DAY:

Is the NHL going to settle its labor problems in time for hockey this season? Wednesday is the 81st day of the lockout and games have been canceled through Dec. 14, plus the outdoor Winter Classic and All-Star Weekend. It looks like progress is being made this week, but is there any hope for a season?

JOE STRAUSS:

Sure, there's hope. But some players seem to feel the integrity of the season vanishes if they're not back on ice by mid-January. Would appear to make it vital that a settlement is reached by Christmas. That leaves 3 weeks. Somehow momentum must be achieved shortly. The disparity between teams w/significant numbers playing elsewhere and those without should be enormous even in a best-case scenario.

JEREMY RUTHERFORD:

With the NHL and the union acknowledging last night that progress has been made, I feel confident in saying that we will see hockey soon. True this ride has been full of twist and turns, and there could be another, but the sides seem close enough that a season shortened to 50-60 games will be salvaged.

The Board of Governors met this morning and said they liked what they heard from NHL commissioner Gary Bettman. As I write this, the owners and players (minus Bettman and union exec Don Fehr) are back at the bargaining table, trying to keep the momentum going. The season now hinges on this unique negotiating approach, an approach that leaves people wondering "Where was this all along?"

TOM TIMMERMANN:

Blues GM Larry Pleau once told me that if it weren't for deadlines, nothing would ever get done. He was referring to the league's trade deadline, which motivated GMs to make moves, but it also works in labor negotiations, too. With the clock creeping toward the point where the whole season may have to be called off, there seems to be a ray of optimism in the talks. Of course, we've seen before that the league is willing to take the season over the cliff, but it looks like with the potential for another season to be trashed, there is movement.

Will the voice of reason prevail? I thought they'd save the Winter Classic or the All-Star Game, and they didn't, and I'm still slightly less than optimistic that the parties will come to their senses. There are sizable gaps to be closed, and the time for light tweaking has past. Big bold steps will have to be taken on both sides. But I'm more optimistic than I was 24 hours ago. And when it comes to the NHL, optimism is all we've got right now.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 12.06.2012

645865 St Louis Blues

Hockey Guy: NHL giving peace a chance

18 hours ago • By Jeff Gordon

As it turns out, not every NHL owner was eager to set fire to the industry to earn Total Victory over the players' union.

The league abandoned its scorched-earth approach when Pittsburgh Penguins owner Ron Burkle gained access to the negotiating process. He, current Penguins star Sidney Crosby and former Penguins star Mario Lemieux are pushing to end this standoff.

Former Penguins center Jordan Staal told the Raleigh News & Observer that Burkle "really understands the business world and he truly does care about playing and getting back on the ice."

New negotiation faces Jeff Vinik (Lightning), Mark Chipman (Jets) and Larry Tannenbaum (Maple Leafs) also brought some sanity to the owners' side of the table.

Hard-line Boston Bruins owner Jeremy Jacobs was in Tuesday's face-to-face meeting with the players. But his lackey, commissioner Gary Bettman, was forced to hover on the perimeter.

(To Bettman's credit, he suggested the owners-players meeting concept, moving himself and NHLPA czar Donald Fehr to edge of the fray. At least Gary realized he was just getting in the way.)

The two sides negotiated for real and found some common ground. Some of those involved actually left the meeting smiling. Positive news leaked out of the proceedings.

That set the stage for today's key meeting of the NHL Board of Governors and additional negotiations. After the board meeting broke up Wednesday afternoon, Columbus Blue Jackets executive John Davidson said: "We feel good about the information we got."

Did the two sides make real progress for a change? Sure, but we've heard that before.

At least they are demonstrating some urgency with time running out to save a partial 2012-13 season.

Here is what the Twitterverse has to say about all this today:

Pierre LeBrun, ESPN: "Needless to say, today is a HUGE day. Either traction brings it to another level or it goes off the rails again. Pivotal day."

Damien Cox, Toronto Star: "'Possibly. We'll know better in a couple of hours.' High-ranking league executive this morning on chance of a CBA deal."

Chip Alexander, Raleigh News & Observer: "Eric Staal says 'positive vibes' came out of Tuesday's meetings. Says texted with some of players in NYC. Calls it 'positive progress.'"

Liz Mullen, Sports Business Journal: "Hear meeting later today is to see if progress continues in NHL talks. Hear very cautious optimism about a deal from some agents."

Jason Kay, The Hockey News: "Hearing rumors that Mario Lemieux's voice was a strong and critical one in yesterday's meeting even though he wasn't in the room."

Jesse Spector, Sporting News: "Instead of 'Thank You Fans!' will the NHL paint 'Thank You Mario!' on the ice?"

Louis Jean, TVA Sports: "Source on issues that have divided league & PA (make whole, contractual rights, etc): 'They are in a mood and mode to make a deal.'"

Nick Cotsonika, Yahoo! Sports: "Told owners have shown willingness to give, but players want to do due diligence and not make a mistake. Lots of work to do."

Larry Brooks, New York Post: "Franchises that generate most of revenue for NHL expected to push for compromise/deal. Question whether small markets can/will push back."

Nick Kypreos, Sportsnet: "NHL expected NHLPA proposal this morn but never got it. With (Board of Governors) meeting told PA ran out of time."

Dave Molinari, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: "If players do, as reported, make some form of 'proposal' later today, key will be if owners see it as something off which they can negotiate."

Adam Proteau, The Hockey News: "If Gary Bettman announces labor talks have fallen apart again, he should resign at the same time. No excuses for not getting a deal done."

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 12.06.2012

645866 Tampa Bay Lightning

Amid new talks, Lightning players optimistic

By ERIK ERLÉNSSON | The Tampa Tribune

BRANDON --

Considering the roller coaster of developments that have taken place during the three-month NHL lockout, nobody wants to get ahead of themselves thinking a deal is imminent.

So even as positive vibes resonated out of meetings – which included Lightning owner Jeff Vinik as well as players Marty St. Louis and B.J. Crombeen – that went on for more than eight hours Tuesday night, the players continuing to work out at the Ice Sports Forum maintain a wait-and-see approach.

"Until there's a deal there's not a deal," Lightning forward Ryan Malone said. "So until that happens we just keep carrying on as usual and see what happens it's not worth getting too excited over something you can't control anymore."

NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said late Tuesday night he hoped "more progress" could be made as talks resumed Wednesday following the league's Board of Governors meeting.

"I don't have any high expectations," veteran defenseman Sami Salo said. "It's been a roller-coaster ride the whole lockout so I think players are preparing themselves not to expect too much out of these meetings until we really get something concrete."

That might come soon. As the league's meeting broke up shortly after 1 p.m., many team officials emerged saying they were encouraged by the update provided to them from Commissioner Gary Bettman.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing, and out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say," Bettman said without taking questions before talks were scheduled to resume in the afternoon.

Nearly three months since the lockout was imposed on Sept. 16, anxiousness to play continues to grow as players work to be ready when – and if – a deal is struck.

"Really antsy," is how winger Teddy Purcell described his feelings. "I've been trying to stay positive and optimistic that (the lockout) might only be a month and then training camp and we are playing by December. And these dates start getting pushed back so after three months you start getting restless."

"These skates are fun to work out with your buddies but you want to compete, you want to play and want to get in some real big group practices. You don't get better as a team by sitting out and it's hard to stay on top of it but it's definitely getting frustrated. But at the same time you can't get too

frustrated or too negative or you'll make yourself go crazy. So just stay positive and hope for the best."

Should something get done, it could happen quickly with 10 days from the point of an agreement signed to the start of a reported 54-game regular season. That might leave about a week of training camp.

That would seem a short period of time to get ready to start playing games.

"Five days is good for me," Salo said. "We'll see, it's not a couple of days thing, they would have to play the schedule and a lot of little things, so obviously the sooner the better. But at least for the group here, I think 10 days is good enough. Even maybe a shorter time probably in particular for these guys here."

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 12.06.2012

645867 Tampa Bay Lightning

Bolts' prospect Panik finally putting it together in AHL

By ERIK ERLÉNSSON | The Tampa Tribune

First-round talent, fourth-round effort equated into a second round pick.

That sums up the draft day experience for Lightning prospect Richard Panik. The 6-foot-2, 205-pound right wing was projected as a potential late first-round draft pick in 2009 but questions from scouts about his willingness to showcase his talents on a consistent basis saw his stock drop.

Scouting service Red Line Report said of Panik "On talent alone he'd be first round material."

Though his stock dropped out of the first round, when he was still available as Tampa Bay was set to use the 52<sup>nd</sup> overall pick, Panik immediately became one of the Lightning's top forward prospects as he oozed talent, something severely lacking in the organization at the time. But that marker followed him around from Bellville to Guelph in the Ontario Hockey League right into last season as a rookie with the Lightning's farm team in Norfolk.

"Panik came in labeled as 'Hey he has all the tools in the toolbox, but Panik only opens the toolbox just once every six games'," Syracuse head coach Jon Cooper said.

Though Tampa Bay's depth in the farm system has become much deeper than it was when Panik was drafted year, his recent improvements may have him better lined to one day play in the NHL despite the recent additions of J.T. Brown, 2011 first-round pick Vladislav Namestnikov and Cory Conacher, among others.

Now in his second full year as a professional, Panik might be putting together his exceptional talent with a better consistent effort and stronger play in the defensive end. Through 19 games with Syracuse in the American Hockey League, Panik is second on the Crunch and tied for fifth overall in the league with 11 goals on the season and is tied for 10th overall with 20 points.

His career-long 12-game scoring streak – the longest streak in the AHL this season by four games – was snapped in Sunday's loss in Binghamton.

After a solid second half of last season – he finished with 19 goals and 41 points in 65 games – Panik appears to be on the right path to finding the necessary consistency level in his game that allows the coaching staff to give him more ice time which in turn allows more opportunities for Panik to put his offensive talents on display.

"The kid has found a real consistency to his game and I think hopefully this will stick with him from today, tomorrow and the rest of his career," Cooper said. "He kind of came in as sort of a project X and I'm not going to lie, a couple of years ago that was that guy. But in a short year and a half he's gone from a regular healthy scratch to a regular top line guy on our team. That's a credit to him to buying into what it is we are doing."

Panik said it was a difficult process for him making the transition from junior to the NHL last year, which affected his confidence with the puck.

"Last year it was difficult for me, it was my first year as a pro and after not having a good NHL camp, I had to fight for a spot in the AHL," he said.

"Last year when I did play I had lots of turnovers and I didn't play consistently."

So Cooper and the coaching staff worked with Panik on learning to balance out his game by making sure he took care of the little details, particularly in the defensive zone which started to result in more offensive opportunities. The progress has been easy to see.

"He's been made accountable so if Richard Panik wants to be Richard Panik he just has to work in some other areas of his game like the defensive side," Cooper said. "I think when he kind of grasps that it just isn't the north end of the ice that matters but the whole part of the ice, he's kind of taken a little bit of pride in that. Now all of a sudden Richard has gone from good one out of every six games to now he's goods every six games and average maybe one."

It's been an approach Panik brought with him to training camp and has carried over into his play.

"My focus at the start this season was I didn't want it to be like last year," he said. "It helped me a lot when Coop was talking to me what should I do better last year. Now the season is going good; I'm not doing that many turnovers and I think I've played more consistently . . . hopefully its going to continue."

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 12.06.2012

645868 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL, union slugging it out towards new deal: Cox

By Damien Cox

NEW YORK—It seems hard to imagine the hockey talks will crumble to dust now.

But they could.

To be sure, the hope of many fans that NHL owners and players would come to an agreement in a New York minute once Gary Bettman and Don Fehr were ushered out of the room was probably always a faint one.

This, it appears, will still take some time if it happens at all. The hard slog, capturing the proverbial devil in the details, means the talks that began Tuesday may stretch into Thursday with not much hard information as to whether an agreement, even a tentative one, is at hand.

"We're going to keep talking up until we get a deal," vowed Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment chairman Larry Tanenbaum.

And that might happen. What we know for sure is that representatives of 23 clubs came to Manhattan for a board of governors meeting on Wednesday and left in the early afternoon with few details and not much sense of the distance travelled by their six colleagues in talks with a larger group of players.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," said Bettman in a terse, 26-second news conference after the conclusion of the board meeting.

Tanenbaum, Jeremy Jacobs (Boston), Jeff Vinik (Tampa Bay), Murray Edwards (Calgary), Mark Chipman (Winnipeg) and Ron Burkle (Pittsburgh) left that board meeting and almost immediately submerged themselves in a series of afternoon head-to-head meetings and private caucuses.

After a dinner break, both sides were back at it by about 8:45 p.m., with 17 players in the room after Jonathan Toews and Craig Adams left for commitments elsewhere and Chris Campoli jumped into the fray.

Still in the middle of it all was Pittsburgh Penguins star Sidney Crosby who, along with Burkle and Penguins co-owner Mario Lemieux, gave the talks a distinctly Pennsylvania flavour on the first day. On Wednesday, Penguins CEO Dave Morehouse was also on the edges of the conversation, as was Crosby's agent, Pat Brisson.

The good news was the NHLPA laid down a proposal in the afternoon, and the NHL countered with one of its own. Among the key elements were the term of the collective bargaining agreement (the league wants 10 years, the union much less), the "make whole" issue and the contentious contracting issues, such as the maximum length of contracts.

This was good. This was the give-and-take that many have been looking for since September. This was, it surely seemed, gritty negotiating aimed at hammering out a deal. The two sides and their representatives shuttled in and out of various rooms, considering and reconsidering.

But where was it heading? Was it progress? Hard to say. Heck, the first definite movement of the day came in the afternoon when hotel security moved the velvet rope barriers farther down the hall to allow players and owners access to the washroom without having to rub elbows with the great unwashed.

As is always the case when dozens of media members are forced to wait for hours as the principals meet behind closed doors, rumours flew here and there, some suggesting great optimism that a deal was at hand, others suggesting doom.

"Nope," said one governor early in the day when asked if a deal could be reached later in the evening.

"Possible," said another senior source when questioned as to whether the new dynamic was pushing the two sides towards an agreement.

Then, as the talks moved into the evening hours, there was a sense that the momentum created on Tuesday had waned, perhaps. But that was, really, just speculation as well, or at best interpreted from the tiny scraps of emails and text messages emanating from the actual meetings.

The sublime turned to the ridiculous at about 9:30 p.m. when the official NHL lecturn, taken down several hours early, suddenly reappeared and was put back in place at the front of the ballroom.

What could that mean? A news conference? A deal? Or a breakdown in talks and another chance for Bettman to excoriate the union?

"Anyone else have butterflies in their stomach?" tweeted Ottawa defenceman Marc Methot, and it was hard to tell if he was serious or not.

Yessir. Restraining ropes and lecturns. The hard evidence of the day. Within 30 minutes, the parody account @NHLPodium had 3,000 followers on Twitter. Seriously.

Hard to imagine it has come to this. But it has.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.06.2012

645869 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Gary Bettman didn't have much to say which may be a good sign: Cox

By Damien Cox

NEW YORK—Not much to say. Yet. Which may be good.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," said NHL commissioner Gary Bettman after emerging from a two-hour Board of Governors meeting just before 2 p.m. today.

"Out of respect for that process, I'm not going to say anything more."

Bettman also did not take any questions before departing the Manhattan hotel board room. A meeting between a group of NHL owners and a group of players is expected to commence soon as optimism continues to reign that there may be a resolution in the offing to the NHL lockout, which has been in place since Sept. 15.

Contract language and the so-called "make whole" issue are thought to be at the centre of the dialogue. Pittsburgh owner Ron Burkle and star Penguins forward Sidney Crosby, along with Mario Lemieux and agent Pat Brisson, were credited with getting talks moving in a new and positive direction on Tuesday.

Given how much of the past two months has been marred by rhetoric, leaks and name-calling, the fact that neither side isn't saying much may be a very good thing.

"We feel good about the information we got," said new Columbus president John Davidson after the board meeting.

Leaf minority owner and chairman Larry Tanenbaum said: "We're going to keep talking up until we get a deal."

The owners-players meeting, again without Bettman and NHLPA boss Don Fehr, is expected to begin about 2:15 this afternoon. The same six owners—Burkle, Larry Tanenbaum (Leafs), Mark Chipman (Jets), Murray Edwards (Flames), Jeff Vinik (Tampa) and Jeremy Jacobs (Bruins)—are again involved.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.06.2012

645870 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: The nuts and bolts of getting players back on the ice

Kevin McGran

Q. Can the two sides make a deal without Donald Fehr or Gary Bettman in the room?

A. Yes. Bettman works for the owners, Fehr works for the players, not the other way around. If they players want something, Fehr ought to follow along. Ditto the owners, who have the ability to give Bettman his marching orders. But be sure both will want to look over the deal before a final sign-off.

Q. How long will it take both sides to ratify?

A. Shouldn't take long, and ratification — while an important step in labour situations involving, say, the auto industry — is more a formality in the world of sports. Bettman will recommend the deal to the board of governors, who generally rubber stamp things. (The NHL board of governors is very Politburo-like, with every decision announced as unanimous.) The players had not revealed how they would ratify, but a vote by phone or even email would probably suffice. Hard to imagine either side voting against a deal at this point.

Q. How long will it take between the time the two sides agree on a deal and the first puck dropped on the regular season?

A. About 10 days. Give the players two days to gather in their respective cities — remember some are coming from as far away as Russia — and let them have a camp of about a week.

Q. Will there be exhibition games?

A. Hard to know. Some teams, for sure, will try to schedule one or two. Can't see any team scheduling more than two.

Q. How can players in Europe just leave their teams?

A. They ought to have lockout-protection clauses. Their European contracts all become null and void once a new collective bargaining agreement is in place. None should have any issues returning to North America.

Q. What about Alex Ovechkin? He said he'd stay in Russia if he didn't like the new CBA.

A. Well, maybe that was just part of the bargaining process. After all, there are international transfer agreements in place that would be violated if Ovechkin — or any player under an NHL contract — refused to report. Put this one in the "wait-and-see" category.

Q. What would the schedule look like?

A. Two guesses here, but most likely the NHL would pick up where it left off, squeeze games in where it can and add games in April. It would mean an unbalanced schedule. Another idea is to play conference games only (the league did it this way in 1995 in a 48-game, lockout-shortened season). Either way, look for the Stanley Cup to played later in June.

Q. How long will the season be?

A. If they get a deal done before the end of 2012, the season could be as long as 60 games. There is talk the NHL has a 56-game schedule prepared.

Q. What's going to happen to Team Canada's entry at the world junior tournament?

A. It will go from a tremendously talent-rich squad to one that's less rich in talent. About six or eight won't come to camp so that they can play in the NHL. That's why Hockey Canada invited 37 — way more than usual.

Q. Can they still play the Winter Classic?

A. No. They can play games on Jan. 1, but there's no way to revive the outdoor game at the University of Michigan. There is too much involved logistically, not to mention the NHL has reneged on its contract with the university by not having made advance payments. Watch for that game in 2014.

Q. If the lockout ends, how long will it take Roberto Luongo to report to the Leafs?

A. What? What do you know? Trades, and free-agent signings, will start almost immediately. The parameters of the new CBA will determine how easy or hard it will be to trade for players, like Luongo, who have massive contracts.

Q. What's the first order of business for general managers?

A. Signing their restricted free agents and getting hold of the unrestricted free agents they might want. There was a slew of signings before the old collective bargaining agreement expired, but each team has two or three players unsigned. About 150 players — roughly 20 per cent of the NHLPA's membership — remain unsigned.

Q. Who are the big-name unrestricted free agents?

A. "Big name" is a bit of a stretch in the UFA pool. But Mathieu Darche, Chris Campoli, Dominic Moore, Brian Rolston, Daymond Langkow and Jason Blake are useful parts on any team.

Q. What about restricted free agents?

A. The list here is much smaller, but more intriguing. The Leafs have one in Cody Franson. Montreal has to get P.K. Subban signed. Michael Del Zotto of the Rangers and Ryan O'Reilly of the Avalanche are also unsigned.

Q. Does any team have an advantage in the regular season due to a lockout-shortened season?

A. The guess is that young, fast teams who had a lot of players active (either in Europe or the American Hockey League) will have a leg up. Edmonton's young guns are going great in Oklahoma City. Boston's Tyler Seguin was having a great year in Switzerland. And let's not discount the Maple Leafs with Matt Frattin and Nazem Kadri playing well with the Marlies.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.06.2012

645871 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Optimism takes a turn towards pessimism

Kevin McGran

Cancelled hockey games ended up leaving the Air Canada Centre empty.

Lost hockey led to devastating ratings for NBC Sports.

With the NHL bleeding \$20 million (all figures U.S.) a day, it is the collapsing business backdrop that may well have led to the urgency behind talks in New York aimed at ending the lockout.

Both sides remained tight-lipped about what was exchanged — both were mulling over ideas presented by the other — as the optimism of Tuesday turned into a hard slog on Wednesday.

And the hockey world waited for the season to be saved.

"I'm trying to stay even-keeled until the deal is signed, sealed and delivered," Maple Leafs forward James van Riemsdyk told the Star.

If Tuesday was about ideas and hope, Wednesday was about trying to put ideas onto paper and hope into action.

Players met directly with owners for the second straight day and frequently recessed as both sides met with their leaders — Donald Fehr and Gary Bettman — who were not allowed inside the negotiating room.

None would say much.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," Bettman said at a brief news conference. "Out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say."

MLSE chairman Larry Tanenbaum, one of the six owners talking directly to players, said, "We're going to continue to talk until we get a deal. That's all I'm going to say."

The silence, to some was golden — a chance for the two sides to deal without the need to trash each other's positions in media scrums and try to win the public relations war.

More than 400 games have been cancelled and more than \$1 billion in revenue has been lost and about half of that total would have been paid to the players in salary.

The Maple Leafs earn about \$2.1 million a game. They have had 17 home games cancelled. Some may come back if the season is saved, but some are gone for sure. About \$1.2 million comes from ticket sales, but the rest of the revenue is generated from what fans spend at games.

And outside of one night when about 5,000 fans showed up for a women's hockey game and a couple of charity public skates, the ACC has not been able to replace hockey games with anything else.

The arena has, instead, been dark.

"Most of the (concert) tours are booked way in advance," said Rajani Kamath, director of corporate communications for MLSE. "Quite a bit in advance and most promoters typically don't add shows in a short period of time. Most shows are back to back. Here in Toronto one night. Then Montreal or New York the next."

NBC Sports Group chair Mark Lazarus told the Sports Business Daily that the lockout is hurting ratings.

"We've been filling our primetime with some good college basketball and some good college hockey, but the NHL is a staple of our primetime lineup from October until May, and not having it is definitely harmful to us," said Lazarus.

Club officials leaving the governors' meeting sounded a note of optimism in similarly brief remarks.

"We feel good about the information we got," said John Davidson, the Columbus Blue Jackets' president of hockey operations, as he left the meeting at the Manhattan offices of the law firm Proskauer Rose.

"I'm encouraged," said Lou Lamoriello, the New Jersey Devils' president and GM. "I've always been hopeful of having a season ... but right now, we have to leave it in the hands of the people who are talking."

With an NHL fine of as much as \$1 million still in place for unauthorized remarks made by team officials, most leaving the governors' meeting refused to speak to reporters beyond exchanging quick greetings.

More than one-third of the season has already been nixed. If an agreement is reached out of Wednesday's session, details would have to be hammered out — and training camps hastily arranged — if there's any hope of dropping the puck by mid-December. Guesses on how long a regular season would be range from 55 to 65 games.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.06.2012

645872 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL players, owners agree to do right thing: Cox

By Damien Cox

For some of the greatest players ever to skate in the National Hockey League, it's one less thing to worry about as the holiday season approaches.

For others, it ends the uncertainty of wondering whether they'll be able to make ends meet and pay basic household bills and medical expenses.

In either case, Monday's confirmation that both the NHL Players' Association and NHL owners have committed to continuing to fund the Senior Player Benefit plan through 2013 — even if a new collective bargaining agreement is not reached to save this NHL season — came as a relief to hundreds of former players or their widows.

Last month, neither the NHL nor the locked-out members of the NHLPA were willing to commit to making their contributions for 2013.

But after a story on the plight of these former players appeared in the Star, both the league and players reconsidered.

"I'm over the moon about it," said Bob Nevin, 74, who skated 1,128 games in the NHL. Nevin retired in 1977 and receives an annual NHL pension of \$8,500, and since 2005 has also received \$7,000 twice a year through the Senior Player Benefit.

"The money certainly helps at different times," he said. "A lot of guys aren't doing so well, and this puts them over the hump. It comes at a nice time of the year."

Until Monday, retired NHLers 65 years of age or older, all of whom played in the days of the Original Six before there was a players union, were being held hostage by the ongoing strife between the league and the NHLPA.

The league locked out the players on Sept. 15 when the old CBA expired, and with that expired a letter of agreement to fund the Senior Player Benefit program.

Under the program, both the NHL and NHLPA each contribute \$2 million annually to a pool. Former players 65 and older received \$1,380 for each season of NHL competition, with payments made in February and September.

Initiated during the 2004-05 lockout, the Senior Player Benefit augments the incomes of former NHLers who often are surviving on pensions of less than \$500 a month.

"We talked about it on our executive board conference call last week," said NHLPA spokesman Jonathan Weatherdon. "There was zero objection to paying the money going forward."

"If we are still without a CBA in January, we'll have to do a formal vote. But it's a done deal. It's something we're very proud of."

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly made a similar commitment to fund the Senior Player Benefit even if a new CBA isn't reached.

"This is a very important benefit that we jointly created to help benefit those players who helped get this game to unprecedented levels," wrote Daly in an email. "Our Board has always done the right thing when given the opportunity and it's the least we can collectively do to pay back those who have contributed so much to our game."

The commitment from both sides at least demonstrates they can agree on something at a time when collective bargaining has become particularly fractious and the 2012-13 season is threatened with possible cancellation.

"That's wonderful news," said Sue Foster, widow of the late Carl Brewer and an activist on behalf of retired NHL players.

"I was at an old-timers Christmas luncheon in Markham on Monday, and this was very much on their minds. They'll be thrilled."

Many of the greatest players who played as far back as the 1940s get annual funds from the Senior Player Benefit, including names like Gordie Howe, Johnny Bower, Ted Lindsay, Dave Keon, Milt Schmidt and Jean Beliveau.

"This money makes a huge difference for many of them who are facing extra dental work or who suffer from aches and pains from long-ago hockey injuries and need treatments and medications," said Foster. "When you're already living on a pension of \$7,000 or \$8,000 a year, it's a relief."

Former Boston Bruins defenceman Dallas Smith, 71, lives in Phoenix and uses the money to help pay for his annual medical insurance bill of \$15,000.

"It wouldn't be the end of the world for me," he said. "But I know damn well a lot of guys are hurting. So that is good news."

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.06.2012

645873 Toronto Maple Leafs

It makes sense Sidney Crosby is helping to solve the NHL lockout

By Michael Traikos

It had to be him. Looking back, it made too much sense for it not to be.

Sidney Crosby is, after all, the Next One.

When he was given that label, it was because everyone thought if there was someone who could become the on-ice equivalent to Wayne Gretzky it would be the otherworldly kid from Cole Harbour, N.S. And while Crosby has come has advertised — winning the Art Ross Trophy as a 19-year-old, captaining the Penguins to a Cup two years later — he has meant much more to hockey than what you see on scoresheet.

Crosby is a savior. He helped keep the Pittsburgh Penguins in Pennsylvania, helped Canada win gold at the 2010 Olympics and helped the NHL usher in a new generation of young stars and fans after the last lockout.

Crosby has been the face of the NHL. The way that his ongoing concussion issues helped shed light on the dangers of illegal hits and the need for improved safety, he has also been the head of the NHL.

So it makes sense that Crosby would be the one to save the NHL in its greatest time of need. After all, during the last lockout, it was Gretzky and Mario Lemieux who flew to New York to try and salvage the season. Now, it is Crosby's turn.

While Alex Ovechkin could not wait to go back to Russia at the first sign of labour strife, Crosby stayed and fought the boring war. He speaks both passionately and intelligently about the issues that the players face and the crossroads the league finds itself in. He has been the voice of reason, a leader for the players both inside and outside the boardroom.

On Tuesday, he made his power play. With 18 players and six owners meeting in New York City on Tuesday — without Gary Bettman and Don Fehr's involvement — it was Crosby and Penguins owner Ron Burkle who reportedly pushed their respective sides towards common ground.

NHLPA special counsel Steve Fehr called it "the best day we've had." And while he also cautioned about sounding optimistic, with Crosby leading the offence it is difficult not to get excited.

Crosby is the reason why the Penguins have a shiny new arena, why Canadians can hold their heads high after the last Winter Olympics in Vancouver. He is just one man. But as opposing coaches always say, that does not seem to matter. On the ice, Crosby always finds a way. Off the ice, the same appears to be true.

According to reports, Crosby has been working behind the scenes to prevent the entire season from being cancelled. He and Burkle reportedly flew together to New York from Los Angeles, where Crosby's agent is located, and along with Penguins co-owner Lemieux, are trying to spur some momentum and move the needle.

So, can Crosby save the lockout? Maybe.

There is no question that Crosby's words hold more weight than Kevin Westgarth or George Parros. Crosby is the star of the league. But he is also a very rich star who is hurt more by this lockout than maybe anyone else. His recently signed contract could significantly be diminished if the players do not get the deal they so desperately seek. And in terms of his playing career, he is also affected.

While Crosby might be in the prime of his career, his clock is also ticking. Because of head and neck problems, he has played in only 28 games in the last two years. He wants the NHL to return, if only because he missed so much time already.

And yet, Crosby has not given an inclination that he or the players would bend over backwards to make a deal. Both sides need to meet in the middle. But in the past two months, he has shown frustration over the NHL's perceived unwillingness to negotiate.

Ultimately, Crosby will have to do what he does best: lead. And not just the players. If the lockout is going to end, the owners will also have to follow.

If he can manage that seemingly impossible act, maybe the Next One will finally become the Great One.

National Post LOADED: 12.06.2012

645874 Vancouver Canucks

Canucks captain Henrik Sedin rips owners for thinking players are 'stupid'

By QMI Agency

Vancouver Canucks forward Henrik Sedin has frequently been called out for his overly calm on-ice demeanor.

But with the NHL lockout surpassing the 80-day mark, Sedin finally showed some emotion in a Vancouver Province report, ripping the owners for their handling of negotiations on a new CBA.

"I don't know if they think they're dealing with kids or that we're stupid or think the fans are stupid," Sedin told the Province. "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."

And Sedin sounded less than optimistic that Tuesday's meeting between a half-dozen owners and players was going to result in anything positive.

"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," he said. "That's a concern."

Winnipeg Sun LOADED: 12.06.2012

645875 Vancouver Canucks

Kesler, Biekša help provide a good time

By Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER - Ryan Kesler refereeing road hockey is like Arthur Fonzarelli jumping a shark on water skis. Things have gone way too far in the National Hockey League lockout.

And lest there was any doubt about this, the @NHLPodium account on Twitter – profile description: "I am always bad news" – was nearing 10,000 followers its first day of inanimate existence.

In New York, 18 millionaire players and six billionaire owners finally mustered enough goodwill and urgency to begin what appeared to be earnest give-and-take of negotiations to end the NHL's labour war.

And on a basketball court under the Cambie Bridge in Vancouver, dog walkers and skater kids were disrupted Wednesday afternoon by the outbreak of a road hockey game hastily announced and officiated by Kesler.

The Vancouver Canuck star refereed the stockinged Green Men, anthem singer Mark Donnelly, 50 road hockey players of varying ages and athleticism, and Canuck defenceman Kevin Biekša.

"It's just a good time," Kesler said. "Obviously, the fans are missing hockey and it's something we can do for them."

Kesler feels their pain, if not quite the sting endured by teammates. He has been collecting full paycheques on his \$5 million salary during the lockout while recovering from shoulder and wrist surgeries.

There was nearly \$10 million worth of referees on the pavement, as Kesler's striped partner was injured \$4.6-million-a-year defenceman Jason Garrison. Biekša, who organized a charity game in October, was the only Canuck who played.

But the Green Men posed for photos, posing the question: Do they smile behind their stockings? And Donnelly sang O Canada, showing that he has lost half his body mass but none of his voice.

"It's just something we wanted to do to have some fun," Biekša said. "Every time we've been talking hockey lately it's been serious and (about) the CBA

and all that, so we're just going back to our roots for a fun road hockey game. In the pouring rain."

Hey, it's December in Vancouver.

In New York, it was Day 81 of the NHL lockout. And, remarkably, it began with the same good intentions among owners and players that was evident on the basketball court across the continent.

The warmth and fuzziness began Tuesday night when, for the first time since the lockout began, the NHL and its Players' Association jointly held a press briefing. NHL vice-president Bill Daly publicly thanked the players for their effort and, while hell froze over, NHLPA deputy Steve Fehr called it the "best day" of the lockout. The happy couple looked like they'd just fallen off the top of a wedding cake. After partying for three days.

It set a tone of goodwill.

When governors exited their board meeting in New York on Wednesday after being briefed on negotiations by Daly, sparking breathless Twitter descriptions of how governors exited their board meeting in New York after being briefed by Daly, Columbus Blue Jackets' president John Davidson said: "We feel good about the information we got."

Governors weren't supposed to say anything, of course, but they must have felt so darn good inside they couldn't keep the sunshine to themselves.

Toronto Maple Leafs' chairman Larry Tanenbaum said: "We're going to continue to talk until we get a deal."

Then I'm pretty sure the media, deprived by the lockout of travel points and pre-game meals, did the wave and, seized by the season, broke into song: "O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum, how lovely are thy branches."

Even reviled commissioner Gary Bettman got into the spirit, standing behind the far more popular @NHLPodium and accidentally smiling as he spoke for 26 seconds to inform reporters he wouldn't be saying anything.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing," he said.

Or did he say "progress?" Anyway, he was pleased.

It seemed so was everyone else.

The change in tone in the negotiations may have been spurred by moderate Pittsburgh Penguins' owner Ron Burkle and superstar player Sidney Crosby, which means statues across Canada of Crosby will need to be upgraded to gold from bronze. Don't worry, Burkle will pay for them.

There was a report on Sportsnet that some NHL coaches were phoning players to put them on standby for training camps, which led to the league reminding teams that coaches are to have no contact with players during the lockout.

There was a report a 56-game season would start on Dec. 20.

There was traction.

There was, my goodness, optimism.

And although tensions ramped up considerably in the evening, according to reports, at least the sides were still talking into this morning.

Nearly five months after Bettman issued his declaration of war by demanding the players' share of revenue be slashed to 43 per cent from 57, the NHLPA apparently made an offer that neither offended nor infuriated owners, who instead counter-proposed. Back and forth it went.

If there's a willingness to compromise, there should be little to prevent a speedy resolution. The contractual issues – things like term length and year-to-year salary variance – that each side says are so vital, don't affect by even one dollar the distribution of wealth between owners and players.

And some of the issues the owners propose would actually work in the players' favour. Only two players per team, on average, are on contracts longer than five years. Shorter contracts mean more free agency, which has always been a player's most powerful salary lever, and less money committed to lifetime contracts under a hard salary cap means more cash freed up for other players.

And the eight- or 10-year Collective Bargaining Agreement owners seek could also be a good thing for players because their downward trend of revenue share probably isn't reversing in the next CBA.

The deal still comes down to the \$182-million disagreement over how to compensate players on existing contracts as the NHLPA share transitions

to 50 per cent from 57. And with any luck, that divide became a little narrower on Wednesday, when from Vancouver to New York there was a feeling that an NHL season may yet materialize.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 12.06.2012

645876 Washington Capitals

NHL lockout: League, players show signs of progress toward labor deal

By Katie Carrera, Published: December 5

It took until the 81st day of the NHL lockout, but for the first time since the stoppage began in mid-September there is genuine optimism that the two sides are moving toward a new collective bargaining agreement and the start of a 2012-13 season.

On Wednesday morning, the NHL's Board of Governors met in New York and received an update on the progress made in a marathon session Tuesday that didn't include either Commissioner Gary Bettman or NHL Players Association Executive Director Donald Fehr. The brief reactions afterward from league executives, who are not permitted to speak publicly about lockout negotiations, offered additional encouragement that the mood between the two sides is beginning to warm up.

"We're going to continue to talk up until we get a deal," Toronto Maple Leafs owner Larry Tanenbaum told reporters in New York. "As long as we're talking, we're hopeful."

Said Columbus Blue Jackets President John Davidson: "We feel good about the information we got."

Washington Capitals President Dick Patrick and General Manager George McPhee attended the Board of Governors meeting Wednesday. Owner Ted Leonsis, who is part of the NHL's four-man negotiating committee, was not present.

Bettman didn't disclose anything about the state of negotiations when he met with reporters. The lack of detail shared by either side, though, is considered a positive sign.

"We are pleased with the process that is ongoing, and out of respect for that process, I don't have anything else to say," Bettman said.

The sudden surge of momentum in talks occurred during a nearly eight-hour meeting between six owners and 18 players in New York on Tuesday without Bettman or Fehr present. According to multiple reports, Pittsburgh co-owner Ron Burkle and star center Sidney Crosby, who both took part in the session, worked to build trust and bridge the gap between the sides.

At the conclusion of Tuesday's discussions, NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly and NHLPA special counsel Steve Fehr stood side by side as they delivered short statements that featured a more congenial tone by both sides.

"I thought it was a constructive day; we had a good dialogue. In some ways, I'd say it might be the best day we've had," said Steve Fehr, who tempered expectations and stressed that there was still work to do.

"I appreciate the efforts of the players in particular," Daly said. "I think everyone wants to get a deal done, so I think that's encouraging."

The group reconvened Wednesday afternoon, once again without Bettman or Donald Fehr, but both men are expected to take part in discussions before any agreement is reached. The players submitted a new proposal at the session and received a counteroffer from the owners, but there were few details available about the offers as talks continued late into the evening.

The reaction to any fresh proposal will be crucial in determining whether the NHL can potentially salvage a 50-plus game schedule for the 2012-13 season.

At this stage in the labor dispute, both the league and players' union have proposed a 50-50 split of hockey-related revenues, but they have yet to find common ground on how to make the transition from a system in which the player previously received a 57 percent share. They also remain divided on player contract issues such as term limits, free agency eligibility and arbitration rights.

Will the details derail the process once again? Only time will tell.

"I've always been hopeful there's going to be a season until there isn't, but right now, we just have to leave it in the hands of the people that are talking," New Jersey Devils General Manager Lou Lamoriello told reporters Wednesday. "They're talking, and that's the most important thing."

Washington Post LOADED: 12.06.2012

645877 Washington Capitals

Optimism for NHL labor negotiations after 'constructive day'

Posted by Katie Carrera on December 5, 2012 at 11:29 am

"Cautious optimism" is the phrase of the day when it comes to the NHL's labor negotiations after a group of six owners and 18 players met for nearly eight hours Tuesday in New York.

The two sides appeared to create some traction in the marathon session, which didn't include NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman or NHLPA Executive Director Donald Fehr, and has the entire hockey world waiting to see if it leads to sustained progress in creating a new collective bargaining agreement.

NHLPA special counsel Steve Fehr and NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly met with reporters together following the long day of meetings.

"I thought it was a constructive day; we had a good dialogue. In some ways, I'd say it might be the best day we've had," Fehr said. "Which isn't to paint too overly optimistic a picture. There's still a lot of work to do and a lot to be done, but we will be back at it [Wednesday] morning."

Said Daly: "I appreciate the efforts of the players in particular. We had 18 players in there today and six of our owners....I think everyone wants to get a deal done, so I think that's encouraging. We look forward to hopefully making more progress [Wednesday]."

The same groups touched base Wednesday morning and they are expected to reconvene for more talks following the NHL's Board of Governors meeting that is scheduled for 11 a.m. in New York. According to multiple reports, the NHLPA is working on a new proposal and how it's received will go a long way to determining where the negotiations stand.

In the meantime, here's what you should be reading and watching for the latest in lockout news:

- TSN's Bob McKenzie, Darren Dreger, Pierre LeBrun and James Duthie break down the strides made Tuesday.
  - The Capitals aren't represented in the group of 18 players who met with owners Tuesday, but you can check out the full list of those who did here.
  - According to a report by the Pittsburgh Tribune Review's Rob Rossi, the Penguins, whose co-owner Ron Burkle and captain Sidney Crosby are present in these latest meetings, are working to bridge the gap between the two sides and save the 2012-13 season.
- Burkle and Crosby were described by participants in the five-hour talks as voices of reason. Their shared point of view: The NHL should not risk another round of canceled games — they're already canceled through Dec. 14 — and the league may not recover if a season is lost to a labor dispute for the second time in eight years, the sources said.
- CBC's Elliotte Friedman takes a look at the two major developments out of Tuesday: That it was the best day in talks thus far and Pittsburgh's involvement. To the former point:

The two big questions for Wednesday are: Can momentum be sustained? And, what will the rest of the Governors think?

One of the biggest problems with this process so far is that any positive movement evaporates once deeper discussions set in. Today, for example,

was believed to be the day the league was going to pull its \$211-million "make-whole" offer from the table.

Now, where does that stand? The answer to those kinds of questions determines where we go from here.

Washington Post LOADED: 12.06.2012

645878 Washington Capitals

NHL lockout 2012: After progress, owners, players back at bargaining table

By Ira Podell

NEW YORK — NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman says he's "pleased with the ongoing progress" as labor negotiations are resuming with players Wednesday following a meeting of the league's board of governors.

Bettman returned to the site of talks with the players' association after spending about two hours with executives from the league's 30 teams a few blocks away. The commissioner offered a brief statement but declined to take questions.

Bettman and union executive director Donald Fehr are again sitting out the latest round of talks that are made up of six team owners and 18 players, along with staff and counsel on both sides. Players and owners met for a total of nearly eight hours on Tuesday in different size groups. Enough progress was made to get back to the bargaining table after talks ended around midnight Tuesday.

The lockout entered its 81st day Wednesday.

Washington Times LOADED: 12.06.2012

645879 Websites

ESPN / Progress isn't the end for Bettman

By Scott Burnside

NEW YORK -- As the pinprick of light on the black canvas of the NHL lockout threatens to become a full-fledged beacon of light, already there is a rush to anoint the winners and losers, the heroes and goats.

That's life.

And while it may be a fool's errand to try to ferret out who bested whom in a wholly preventable labor stoppage -- with said labor stoppage still technically under way even though Wednesday marked more good news with continued forward traction between the players and the owners -- such discussion provides a window into future labor battles and the future of embattled NHL commissioner Gary Bettman.

Is Bettman a genius for suggesting that he and his NHL Players' Association counterpart, executive director Donald Fehr, step away from the process after a failed attempt at federal mediation last week?

Credit Bettman for understanding that with the season hanging in the balance, the air had become so toxic in those rare moments the two sides actually found enough reason to be in the same room that the loathing and mistrust trumped all other issues and that the two men stepping back would allow that air to be cleared.

ESPN LOADED: 12.06.2012

645880 Websites

ESPN / Steve Ott getting to play hockey in a 'flash'

By Scott Burnside

One of the interesting phenomena to grow out of the ongoing NHL lockout has been what might be dubbed the "flash camp."

With relatively short notice, groups of NHL players have descended on a variety of locations like Dallas and Phoenix this fall to hold impromptu camps featuring some of the top names in the game.

Unlike places like Minnesota where there is a large group of NHLers who make the so-called State of Hockey home or are Wild players to provide a ready-made group for ongoing workouts and scrimmages, these flash camps involve significant travel for many of the participants.

In Phoenix, for instance, players like Sidney Crosby, Ryan Miller, Ryan Whitney and others joined a regular group of Phoenix Coyotes players for workouts and scrimmages last week, much to the delight of hockey-starved Arizona fans.

"It's basically an NHL training camp," explained Buffalo Sabres forward Steve Ott, who attended gatherings in Dallas and Phoenix.

The camps include trainers, coaches and officials to give the proceedings a professional feel.

"It's what we're trying to accomplish. These camps have been phenomenal," Ott said as the Phoenix camp was preparing to break late last week.

In Dallas, Crosby and Edmonton captain Shawn Horcoff divided up the squads in an informal draft so that goaltenders, defensemen and forwards were equitably distributed, Ott said. In Phoenix, given the large group of Phoenix-based players already working out, the newcomers more or less formed their own team for scrimmage purposes.

The camps, along with a variety of charity games, have given those NHL players who have not yet or have no plans to pursue work in Europe a chance to keep their skills sharp and to bond with players going through the shared experience of being without the game that is their livelihood.

"We're ready to go. That's the tough part," Ott said.

It can make for some interesting times if you're a player like Ott, whose stock in trade is to agitate and annoy opposing players while mixing in a healthy dose of skill.

He acknowledged there might have been an awkward moment in the locker room when a memory of a play or a comment bubbled to the surface.

But those moments pass quickly, he said.

"Guys might be a little hesitant. I'm used to battling against a lot of these guys," Ott conceded.

"But once you're in the dressing room with a guy it doesn't take very long to find out what kind of person he is. Pretty soon you're laughing about something I've done or they've done to me."

Although there has been talk of returning to Phoenix in a week's time pending negotiations, Ott has his plate full organizing a charity event in his hometown of Winsor, Ontario, with Detroit Red Wing Danny Cleary and Horcoff.

"We're all sitting here waiting to play. So hopefully we can do some good for a great charity," Ott said.

The game is set for Saturday night at the home of the Ontario Hockey League's Windsor Spitfires, where Ott played before Dallas made him the 25th overall pick in 2000.

Close to 40 players are expected to take part in the game that will raise money to help fight children's cancer as well as other local charities. The NHLPA will also be donating 25 sets of equipment to needy kids in the area as part of their successful Goals and Dreams foundation.

Traded in the offseason to Buffalo, Ott worked out for a short time with his new Sabres teammates in Buffalo. So he was grateful for the response from all those contacted about playing in the charity game, especially his new teammates, including Jordan Leopold, Drew Stafford, Thomas Vanek and Matt Ellis.

"Every single guy that I called pretty much committed," Ott said.

Like most NHLers, Ott feels the twin pulls of wanting a deal that works for the players, not just now but down the road, and the desire to get back to work as quickly as possible.

For Ott that desire to play is ramped up given that he has a new team for whom he wants to make an impression and prove that their acquisition of him for popular center Derek Roy was the right move.

"I'm excited. I'm ready to chomp on the bit," Ott said.

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ESPN / Both sides look committed to making deal

By Pierre LeBrun

NEW YORK -- These two sides desperately want to make a deal.

That much is clear after a second day of marathon meetings, because things nearly blew up Wednesday evening but the NHL and NHLPA did not take their toys and go home. Instead, they turned the other cheek, persevered and kept at it until nearly 1 a.m. ET Thursday.

And talk they did, in serious, serious form. One source in the room felt the sides could be close to a deal, though another also from the room said it would easily still fall apart when talks resume Thursday.

Everyone I spoke with agreed on one thing in the early hours of Thursday morning: Things remain at a very delicate stage.

There were some key moves on the league's side in an attempt to bridge the gap:

Raising the total money in its Make Whole provision to \$300 million from the previous offer of \$211 million. This is a key move to say the least.

League backs off contracting-rights demands on unrestricted free agency age (27) and salary arbitration, offering to keep both the same;

However, the league stays firm on five-year term limits for contracts and 5 percent salary variance; the only exception is when a team re-signs its own free agent it could go to seven years in term.

League wants 10-year term on CBA (union has asked for five-year term).

Now the ball is in the NHLPA's court. As NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told a weary bunch of reporters around 1:25 a.m. ET Thursday, the league awaits the players' response within the day.

First thing's first, the union will reassemble internally Thursday morning and figure out what its next move is.

I still believe the contract term limit remains a tough pill to swallow for the players. I think all along they believed the league would pull that off the table at the 11th hour. But it hasn't happened. At least not yet.

If you're the players, though, you've got \$300 million now in Make Whole money, which frankly was the total all along I think the union was eyeing when it asked for \$383 million two weeks ago. That was an obvious attempt in my mind to get the owners to respond by meeting them halfway from \$211 million. Well, now they have.

There's obviously a significant divide on the term of the CBA. It's pretty clear the owners feel if they're going to fork out \$300 million in money up front over the first few years of the deal, they want a great benefit of a 50-50 split in revenues long term.

A lot to chew on for the players overnight.

And while both sides were holding their breathe in the early hours of Thursday morning that this thing could still blow up, the fact that it didn't when it easily could have tells me the owners and players who are logging these long bargaining hours don't want to leave New York City without a deal.

Let's hope they get what they came for.

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NBCSports.com / NHL presents NHLPA with counter-proposal

Jason Brough

Funny how fast negotiations can move when two sides actually want to make a deal.

Shortly after the NHLPA presented the NHL with a new proposal this afternoon in New York, the NHL reportedly went right back and presented the NHLPA with a counter-proposal.

No details of either proposal have been reported, but with each side having made a presentation, each side now knows where the other stands.

It's not clear if owners and players will get together again this evening, or if they'll retire to their separate corners and sleep on today's events. (Update: they'll reportedly talk after dinner.)

According to Sportsnet's Doug Maclean, both sides are working to get a deal done by Friday.

One other bit of scuttlebutt making the rounds is that the NHL wants a 10-year CBA.

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NBCS/ NHLPA presents owners with new proposal, awaiting response

Jason Brough

Dec 5, 2012, 5:12 PM EST

As expected, the NHLPA presented the NHL with a new proposal today in New York.

The news was first tweeted by TSN's Aaron Ward.

No proposal specifics have been reported. The division of hockey-related revenues and player contract rights have been the two main issues separating the sides.

Owners are reportedly reviewing the proposal.

Meanwhile, the players and fans wait.

Related: Bettman "pleased with the process that is ongoing"ports.com /

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Sportsnet.ca / Spector on NHL: Winners of a shortened season

The Edmonton Oilers' trio of Jordan Eberle, Taylor Hall and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins have lit up the AHL so far this season.

Mark Spector

OK -- let's take the glass-half-full approach. Because that is, as you know, what us sports writers do best: Stay positive.

So let's say they wrap up these CBA negotiations in the next few days, and we still get some kind of a season. Word is, 56 games is what we'd be talking about. All games against your own conference -- so no Vancouver-Boston this year, unless it happens in June.

So, if you're still with us on a 56-game season, which teams have the advantage?

Well, said one NHL exec (who does not want to be named as the lockout blackout is still in effect), the more players a team has playing in the American Hockey League, the better off they will be.

"Edmonton, Carolina and Chicago will have a big advantage. They have a lot of young key players playing in North America on the small ice, getting a ton of ice time. It's a big difference from playing in Europe," he said. "If we start in two weeks, there will be guys who have played over 30 games, and guys who have played zero."

The Oilers can say they have their Top 6 forwards playing hockey: Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle in OKC, Sam Gagner (Austria), Nail Yakupov (KHL) and Ales Hemsky (Czech).

Stack that up against Northwest Division skaters from Vancouver or Calgary, where virtually none are playing anywhere for either the Canucks or the Flames, and that would theoretically give the Oilers an edge off the start of the season.

"It is an advantage for Edmonton," said former Flames defenceman Rhett Warrener, who was in his final year of junior in 1995 when the NHL played its last truncated season of 48 games. "They've got guys playing -- they're going to be two steps ahead of everyone else. And in a short season, you get off to a fast start and next thing you know you're in the playoffs."

Chicago has Patrick Kane (Austria), Viktor Stalberg (KHL), Nick Hjalmarsson (Italy) playing overseas, plus Marcus Kruger, Nick Leddy and Ben Smith in Rockford of the AHL.

Only the Canucks, however, have a goalie -- Cory Schneider, in Switzerland -- who could start up a shortened season with games under his belt. And as of this writing, Schneider had only played two games for Ambri-Piotta.

"The hardest evaluation is on the goalies," said our executive. "There will be goalies who haven't played, and I don't think there's any advantage for the guys who play in Europe. It's a sideways game over there, the angles are different."

"But two-thirds of the goalies, they won't have played a lick."

Martin Brodeur won his first Stanley Cup in the spring of 1995. Detroit won the Presidents' Trophy with 70 points, but couldn't shake the Jacques Lemaire trap and were swept in the Cup final by the Devils.

Ron Tugnutt was Patrick Roy's backup in Montreal that season. He would get into just seven games in that aborted season, and see the least ice time in any of his last 16 NHL seasons.

"I would be more concerned about injury. About my top goalie going down with an injury because they haven't had the proper preparation," said Hockey Canada's goaltending consultant. "But, they're responsible for being prepared. If you're a pro, you're waiting for the call (that it's game on). You want to be ready to play. Shame on them if they're not in shape."

Staying in shape was an issue last time around. Remember Keith Tkachuk? He wasn't the only player who resembled an offensive lineman when play resumed in January 1995.

"There's no chance that happens now," said our exec. "You'll have a (Dustin) Byfuglien, I saw (Dustin) Penner on Conan O'Brien ... he looks like he's put some weight on. You'll have some challenges, but the bigger ones are getting a player up to speed. It takes a top player a month to get up to speed."

The culture of fitness today is leaps and bounds from where it was nearly 20 years ago, when the NHL last played a lopped off campaign. That likely has to do with the vastly increased average salary of today's NHL player.

"They'll be in better shape now than back then," Warrener assured. "Even in 2004-05. I was in Calgary trying to find a place to skate, and you couldn't even find a decent skate (with enough NHL players)."

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