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NHL 12/8/2012

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646006 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres' Miller explains his side of verbal encounter with Bruins' Jacobs; 'wanted more than anything to make a deal'

John Vogl

Before the entire NHL negotiation fell off the cliff Thursday, one of the biggest pieces of news that came from Wednesday's meetings was a heated exchange between Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller and Boston owner Jeremy Jacobs.

The Toronto Star reported Miller "angrily vented" when Jacobs and the owners threatened to pull everything off the table. Sportsnet.ca wrote Miller "lost his temper briefly."

In a text to The Buffalo News today, Miller explained his version of the events:

"The owners wanted to leave the room and pull everything we spent a full day on. I asked them to stay and continue pushing through. I may have been passionate but there was no disrespect or calling out one owner by name. I have a lot of respect for any owner because they are a big part of hockey.

"I wanted more than anything to make a deal but we are not professional negotiators. We as players didn't have the experience or authority to make a final deal. We were trying to responsibly move this process forward as best we could. If anyone thinks that we did wrong by the game or by the fans then they are misinformed. We have a responsibility to about 750 players and we made moves approved by them and thinking about them."

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.08.2012

646007 Carolina Hurricanes

Harrison on CBA talks: 'Top of hill to the bottom'

By Chip Alexander –

Canes defenseman Jay Harrison believed the NHL and NHLPA was on the verge of an agreement on a CBA Thursday night that would end the lockout, the nightmare.

And then ...

"I was surprised by how quickly it turned around," Harrison said Friday. "It was top of the hill to the bottom."

The NHL's rejection of the union's CBA counter-proposal Thursday has everyone wondering what happens next. Harrison was one of the players who was on an hour-long conference call with NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr later Thursday night, when Fehr updated the members on the series of meetings in New York, how everything fell apart -- seemingly in a matter of minutes -- and what the next step or steps might be.

That apparently does not include collective bargaining meetings Friday or on the weekend, Harrison said. The next move, he said, would be made by the league.

"It was informational, about the nature of how things had gone," Harrison said of the players' conference call. "A lot of things had happened in the last week that the guys as a membership hadn't been privy to.

"There was time for guys to talk about the future and what we want to do and how we want to react. The big thing you can learn from Don (Fehr) is to step back and reflect and then move forward. You kind of separate yourself from the emotion of the moment and you regroup and you decide on your best course of action."

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman was the emotional one Thursday night. He said Fehr had made misleading comments to the media and "spinning us all into an emotional frenzy."

A group of owners and players met Tuesday and Wednesday in New York with Bettman and Fehr out of the room. The sessions Tuesday were said to be productive, and Bettman said he then gave a generally optimistic update to the NHL's board of governors on Wednesday morning.

The owner/player meetings resumed after the board meeting, and with growing tension as the players apparently brought up other CBA issues that the owners' side did not anticipate. The players then said they wanted Fehr again involved for Thursday's meetings, which did not set well with the owners.

"I'm kind of a little disappointing after such huge strides, with both sides reporting how pleased they were, to within 24 hours having a complete change in mood, perspective, outlook, everything," Harrison said.

The league said it is not flexible on its proposals for a 10-year CBA with an opt-out after eight years, new contract lengths of five years, and on compliance issues. An angry Bettman said Thursday night the league's proposal to use \$300 million to "make whole" players contracts in deferred compensation -- now being called "transition payments" -- had been withdrawn.

The union proposed an eight-year CBA with opt-out after six years and contract lengths of eight years. That angered Bettman, who said the league had sought a yes or no answer from the union on the league's offer, not more negotiation.

"In a cap system the only leverage you have is your individual contract rights, so we hold those with great pride," Harrison said. "We feel we have addressed some of the issues they have with the contracting such as the back-diving contracts, and we've come in their direction as far as length of contract, as well.

"We've moved. We moved twice again over the past three days in their direction. To say we're not looking to make an agreement, I don't sense that."

Despite the pessimism of Thursday night, Harrison believes hockey will be played this season. It could be a 48-game season, but hockey will be played.

"I still expect to play hockey. There's still too much to be lost," he said. "I'll believe that to the day it's not."

News Observer LOADED: 12.08.2012

646008 Chicago Blackhawks

Playing overseas now on front burner for Toews

TRACEY MYERS

Jonathan Toews has long been optimistic that at least some of the NHL season could be saved. But after Thursday's events in New York City, the Chicago Blackhawks captain isn't feeling the same.

And playing overseas has become a lot more likely.

Toews was part of talks in New York on Tuesday and part of Wednesday, back when things were going smoothly. But sometime Wednesday the mood change, and Thursday turned into an absolute mess of rejected proposals, items taken off tables and angry words.

"Everyone talks about being optimistic but, really, what is there positive to take from what's gone on?" Toews said Friday. "It's unbelievable how hypocritical the league's been in saying they've tried so hard to make an

effort to get a deal done when they've pushed it this far to begin with. It doesn't matter what the players do, how much we sacrifice to make things happen. It's never been good enough."

The Hatfield-McCoy fracas between the NHL and NHLPA took its most bizarre twists on Thursday. We'll summarize again in a nutshell: NHLPA director says the two sides are close and announces group's latest proposal. League rejects proposal via email. League commissioner blasts NHLPA and the "we're close" talk. League deputy commissioner says some items were non-negotiable including those five-year player contract limits ("the hill we will die on"). Commissioner takes some items off the negotiating table.

Owners who had been meeting with players Tuesday and Wednesday, left on Thursday. Four of the owners released statements regarding the week's talks.

It's all left Toews very frustrated.

"It's mind-blowing that we've made it this far and their behavior hasn't changed one bit. They're great at trying to make (executive director Donald Fehr) and the players association look like the bad guys," he said. "They're just trying to play any angle they can. So far, any angle we've had is to see and wait if the NHL wants to wait this long and they have. I'm not too sure where we go from here."

Now Toews will look at where he goes from here. Fellow frustrated captain Sidney Crosby told Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's Dave Molinari that playing in Europe has moved to the front burner. Same go for Toews?

"Absolutely it does," he said, adding that he doesn't have a specific location in mind yet. "It's just sad in so many ways because your whole life you dream of playing in the NHL. You never dream that politics and things like this would get in the way of you playing and living out your dream. But that's obviously something you have to explore more at this point."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.08.2012

646009 Chicago Blackhawks

Kane apologizes to NHL fans

NINA FALCONE

Patrick Kane has been in Switzerland playing for HC Biel alongside fellow NHLer Tyler Seguin since the end of October. And while the Blackhawks forward is enjoying his time overseas, he—just like plenty of others—is ready for the lockout to end.

So Kaner recorded a video from Switzerland that includes an apology to NHL fans for having to endure the ongoing lockout.

Since his arrival, Kane's recorded 15 points in 12 games for HC Biel.

Hopefully Chicagoans can once again witness those numbers being recorded on their home ice sooner rather than later.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.08.2012

646010 Dallas Stars

Derek Roy rehabbing, should train with Texas Stars next week

MIKE HEIKA

Derek Roy is feeling good about his shoulder and great about the Stars.

While the 29-year-old center still hasn't played a game for Dallas, he said Tuesday he's happy with the trade that brought him to the Stars in July, and that he's happy with the decision the team made to make him have shoulder surgery just a couple of weeks after the trade.

Roy has been working out in Frisco and also skating occasionally with the Stars alumni \_ guys like Joe Nieuwendyk, Bob Bassen and Craig Ludwig. He is nearly 100 percent recovered from the surgery and is expected to go

down to Cedar Park at the end of the week to work out with the Texas Stars. He will not play in games, because of the lockout, but he will get in some intense practices.

"I'm looking forward to it," Roy said. "I think it's a great opportunity for me on a lot of levels. First, I get to test the shoulder and get to push my workouts. Second, I get to see some of the guys who I might be playing with up here and get to know them a little better."

Roy was acquired from Buffalo on July 2 in a trade that sent Steve Ott and Adam Pardy to the Sabres. He can fill a hole in the middle of the Stars lineup and brings skill and speed that Ott didn't have. However, Ott also added grit, leadership and star power that have to be replaced. The trade could be one of the most controversial of the Nieuwendyk era, as Roy can become an unrestricted agent at the end of the season, and the Stars elected to have the shoulder surgery knowing he wouldn't be back until late November or late December.

Roy played all last season with a loose shoulder socket and said the arm would pop out all of the time, and he would just pop it back in. While he didn't want to use any injuries as excuses (he also had hamstring soreness early in the season), it seems clear that the shoulder had a major effect on his performance \_ His 44 points (17G, 27A) in 80 games were among the lowest totals in his career.

"I played on it last year and was ready to play on it again, so I knew I could fight through it," he said. "But I do understand the thinking that I should be better with it healthy. There are a lot of things you do on the ice that involve your shoulder, and you probably shouldn't be thinking about how it's feeling during the game. If you're 100 percent healthy and confident, then you can just worry about the game."

As a smallish (5-9, 184) center, Roy is not going to engage in much physical play. However, he still has to go to the boards to win battles and he still has to fight off defenders while carry the puck. In addition, he has to have full range of motion for shots and full shoulder strength for faceoffs \_ something he didn't have last season.

As odd as it sounds, the faceoff issue might be the most important. The Stars lost their No. 2 and No. 3 volume guys in Ott (55.5 percent in 1,011 faceoffs) and Mike Ribeiro (42.2 percent in 808 faceoffs) and also lost their top two percentage guys in Ott (55.5 percent) and Adam Burish (55.8 percent in 389 faceoffs). As such, Roy and fellow newcomer Cody Eakin are going to have to take a lot of faceoffs.

That hasn't been a problem for Roy, as he typically exceeds 1,200 in a season and last year won 50.6 percent of 1,329 draws. And that was with the bad shoulder.

"It's an important part of my game, and I do think being healthy can help you there," he said. "I also think being a veteran helps, and maybe I can share a few tricks with the younger guys."

Roy is in the final year of a six-year contract and can become an unrestricted free agent in the summer. He is scheduled to make \$5.5 million this season, and has been getting paid during the lockout because of the surgery. He will stop getting paid when he is 100 percent healthy. That's a pretty big chunk of change for the Stars to swallow for something that didn't "have" to be done. However, Nieuwendyk said he felt it was a smart decision.

"We are interested in making him a long-term part of this team, and that was our mindset from the moment we made the trade," Nieuwendyk said. "We knew the contract situation, and we knew that we wanted the best Derek Roy we could get, so we felt it was a good decision."

Because of the lockout, the Stars can't have contract extension discussions with Roy or his agent, Larry Kelly. There's a good chance they might wait until after the season to negotiate, because they have yet to see Roy play in a Stars uniform. If the season is cancelled, that could make the negotiations very interesting.

Roy says he's happy with the treatment he's received and would like to stay.

"Everything that has happened here has been first-class, and I can't say enough about the team and the city," he said. "I'm excited about getting out there and playing, and I can see myself staying here a long time."

That said, there's no telling what rules the new CBA will have in it. There are also the questions of length of deal and amount of yearly salary. As we've seen in several previous negotiations, it's tough for two sides to get together when unrestricted free agency is a possibility.

But, for now, the Stars and Roy are both ecstatic. If the lockout ends, the Stars have a high-performing center (scoring 81, 70 and 69 points from 2007-10) at full strength, as well as a strong relationship for potential future contract negotiations.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 12.08.2012

646011 Dallas Stars

Stardate: Dec. 7, 2005 - Lehtinen foils Panthers with 16 seconds left

SportsDayDFW.com

A series of Stars games and moments that happened on a specific date. The following appeared in the Dec. 8, 2005 editions of The Dallas Morning News.

The recognition was nearly instant between Mike Modano and Jere Lehtinen, a second nature that comes from years on the same line.

Modano circled behind the net, Lehtinen went to the front and the two combined to give the Stars two points that were on the verge of slipping away. Lehtinen's power-play goal with 15.8 seconds remaining lifted the Stars to a 4-3 victory over the Florida Panthers on Wednesday. The win came after the Stars squandered a three-goal lead.

"He knows where to go, to that short side," Modano said. "If I'm working out of that corner, that's the first thing I'm looking for."

The Stars (18-7-1) have won 12 of their last 14 games and maintained first place in the Pacific Division. Florida (9-16-4) lost its 10th consecutive road game.

Paid attendance was announced at 17,377. The actual American Airlines Center crowd was probably no more than a third of that, the result of a nasty snow-ice mixture that descended over North Texas.

The Stars don't play at home again until Dec. 23 against the Phoenix Coyotes, following a six-game road trip.

With Lehtinen's goal, the Stars tied a franchise record by scoring on the power play for the 17th consecutive game. But they needed five man-advantage tries in the third period.

"We cranked up the urgency and started getting the power plays, and then our power play fed off that," Stars coach Dave Tippett said.

Lehtinen scored twice and has seven goals in his last 10 games.

"You're looking down the bench for somebody to take control of the game," Tippett said. "Lehtinen doesn't tell you he's going to take control. He shows you he's going to take control."

The Stars were assertive early, outshooting the Panthers 15-4 in the first period.

Florida goalie Roberto Luongo, a probable candidate for one of three spots on the Canadian Olympic team, allowed three goals on 11 shots.

Trevor Daley's goal at 13:22 finished Luongo, who was replaced by Jamie McLennan. On the play, Sergei Zubov recorded his 316th assist as a Star, passing Craig Hartsburg for the most among defensemen on the franchise list.

The goals came almost too easily, Modano said.

Tippett blamed complacency.

Shaky defensive coverage led to second-period goals by Florida's Juraj Kolnik and Nathan Horton.

Then the Panthers took advantage of penalties to Sergei Zubov (holding) and Brenden Morrow (tripping) to forge a tie. Former Star Joe Nieuwendyk scored after a scramble in front of Stars goalie Marty Turco.

The momentum shifted to the Stars in the third period as the whistles and power-play chances kept coming, the product of the new NHL.

"Those calls are not made two years ago," Modano said. "Not even close."

-Chuck Carlton / DMN

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 12.08.2012

646012 Detroit Red Wings

Players: Sides too close to stop talking now

By George Sipple

Niklas Kronwall said Friday he was "frustrated" by the breakdown in NHL labor talks on Thursday.

Dan Cleary said he felt "duped." Jimmy Howard said it was "ridiculous" that the league didn't keep negotiating to end the lockout.

The players who spoke Friday following a practice at the Troy Sports Center echoed the sentiment of union leader Don Fehr on Thursday that the sides aren't far apart on reaching a collective bargaining agreement.

"They have certain goals in their mind that they have to achieve," Cleary said of the NHL. "So do we."

The league agreed to cover existing contracts with a \$300-million "make whole" offer. The sides also had agreed on pensions and other issues. But they don't agree on the length of the CBA or term limits on player contracts.

"I think if we're this close, I don't see the reason why we shouldn't just keep at it until we have something," Kronwall said. "I don't see the reason why we should all of a sudden step away and get all dramatic. Just stick with it and let's get this done."

Kronwall, Cleary, Howard and Ian White all said that the support for Fehr remains strong and won't be broken.

"I'm not saying that because I toe the line with the PA," Cleary said. "I've been on calls with 200 players. Trust me, it's overwhelming."

Although Kronwall said he was frustrated, he added: "I still think a lot of things got accomplished this week."

The players hope the NHL Players' Association can go back to the negotiating table when cooler heads prevail. According to the Associated Press, the two sides had no contact on Friday.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said Thursday that the recent agreements made this week were now off the table. The players aren't sure whether they buy that.

"We're obviously not going to start from scratch and do this process all over," White said.

CHARITY GAME: Several Wings, including Kronwall and Cleary, will be skating in today's NHLPA charity game in Windsor at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are available at the WFCU Centre (8787 McHugh Street) and at 1-866-969-9328 and [www.wfcu-centre.com](http://www.wfcu-centre.com).

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.08.2012

646013 Detroit Red Wings

Work stoppage doesn't stop Red Wings from bell-ringing competition

Detroit Free Press News Services

While the NHL work stoppage still threatens the 2012-13 season, the Detroit Red Wings will hit four Metro Detroit locations Tuesday to raise funds for the Salvation Army.

Coach Mike Babcock, GM Ken Holland, radio play-by-play announcer Ken Kal and five former Wings are taking part in this year's bell-ringing competition to see which duo can raise the most money for the Salvation Army's Red Kettle Campaign.

Where you can find them:

• Babcock and Holland: 4:30-6:30 p.m., Hiller's Market, 425 N. Center St., Northville.

• Chris Chelios and Kris Draper: 4:30-6:30 p.m., Hockeytown Authentics, 1845 E. Big Beaver in Troy.

• Manny Legace and Chris Osgood: 5-7 p.m., Kroger, 44525 Ann Arbor Rd. in Plymouth.

• Ken Kal and Kirk Maltby: 5-7 p.m., 31145 Harper Ave. in Saint Clair Shores

Fans are asked to make a suggested \$10 donation in exchange for an autograph at all four locations.

This is the seventh consecutive year the Red Wings and the Salvation Army are teaming up through the "Red Wings for Red Kettles" initiative to help the nonprofit reach the \$8.5 million Red Kettle Campaign goal. The initiative has raised more than \$45,000 for the charity since 2005.

For more info about the Salvation Army, visit [www.salmich.org](http://www.salmich.org).

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.08.2012

646014 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings players remain positive there will be a season

By Ted Kulfan

Red Wings defenseman and players association co-representative Niklas Kronwall remains optimistic there will be an NHL season despite talks between the owners and players breaking down Thursday.

Troy — Jimmy Howard isn't a rookie, but he's far from a grizzled veteran, either.

At 28, with three full seasons under his belt, Howard thought he understood life in the NHL.

But the lockout, 84 days long today, has been an education.

"It's been an eye-opener," the Red Wings goaltender said Friday. "It reminds you that even though we play a game we love, it's a business.

"That's one thing I've learned with this lockout. At the end of the day you're your own independent contractor and you have to look after yourself."

The business side of the game slapped everyone hard Thursday night as negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement once again derailed after there had been some encouraging signs.

But despite the doom and gloom, some Red Wings players remained optimistic that a season will take place.

"If we're this close, I don't see why we shouldn't keep at it until we have something," Red Wings co-player representative Niklas Kronwall said. "Just stick with it and let's get this done.

"A lot of things got accomplished this week."

Said Danny Cleary, another Red Wings player rep: "We're too close to burn a season."

Commissioner Gary Bettman said after the talks broke down — owners rejected a proposal from the players — the league's offerings are no longer on the table.

Bettman said an offer of \$300 million to "make-whole" the existing contract is not available.

The provision was part of a three-part non-negotiable package owners wanted.

The union agreed, but countered on issues owners said it had no wiggle room on.

"Stunned," Red Wings defenseman Ian White said. "We're right there in terms of real negotiations, the best couple of days we had, we hammered down some of the issues, come close to an agreement, and all of a sudden the tables turned completely.

"Talks get shut down and here we go again."

The concern now is whether the league, which cancelled the 2004-05 season, is on the verge of another lost season.

"I just feel the time isn't right now for them (the league)," Cleary said. "I just think they (owners) have certain goals in mind they have to achieve, so do we, and we have to find the (common ground).

"I don't believe the season is lost by any means."

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told the Associated Press that he would not contact the union.

"I have no new ideas. Maybe they do. We're happy to listen," Daly said.

Detroit News LOADED: 12.08.2012

646015 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings' Ken Holland, Mike Babcock, former players will ring Salvation Army bell on Tuesday

Ansar Khan

Detroit Red Wings general manager Ken Holland, coach Mike Babcock, former players Chris Chelios, Kris Draper, Kirk Maltby, Manny Legace and Chris Osgood and radio broadcaster Ken Kal will appear at four locations Tuesday to help raise funds for the Salvation Army.

Fans are asked to make a suggested \$10 donation in exchange for an autograph at all four locations as Red Wings personnel complete to see which duo can raise the most money for The Salvation Army Red Kettle Campaign.

Holland is the honorary chairman of the campaign for the seventh year in a row. The initiative has raised more than \$45,000 for the charity since 2005.

Here are the locations and times:

Hiller's Market, 425 N. Center St. Northville (Babcock and Holland from 4:30-6:30 p.m.)

Hockeytown Authentics, 1845 E. Big Beaver Troy (Chelios and Draper from 4:30-6:30 p.m.)

Kroger, 44525 Ann Arbor Rd., Plymouth (Legace and Osgood from 5-7 p.m.)

Kroger, 31145 Harper Ave. St. Clair Shores, (Kal and Maltby from 5-7 p.m.)

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.08.2012

646016 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings frustrated by wrong turn in labor talks, but believe sides too close to scrap the season

Ansar Khan

TROY — Jimmy Howard called Thursday's sudden turn of events at the NHL labor talks ridiculous, saying it made him sick to his stomach.

Niklas Kronwall was frustrated because he sensed an end to the lockout was imminent. Ian White was stunned. Danny Cleary felt like he had been "duped."

But, after stepping off the emotional roller coaster, several Detroit Red Wings said Friday that owners and players are not that far apart on a collective bargaining agreement. They believe the existing differences aren't significant enough to lose an entire season.

"We're too close for this to burn up," Danny Cleary said after skating with several players at the Troy Sports Center. "I don't believe the season is lost by any means. This process is slow, you have to be patient.

"It's not over. We got to be positive. Cooler heads need to step back and really look at what's on the table."

No offer is on the table anymore, according to NHL commissioner Gary Bettman. But players aren't buying that.

"It's off the table until they talk to us next because obviously we're not going to start from scratch and do this process all over," White said.

Added Howard, "Hopefully, it's just one more of Gary's ploys to see if we're going to crack."

They're not cracking. They're taking a hard look at the issues, and they see the gap between the sides closing.

The league agreed to increase its "Make Whole" offer to \$300 million to cover existing contracts and the union accepted. They agreed on pension plan funding. They agreed to keep key contracting issues such as unrestricted free agency (age 27 or seven years) and salary arbitration eligibility (four years) as they were in the previous CBA.

The NHL wanted a 10-year CBA term with an opt-out clause after eight years. The union wanted an eight-year term with an option to pulled out after six years.

The league remains firm on its demand for a five-year cap on contract lengths (seven years for a team's own restricted and unrestricted free agents) and a maximum five-percent variance on annual salaries of a contract.

The NHLPA wanted an eight-year cap and 25-percent variance.

This appears to be the biggest issue. Players believe the shorter term will create a two-tiered salary system where the middle class, as Cleary put it, will have their pay slashed.

Cleary, who has said several times during this work stoppage that he fears the season will be scrapped, was more optimistic on Friday.

"Our proposal wasn't bad enough to say everything's off the table, there's no more talks scheduled," Cleary said. "If you look at how far we've come — they've given, too — the sides are too close for this to happen."

Kronwall, still the club's union representative, said a lot of things were accomplished this week, despite Thursday's dramatic turn.

"If we're this close, I don't see the reason why we shouldn't keep at it until we have something," Kronwall said. "I don't see the reason why we should all of the sudden just step away and get all dramatic. Just stick with it and get this done."

Kronwall said the union has made enough concessions.

"You hear them talking about how it's all us taking and taking. What have we taken?" Kronwall said. "Really, if you look at it, it's a lot of giving and giving."

Cleary believes the league has a date in mind it wants the season to start and doesn't want to agree to a deal beforehand.

"I just feel the time is not right now for them; that might sound crazy, because the time was months ago," Cleary said. "I just think they have certain goals in their mind they have to achieve, and so do we. We have to find a way to get off those goals a little bit."

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.08.2012

646017 Edmonton Oilers

NHL's divide-and-conquer strategy was clear to Oilers captain

By Jim Matheson,

EDMONTON - Edmonton Oilers captain Shawn Horcoff says the NHL's game plan in the labour war is as clear as a sheet of ice that's just had the Zamboni over it — it's clear to him the league wants to separate union head Donald Fehr from the herd of players.

They did that with the former NHLPA chief Bob Goodenow during the last lockout, but the players see Fehr as their Mark Messier. They're going to war with this guy and not turning back.

"I think that's obvious (divide-and-conquer strategy)," said Horcoff, who was one of 18 players negotiating with a group of six owners earlier this week in New York.

"They did everything they could to keep Don off the table ... and we were open to it, but we're hockey players — you can't expect us to negotiate against these guys.

"At a certain time, we knew we'd have to get him involved in the process again, and when we did, they made it clear that could possibly be a deal-breaker, which we found surprising."

So the owners just don't like Fehr?

"Yeah, pretty much," said Horcoff, saying the feeling is mutual with the players and Gary Bettman, the owners' boss.

Detroit Red Wings winger Dan Cleary seconded Horcoff's opinion about the NHL trying to make players pull away from Fehr.

"I've been on calls with 200 players, and trust me, it's (the support of Fehr) overwhelming. You're going to have a few players saying 'let's just get a deal signed,' " but Don is as transparent as it gets. This guy is letting us know exactly what's going on," Cleary told Detroit writers.

Fehr thought the two sides were close to an agreement Thursday in New York, and a short time later, a fuming Bettman not only rained on Fehr's parade, he brought out the lightning and thunder and hailstones.

He railed that the union head was full of hokey, intimating that Fehr painting a rosy picture was disingenuous and that everything's off the table now because they wanted a simple yes or a no on five-year term on contracts and a 10-year CBA, while the players wanted to have some give-and-take even though Bettman's right-hand man Bill Daly said "it was a hill to die on."

Horcoff still thinks we'll have a truncated NHL schedule, but he's a glass half-full guy. Any day now, the NHL will probably cancel games through the rest of December, which means we're into the New Year. In 1994-95, the two sides settled on Jan. 9 and play started Jan. 20 with 48 games, so there's still time, but the clock's ticking furiously.

"There's no new plan. Everything's on hold," said Horcoff, who was going on a rank-and-file conference call Friday afternoon with Fehr.

"I know things ended badly yesterday (Thursday) but there really was progress," said Horcoff.

"The first night we met (players and owners with Fehr and Bettman as spectators), there was optimism but there weren't any negotiations," said Horcoff. "But when the actual negotiations started, they gave us an ultimatum on the limits on contracts. A yes or a no. The life of a players' contract? There has to be some negotiation on that ... only five per cent variation (salary) from year to year on a five-year contract (or seven if a team signs their own free-agent)? That's crazy. That would eliminate the middle-class (NHL player)."

"The star players are going to get the best of this: the most money and the longest contracts and their salaries would be maxed out. You're not getting Sidney Crosby for a cap hit of \$7 million. You're going to get him for the max cap hit of \$12 million (a year)," said Horcoff. "That would take away (dollars on the cap) from the middle class. They (NHL management) are going to say if Sidney Crosby gets five years or seven years, then what about a third-liner? Then he should only get two years or three years max?"

"That's too short."

Right now, it's two kids at a schoolyard playground both wanting the slide, with a lot of pushing and shoving going on.

"This is very frustrating. Just find some middle ground," said Horcoff.

"There's room to come back to us and get this thing solved."

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 12.08.2012

646018 Edmonton Oilers

Cherry says he's never seen NHL commish 'so livid' in wake of dashed talks

The Canadian Press

TORONTO - Don Cherry's never seen Gary Bettman like this before.

The Hockey Night in Canada commentator took to Twitter on Thursday night to comment on the NHL commissioner's heated news conference in New York City.

"I have known Gary Bettman since he was named commissioner," said Cherry. "I have never seen him so livid as he was tonight at the press conference.

"He was almost shaking. That was no act."

Bettman held the conference after two days of intense but optimistic negotiations with the NHL Players' Association fell apart.

Union head Donald Fehr held a news conference in the early evening when he said the NHLPA had tabled an offer that he felt made real progress to ending the 82-day old lockout.

Minutes later, Fehr spoke to the assembled media again, saying the owners had rejected the offer.

Bettman then held a third news conference where he explained the NHL's reasons for turning down the NHLPA's offer and took some shots at his union counterpart.

Cherry theorized on Twitter as to what happened with the owners behind the scene.

"There were owners who I'll call doves who were against the hawks. The hawks said ok we'll do it your way and the doves put an extra 100 million on the table and when the association said ok but... The doves turned into hawks themselves," said Cherry. "I believe the hardliners said to the doves ok we did it your way and the association thinks we are weak..

"Now we'll do it our way...."

The former Boston Bruins coach then added: "Looks like I will see a lot more of Marlies, Junior and Minor Midget games this year."

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646019 Edmonton Oilers

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins improved at even strength, gets "A" grade in Oklahoma City

David Staples

RNH has done well on power play, but can still do more ...

centres.okc.20games.esRyan Nugent-Hopkins, A: It's hard to assess how much RNH has improved over last season, given that in the American Hockey League he's still got excellent quality of teammates, but his quality of competition has dropped off the cliff compared to last season.

That said, RNH has played excellent hockey at even strength and been even better on the power play. He has chipped in on 70 chances at even strength and made mistakes on just 25 chances against. If a centre is doing his job, he's chipping in on at least a few chances per game, and making mistakes on about half that many. RNH is the only OKC centre meeting that test at even strength, and he's passing it with fly colours.

By eye, I see a bit more defensive competence and awareness this season.

On the attack, only Justin Schultz has been in on more power play scoring chances, 59, compared to RNH, 56. Jordan Eberle has also been in on 56.

RNH has combined fairly well with Schultz on the power play, though RNH could still do better to find ways to set up his wingmen Eberle and especially Taylor Hall on one-timers. Perhaps RNH will have to set up with the puck more towards the point, or attack more often towards the centre of the ice, for that to happen.

In basketball parlance, when you're attacking a zone defence — which is what you see on the penalty kill in hockey — you need to "turn yourself into a shooter," draw defenders towards you by faking a shot or driving into the zone towards the net. That opens up space for other shooters.

RNH has the shot and skill to both shoot and fake shots more, and to also drive and attack the net, or drive and dish. He's been a bit too passive, a bit

too unselfish, passing the puck off to Justin Schultz, which no doubt is a tempting thing to do, given Schultz's talent.

The best plan, I suspect, would be for RNH to change spots with Hall, for him to create from beside or behind the net in the low post a la Wayne Gretzky. Perhaps he could set up one-timers for Hall and Eberle that way. The team would have exquisite puckhandlers setting up the shooters from both high (Schultz) and low (Nugent-Hopkins). Shifting RNH down low would also put Hall in a better spot to unleash his excellent shot, so this could solve two problems at once on the power play.

okc.20.specialteams

Chris VandeVelde, C: He's moved a bit ahead of Lander on the depth chart mainly because of his physical play. He has a bit of impact on the attack through his hitting, but his puck skills aren't at an NHL level. Might be the Oilers fourth line centre if the season ever gets under way, though Eric Belanger did well in that role at the end of last season.

Mark Arcobello, C: He's small, fast, somewhat skilled, decent shot, good head for the game. Whenever RNH leaves OKC, he will be the top line centre and will start putting up the points. He brings a lot, but not so much that it's apparent where he would fit in on an NHL team.

Anton Lander, C-: He's looked better as of late, but it's becoming clear that the offensive play for him to be even a third-line centre in the NHL isn't there. He lacks skill, creativity and confidence with the puck. He's OK on defence, but needs to play a more robust hitting game all over the ice.

Tanner House, D+: The Lennart Petrell of the OKC Barons, solid defence, no offence. He and VandeVelde have been OK on the penalty kill, but nowhere near excellent. In fact, the unit of Lander and Magnus Paajarvi may get the job done better.

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646020 Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton Oilers defenceman Corey Potter returns home for pending birth

By Derek Van Diest

EDMONTON - Corey Potter's tenure in Austria has come to an end.

The Edmonton Oilers defenceman left the Vienna Capitals earlier this week to be with his pregnant wife, who is due in mid-December.

Potter, a Lansing, Michigan native, played 17 games with the Capitals this season, scoring a goal and adding three assists with 10 penalty minutes and a minus-two rating.

"I'm looking forward to being back with my family and to the birth of our first child, we are all very happy," Potter told an Austrian website. "I liked it very much in Vienna. The team is great, the environment and the Capitals fans are great. It's a great city. If the lockout continues or the entire NHL season is wiped out, I'll think about my next steps and can envision a return to Vienna."

Potter, 28, was one of the first players to sign with a European team due to the NHL lockout. In 62 games last year, he scored four goals and added 17 assists for the Oilers.

"I have nothing but good things to say about my experience," he said. "I would definitely like to come back."

Potter signed a two-year, \$1.55-million extension with the Oilers prior to the lockout. This season would have been the first year of his deal.

Following Potter to Austria was Sam Gagner, who is starting to finding his game with Klagenfurter AC of the Erste Bank Ice Hockey League.

Gagner, who was joined by Andrew Cogliano in Klagenfurter, has eight goals and seven assists in 15 games this season.

On Friday, Gagner scored a goal in a 4-2 loss to the Graz 99ers. He added a goal and picked up an assist in a 4-2 win over the Vienna Capitals last Sunday.

Ales Hemsky is also in a scoring groove, leading his hometown club CSOB Pojistovna Pardubice in scoring, in the Czech Republic Extraliga.

The Oilers winger has 14 goals and 17 assists in 24 games this season.

On Friday, Hemsy was in on all three goals in a 3-1 win over HC Skoda Plzen. He also had a helper in 5-0 win Wednesday over Pirati Chomutov. Hemsy also scored a goal in an 8-4 loss to Ocelari Trinec last Sunday.

Ladislav Smid is also finding success in the Czech Republic, although the same can't be said of his club.

Smid has two goals and 12 assists in 22 games this season to lead Bili Tygri Liberec in defensive scoring. However, his team is at the bottom of the 15-team Czech Extraliga and lost all three games they played this week.

Liberec fell 2-1 to Rytiri Kladno on Sunday, 2-1 to Sparta Prague Tuesday and fell 2-1 to Ceske Budejovice in overtime on Friday.

Meanwhile, in Russia, Nail Yakupov has still to get off the mark since returning from the Subway Super Series in mid-November.

Yakupov has yet to score a goal since returning to Neftekhimik Nizhnekamsk after leading Russia to a series win over three CHL all-star teams.

Yakupov, who will captain the Russian entry in the upcoming World Junior Hockey Championships, has 10 goals and eight assists in 22 games this season.

He was kept off the scoreboard in Neftekhimik's last three games.

Neftekhimik defeated Sibir Novosibirski 2-0 on Friday, beat Metallurg Novokuznetsk 4-3 on Wednesday and lost to Lokomotiv Yaroslavl 3-1 last Sunday.

derek.vandiest@sunmedia.ca

twitter.com/SUNdvandiest

#### OILERS OVERSEAS

Nail Yakupov

Neftekhimik Nizhnekamsk, KHL, Russia

Has 10 goals and eight assists in 22 games so far this season.

Ladislav Smid

Bili Tygri Liberec, Czech Republic Extraliga

Two goals and 12 assists in 22 games this season. Leads the team in defensive scoring.

Ales Hemsy

CSOB Pojistovna Pardubice, Czech Republic Extraliga

Has 14 goals and 17 assists in 24 games so far this season.

Lennart Petrell

HIFK Helsinki, Finnish Elite League

Nine goals and no assists in 20 games this season.

Sam Gagner

Klagenfurter AC, Erste Bank Ice Hockey League, Austria

Eight goals and seven assists in 15 games.

#### OILERS IN OKC

Jordan Eberle

Twelve goals and 15 assists in 20 games.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins

Eight goals and 12 assists in 19 games.

Magnus Paajarvi

Two goals and 11 assists in 20 games.

Justin Schultz

Leads the team in scoring with 11 goals and 20 assists in 20 games.

Teemu Hartikainen

Six goals and 10 assists in 20 games.

Taylor Hall

Five goals and 11 assists in 16 games.

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 12.08.2012

646021 Edmonton Oilers

There will be NHL hockey this season: Edmonton Oilers Shawn Horcoff

By Derek Van Diest

Shawn Horcoff believes there will be NHL hockey this season.

Despite a breakdown in negotiations Thursday night in New York, the Edmonton Oilers captain feels the NHL and its players association are too close to an agreement to have it all fall apart at this point.

Horcoff was in the thick of negotiations this week trying to hammer out a deal that would save the season.

"I think both sides are closer to a deal than they were before on many issues," Horcoff said. "There isn't a lot of disparity. The problem is though, that the league is not willing to negotiate. It was a 'take our deal or we won't negotiate' type of thing.

"That was the most frustrating thing for me. We worked extensively on a proposal that we could bring back to the league, we moved towards them on the issues that were important to them and the issues that were important to us. But the fact they responded by taking everything off the table was really frustrating to us."

Talks broke off when the NHL rejected the players associations' counter-proposal on a new collective bargaining agreement.

In a bizarre series of events, Donald Fehr, the executive director of the NHLPA, held a news conference at a hotel in midtown Manhattan where the negotiations were taking place, and stated the two sides were close to a deal.

Minutes after wrapping up his news conference, Fehr returned to the podium announcing the NHL had rejected the players associations' latest offer via a voicemail and talks were off.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman then held a press conference of his own where he lambasted the players union and said the league's deal was off the table.

"Things are going to happen through the course of negotiations, both sides talk about some things then take them back," Horcoff said. "Whether or not everything is completely taken off the table remains to be seen.

"I still remain hopeful that a deal can be done. There was progress made and unfortunately things just didn't end the right way. A deal wasn't done but there definitely was progress made."

Earlier in the week, Bettman and Fehr stepped aside allowing a group of players – which included Horcoff – to negotiate directly with an ownership group.

Things appeared to be very positive following a long day of meetings Tuesday. They became tense Wednesday and fell apart Thursday.

"We made a lot of progress," Horcoff said. "The make whole dollars we are a lot closer on, the revenue sharing we're a lot closer on. The biggest issues are transition payments, the length of the CBA term, contract terms and variation of player contracts.

"Those are the areas that we need to find some common ground on. It's unfortunate though, that in those areas the league's position is that they want us to come their way on those four things and they'll come our way on some other things.

"The problem is that those are four major things that concern us also. It's hard for us to say, we'll give you everything that you want, because those other things don't really mean as much in the big picture of a deal."

The two sides seem to have come to an agreement on the 'make whole' issue, which would cover existing contracts.

However, the players association was against the proposed five-year contract limits with a 5% variance limit on year-to-year salary.

They also were against the 10-year CBA term proposed by the league, instead offering an eight-year team with an opt-out option after six.

As far as the league was concerned, their offer was all part of a packaged deal and specific details of it were not up for negotiation.

"When they say take the whole offer or leave it, that's just unacceptable for us," Horcoff said. "We have a responsibility to our 700-plus players in the league. We also have a responsibility to the players that will be coming into the league and the CBA will be the framework where they have to negotiate their deals on. We want to protect bargaining rights and contract rights of future players and that's why those negotiated points are important to us."

Like many tuning into Bettman's news conference Thursday, Horcoff was surprised at the commissioner's reaction to the counter-offer made by the players.

Horcoff hopes cooler heads will prevail in the following days and the two sides can get back to the negotiating table.

The two sides are running out of time to try and salvage a semblance of a season.

"For me it looks like we're on the road to getting a deal, just the way things ended (Thursday) set us back a little bit," Horcoff said. "But I'm hoping we're able to get back to the table in the next couple of days and we'll see."

"I think if they had reviewed our proposal and negotiated back towards us like normal negotiations happen, perhaps we would be able to find some middle ground. If that was the case, we could probably still be meeting today to try and close out a deal."

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646022 Florida Panthers

Panthers buoyed by other arena events during lockout

Craig Davis,

There has always been irony in the Florida Panthers being named after an endangered cat clawing for survival in an adverse environment.

Before the NHL lockout began, Forbes speculated that losing this season to a work stoppage could drive the hockey Panthers to extinction.

There are plenty of voices in long-established hockey regions that would delight in the demise of Sun Belt franchises such as Florida and Tampa Bay.

Even with the Forbes list of franchise values showing a wide gulf between NHL haves and have-nots, the 24th-ranked Panthers are far from a toothless franchise.

A diversified parent company with a favorable arena deal gives the Panthers a fighting chance even as the lockout threatens to wipe out some of their best drawing games during the upcoming holidays.

"It is a different situation than an entity that is just a team and a pure tenant in a facility, that it makes some of its money from other events," Rick Horrow, host of Sportfolio on Bloomberg television and former director of the Miami Sports Authority, said of the Panthers.

While these are dark days for hockey in North America, there is plenty of activity at the BB&T Center with the likes of Aerosmith and the new Golden Boy Boxing Series helping fill the iceless void. Lady Gaga, Bocelli and Pink are coming to pack seats, even if the Panthers don't come back soon.

"We're an entertainment company. Hockey is our bread-and-butter, it's a big part of what we do. But concerts and shows are also very, very important," said Michael Yormark, president and COO of Sunrise Sports & Entertainment, which operates the Panthers and the Broward County-owned arena.

While the Toronto Maple Leafs topped Forbes' 2012 rankings of NHL franchises with an estimated value of \$1 billion, the Panthers were among the bottom-dwellers at \$170 million.

In the course of winning their first division title and reaching the playoffs for the first time in 12 years, the Panthers actually moved up two spots and increased in value by \$8 million.

Still, it is easy to point to Forbes' estimate that the team operated \$12 million in the red in 2011-12 as evidence of a failing franchise. It provides fodder for relocation and contraction chatter, but paints a misleading picture.

The Panthers show a loss year after year. But are they really hemorrhaging red ink?

Keep in mind, Forbes' numbers aren't the gospel. No one outside the organization knows the fiscal realities and how they fit with other components of the operation.

What is open to public scrutiny is the performance of the BB&T Center, which the SSE has run since 1998 through the sort of sweet deal that sports franchises tend to wrangle from government entities.

The ebb and flow of arena finances during the first 10 years, through 2008, are available for anyone to view on the county website in the auditor's report published in 2010 (Broward.org; search under auditor's reports).

During the initial decade, the Arena Operating Company turned a profit every year, generating a total net income of \$89.9 million. The AOC is the sister of the Panthers, both under the SSE.

Compare arena revenues with Forbes' annual estimates of the Panthers' finances, and most years the SSE comes out ahead. One extreme example, in 2006 the AOC had a profit of \$11.7 million while the Panthers lost \$1.9 million, leaving a handsome net gain of \$9.8 million for the organization.

The trend has continued in the years since 2008. Earlier this year, when the Panthers sought and won a \$7.7 million loan from Broward for arena renovations, the county auditor disclosed that the Panthers had netted \$117.4 million from the arena since it opened.

Note that annual income hasn't reached the lofty plateau to require the SSE to share a portion of profits with the county since the building's inaugural season.

The finances of the hockey operation are unknown, but it can be an advantage for teams to show losses — certainly in the league's negotiations with the players' union.

It is difficult to assess what the lockout is costing the Panthers. But the county audit shows that arena profits dipped to their low point of \$1.024 million when the 2004-05 season was lost to a lockout, and jumped to \$11.7 million the next year when the NHL returned.

The SSE needs hockey to come back as soon as possible, but the organization isn't withering in its absence.

"It's a bump in the road; that's all it is," Yormark said. "But we can take this challenge and turn it into a real opportunity to strengthen our business, to diversify and to really prepare ourselves so that when the team comes back we're much stronger."

"When you look at our business right now and the trends of our business, they're actually all going in the right direction."

The recently signed 10-year extension of the arena naming rights deal with BB&T reportedly will bring in another \$37 million.

Sun Sentinel LOADED: 12.08.2012

646023 Minnesota Wild

Scoggins: NHL stalemate might be deal-breaker, even for diehard fans

CHIP SCOGGINS

Lockout is splintering a fan base the NHL can't afford to chase away.

Josh Petzel coaches Pee Wee hockey in the suburbs, plays in four adult leagues, spends a boatload of money on hockey sticks and other equipment every year and has shared Wild season tickets the past five seasons.

The guy is a hockey nut. He's also fed up with the ongoing NHL lockout, so much so that he called his buddies and told them that he's no longer interested in splitting Wild tickets with them.

Instead, Petzel is using that money to remodel his kitchen and get new appliances.

"[The lockout] basically just emotionally depleted me on this situation," said Petzel, managing partner of Cara Irish Pubs.

He's not alone. Mendota Heights resident Tom Graves purchased Wild season tickets the first day they went on sale after the organization came into existence. Graves and his wife have talked about canceling them because they're frustrated by the labor stalemate and they've found other things to do. They go to movies, enjoy eating out and attend Gophers hockey games now.

"We're definitely finding things to fill our time," Graves said. "Honestly, it's kind of nice to have some money to use for other things, too."

Both Petzel and Graves admittedly are hockey diehards, which should scare the NHL and players union into resolving their differences pronto. If the diehards are moving on, imagine the indifference among fringe or casual fans who don't require much push to turn elsewhere. The NHL can't afford that.

Friday marked the lockout's 83rd day, and the two sides were forced to regroup after an amateurish display that elevated the anger level tenfold and revealed a maddening disconnect between the participants. It's both incomprehensible and comical that players union chief Donald Fehr would call a news conference Thursday night to declare an end to the lockout was near, only to return moments later and announce the league had pulled its proposal off the table by voice mail.

Neither side is free of blame. That's never the case in these labor situations, and this dispute has dissolved into a stare-down between two egomaniacs, Fehr and NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman, who is now overseeing his third lockout.

However they achieve compromise, the two sides are foolish if they think their sport is popular enough that fans will return in flocks, even in this self-described state of hockey. Hockey fans, by nature, are loyal and passionate. They shell out big bucks to buy replica jerseys and attend games on Tuesday night in the dead of winter. Though frustrated and angry now, those diehards likely will return once the puck drops again.

But unlike the NFL's recent lockout, the NHL is not embraced by the masses to the degree that it can expect to avoid substantial losses at the ticket office. They don't have a massive TV deal. Hockey doesn't lead "SportsCenter." Outside of Canada, the sport's popularity doesn't rank high on the pecking order.

It's almost as if the lockout has created an out-of-sight-out-of-mind attitude toward hockey. Anger eventually goes away. Indifference is harder to change.

"There's going to be people that will stay away because they're just turned off," Graves said. "There will be other people who will want to come back, too. For me, I'll probably come back, but I know it's not going to be with open arms and with as much excitement as I had."

Some NHL teams already have difficulty selling tickets and attracting fans under normal circumstances. Good luck doing so now. Even the Wild has struggled to fill Xcel Energy Center on a regular basis the past two seasons. And any momentum the Wild created among casual fans with the summer signings of Zach Parise and Ryan Suter has vanished. Remember those July 4 fireworks? Poof, gone.

Maybe that excitement will return if the season is salvaged. But maybe not. The league undoubtedly will go to great lengths to thank fans for their patience and loyalty. Those self-serving gestures will probably fall on deaf ears.

"I'm going to watch the games on TV and I'm going to continue to read everything I can," Petzel said. "But the conscious decision I'm going to make is, I'm not going to put one dollar towards it."

Shawn Larson held Wild season tickets since the team's second season but canceled them two weeks ago. He doesn't blame the Wild necessarily, but "it's the whole process that's disheartening. This is the second [lockout] we've been through as season ticket holders."

Larson loves hockey though, and he admits he'll eventually return.

"I don't want to totally say no because that will probably make me a hypocrite," he said. "But I can't tell you how long it will take."

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.08.2012

646024 Minnesota Wild

Minus Wild, St. Paul and businesses look to hold on

KEVIN DUCHSCHERE ,

A roundtable discussion Friday looked to aid small businesses stung by the 12-week revenue-sharing dispute between the NHL and the players' union.

With business down 25 percent since the NHL lockout began, owner Miyoko Omori of the Sakura restaurant in downtown St. Paul is relying on family members working long hours to ride things out.

"I just have to find a way to hold on tight," she said.

That was the theme of a roundtable discussion Friday to aid small businesses stung by the 12-week revenue-sharing dispute between the NHL and the players' union.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., and Nancy Libersky, district director for the Small Business Administration (SBA), said the agency is offering microloans as well as marketing and business advice, free of charge, to help businesses stay above water until the impasse breaks.

The discussion took place at the Eagle Street Grille, a favorite stop of hockey fans just across Kellogg Boulevard from Xcel Energy Center. Co-owners Kevin Geisen and Joe Kasel said they've had to lay off two-thirds of their staff and gross revenues are down by half from a typical fall when the Wild are playing.

Geisen said Eagle Street was built around catering to the arena and its seasonal hockey traffic. "We can't take a restaurant like this and change it around," he said.

Mayor Chris Coleman said local bars and restaurants lose an estimated \$900,000 for each game not played, based on an average of \$50 spent by the 18,000 fans who typically attend.

City leaders estimated that the economic hit to St. Paul was \$60 million in 2004-05, when a labor dispute led to the NHL season's cancellation.

This time it's tougher for laid-off workers to find other jobs, said Matt Kramer, president of the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce.

And it's not just the hospitality industry. Greg McLeod of Innovative Office Solutions, which supplies the Wild with products and services, said business is down 25 to 30 percent from what it was at this time last year.

Word from the players' union Thursday that an agreement on dollar figures had been reached raised hopes that the lockout was finally over. "We were pretty fired up," McLeod said.

Then those hopes were dashed when the NHL rejected the players' proposal. "All of a sudden they pulled the rug out," Geisen said.

Sakura, which Omori has owned since 1990, has become a favorite of Wild players as well as fans. Omori also caters four to five dinners for the Wild at the arena every year.

"She may have the only restaurant in the world that has menu items named after NHL players," Coleman said.

Omori is suffering from a double whammy that includes the shutdown of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, whose fall season at nearby Ordway Center has been canceled over another labor dispute.

"If things get any worse, I'm going to have to get more members of my family to work," Omori said.

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646025 Minnesota Wild

Still-optimistic Zach Parise: It is not 'Doomsday'

Posted by: Michael Russo

Zach Parise skated with a number of fellow locked-out NHLers down at his favorite place, the University of Minnesota, this morning and said the atmosphere amongst his brethren was "more confusion than anything else" after last night's turn of events in labor negotiations between the league and NHLPA.

Parise, who one day hopes to actually wear a Wild sweater, said the week was a "roller coaster."

"Everyone thought it was great the one day, and, of course there's going to be some back and forth and high-blood pressure during some of the exchanges. That's expected in any type of negotiation," Parise said by phone this afternoon. "But I think everyone was a little surprised how it turned out, seeing how it was going so well to where it is now."

Still Parise doesn't believe last night's breakdown means the end to a possible shortened season.

"I don't think it's as dramatic as everyone's trying to make it," Parise said. "I don't know the ins and outs of everything. But we have an agreement on a lot of things, I mean, a lot of things. There are still one or two things that need to be talked about, and in my eyes that's not a total derailment of a negotiation. I think people are being a little dramatic thinking this is Doomsday, which I don't believe."

It was clear to me talking to a handful of players this week that some are very nervous, are worried about their careers and think it's time they're given the opportunity to vote. I asked Parise if he feels there comes a point where the union should present the league's best offer to union membership for a vote.

"I'm not sure what our next step is," Parise said. "That's why you have a guy like Don [Fehr] to get us the best deal possible and a fair deal for everybody. So I'm not going to sit here and make it sound like I know how to negotiate because I don't. For a player to think they can actually negotiate with an owner and make a deal, that can't happen. That's why we have him and we'll find out what the next step will be."

"But I think people are overreacting."

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.08.2012

646026 Montreal Canadiens

Canadians finding ways to cope without hockey

SIMON HOUP

Julian Harris Brown would like to thank the NHL's owners and players for giving him his life back. For as long as he can remember, the 40-year-old professional musician has been a hockey nut, watching an average of three games a week during the regular season and easily twice that during the playoffs.

Even now, two months into the NHL lockout, he feels a vestigial urge, a barely resistible momentum on Saturday nights that "when 5:30 rolls around, I have to make dinner, so I can eat and watch the pre-game show," of CBC's Hockey Night in Canada broadcast .

Still, since the league suspended the new season in September, Brown has found he is healthier, more productive – and, frankly, is drinking less beer. The lack of hockey, he says, suddenly "frees you up" – in his case, for about 10 hours a week.

And there seems to be a growing army of Browns who are determined to leverage their new-found freedom into something unexpected.

Over the past two months, an audience the size of Edmonton has stopped watching TV at home on Saturday night. Viewership between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. ET is down year-over-year about 7.6 per cent, according to the ratings service BBM Canada. That represents a drop of roughly 800,000, to approximately 11.6 million viewers in an average minute.

Other hard evidence of behavioural changes sweeping the nation is hard to come by. In early November, the CEO of Molson-Coors predicted the lack of hockey would directly lead to a drop in the brewer's sales, but he had no proof yet. Last week, Labatt said in a statement only that, while the company was "anticipating an industry decrease," it was "still a bit early to report on the effect the lockout is having on sales."

But the wayward viewers, many of whom used the weekly games as an excuse to gather with friends, are finding community in other places: at the local pub, where they trash-talk each other over picks for their NFL pool rather than the hockey pool; at the sports bars, where the weekend program of choice is now U.S. college football; at the local rink, where hockey dads are spending longer hours with their sons because there's no rush to get home for Coach's Corner.

The change in viewing habits are felt most sharply by the CBC, which last year pulled in more than two million viewers on average for its 7 p.m. (ET) flagship edition of Hockey Night in Canada in October and November, making it the only regularly scheduled Saturday broadcast to land in the top 20 of weekly programs. (The CBC's western game, starting at 7 p.m. (PT), usually pulled between 700,000 and 1.25-million.) Denied fresh NHL games this year, the broadcaster aired old hockey matches for the past two months, which drew only about 10 per cent of its usual Saturday night audience; it is now airing holiday-themed programming in that time slot.

Roughly a million viewers have simply changed the channel: to CTV's weekly marathon of four successive repeat episodes of Big Bang Theory, which goosed the network's ratings about 90 per cent in the time slot; to U.S. stations, which are up about 11 per cent; and to Canadian specialty channels, which are together up 19 per cent.

But many are like Chris Faulds, a digital media sales manager and die-hard Leafs fan from Newmarket, Ont., who is spending more time at the local rink with his two boys. In previous years, he says, NHL games were "always, always, always on – Saturday nights, Tuesday nights, Wednesday nights – doesn't matter. Hockey is pretty much a staple in my household." But with his sons now 7 and 10, "luckily, there's been a lot of minor hockey this year – not just their games but their friends' games. We're spending more time at the arena. We'll just hang out and watch the other kids' games. It's something to fill that void."

Sean Gallagher, who works in advertising in Toronto, said his 10-year-old son used to read the sports pages while being driven to school in the morning. With no games, though, he's started reading other sections of the paper. Lately, he's even found himself interested in reports of young Canadians campaigning for social justice around the globe. "But I don't think it's necessarily going to lead to a better world," Gallagher chuckled.

The musician Brown, who has toured with Feist, Matthew Barber, Torquil Campbell and others, has had an especially fruitful lockout: he spent a recent Saturday evening mixing a new solo album he'd recorded. He's also been catching up on his reading – non-fiction books, mainly – and working his way through box sets of critically acclaimed TV shows such as HBO's riveting Treme and BBC's dark comedy The Thick of It .

Others have moved on more forcefully from hockey, still feeling burned by the season-killing lockout of 2004-05. "I never forgave them for that one, never got over that," said James K., a 36-year-old Ontario civil servant who was too shy to give his last name for publication. The scrapped season broke hockey's spell, which had held him for the first 28 years of his life. So even though he eventually continued organizing his office hockey pool, he was more devoted to a pair of NFL pools he'd started.

When this year's lockout became official, "I just kind of said: 'Fine, I've got other things I can do that are more important to me,'" he said recently. But as he spoke, he began to sound wistful, and acknowledged that it had been many months since he'd last spoken with one old friend who hadn't joined the football pools. The NHL pool, he said, "just gave us something to argue about, something in a day to bring a little excitement."

In an era of 24/7 cable sports, there's always another match somewhere in the world ready to woo wandering fans looking for a diversion. Scott Moore, the president of broadcasting at Rogers Media, whose parent company owns the Toronto Blue Jays as well as a large share of the Toronto Maple Leafs, preferred to look on the bright side. "I think one of the nice consequences is that, obviously with the trade the Blue Jays made, there was gonna be buzz anyway. But with a little less noise in the marketplace, the Jays are getting even more [attention], which is obviously great for us."

Even one division of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment Ltd., the company that owns the Leafs, is encouraging the consumption of other sports. "Our business is down marginally," acknowledged Rajani Kamath, a

spokesperson Real Sports Bar & Grill, the mammoth MLSE-owned beer-and-TV man cave on the northern rim of the Leafs' Air Canada Centre.

But the bar, she says, is proudly "sports agnostic," and therefore happy to feature whatever happens to be on TV on a Saturday night. "College football is huge," she said cheerily.

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646027 Montreal Canadiens

Habs players put smiles on faces of sick kids with hospital visit

By Brenda Branswell,

MONTREAL — From inside an isolation room in the oncology/hematology unit at the Montreal Children's Hospital, 11-year-old Claudia Martino beamed and bounced with excitement as she waved at her three afternoon visitors on the other side of the window pane.

"You look pretty happy to see us," Canadiens defenceman Josh Gorges said, talking to her on a phone.

Canadiens captain Brian Gionta and forward Erik Cole also took turns on the phone.

"You got a Zamboni ride? That's awesome," Gionta said, referring to a hockey game Claudia attended.

"We're going to give you a hat and stick. Is that OK?" said Cole, who joked she could use the stick "to fight off all the boys."

Their brief chat with Claudia, who is awaiting a bone-marrow transplant, was the first of many stops for a handful of Canadiens players who visited children at the hospital on Friday. It's an annual holiday season ritual for Canadiens players, only this year they organized a visit on their own because of the National Hockey League lockout.

The ongoing labour dispute wasn't something the players wanted to talk about with the media before they set off on their goodwill rounds.

Gionta pushed a shopping cart with hats, mini-sticks and photos that players signed for kids.

The players have been skating together and agreed that if the dispute dragged on they still wanted to do the hospital visit, Gionta said. Mathieu Darche, an unsigned former Canadien, contacted the Children's "and obviously, we were all on board," Gionta said.

"A lot of the kids, especially around here, are huge hockey fans," the Canadiens captain added. "You want to come in and maybe brighten their day and take their mind off of some things that are going on in their life. ... For us, that's why we're here — to make them smile and to hopefully give them a little relief from what they're going through."

More hospital visits will follow on Monday when the Canadiens organization stages its annual event for the 48th consecutive year. Instead of players, members of the Canadiens management, coaching staff, alumni and RDS personalities will visit patients at the Children's and Sainte-Justine hospitals along with furry orange mascot Youppi!

The players at the Children's didn't visit Sainte-Justine hospital on Friday but Gionta said: "We plan on making another visit."

They also cooked dinner for families last week at Ronald McDonald House, near Sainte-Justine hospital, he said, of an initiative started by Canadiens forward Colby Armstrong and his wife.

Canadiens defenceman Francis Bouillon was also at the Children's along with former Habs forward Steve Bégin.

The visit puts things in perspective, Gorges said.

"Obviously, we're not happy the situation we're in," the defenceman said. "We'd love to be playing hockey ... but today's an eye-opener."

"There's a lot of people that are suffering a lot more than we are," Gorges said, adding the players hoped to bring some laughter, smiles and see some excited children's faces.

"Right now, that's more important than playing hockey."

Cole, a father of two, said: "You feel for the families and you really count your blessings when you get home."

Cole, Gionta and Gorges also stopped by to see Los Angeles Kings fan Jonathan Caiola, 12.

"We didn't talk much, but it was good meeting them," he said.

Jonathan, who is in Grade 7, plays peewee hockey and says Carey Price is his favourite Canadiens player.

It's a nice experience to meet the players, his mother Rosie Ippolito said.

"It's amazing what they do for the kids," she added. "And it's just absolutely great to take the time to come and see them."

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646028 New Jersey Devils

No Fehr? No Deal, Say the N.H.L. Players

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

The lockout is in its 84th day, and there will be no resolution, according to the players, without the union head Donald Fehr being part of the negotiations.

There was optimism earlier this week to save the season when some owners met with a group of players without Fehr or other union staff members present. Shortly after those talks ended, however, the players told the owners that all future meetings must include union leadership.

The owners told the players that bringing Fehr back "could be a deal breaker," according to Ron Hainsey, a Winnipeg defenseman.

Players responded by ending the meetings early Thursday morning after an all-night session.

"If they're unwilling to meet without our leadership, we've got a problem, because we literally cannot close the deal without them for a number of reasons, legal and otherwise," Hainsey said Friday. "It leads you to believe that you'll have a very difficult time reaching a deal at all."

The long, tense negotiating session at a Midtown Manhattan hotel that began Wednesday was the turning point when optimism for a season-saving settlement turned to rancor.

The talks blew up when Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly left a voice mail message rejecting the union offer, even as Fehr was telling reporters that the sides had reached agreement on several key points.

There was no contact between the league and the union Friday.

Hainsey said players were making informational phone calls to union membership before discussing the union's next step.

"The reaction from the players has been pretty strong," he said.

On Tuesday, meetings were held by mutual agreement without Commissioner Gary Bettman and Fehr. The players were accompanied only by Steve Fehr, the union's special counsel, with the league represented by Daly and six owners.

It was an arrangement Bettman had requested.

"It was just players talking to owners, and Steve Fehr and Bill Daly were in there but not engaging, just taking notes," Hainsey said.

The arrangement, which produced what Steve Fehr called "our best day so far," remained in place when talks resumed Wednesday afternoon.

The negotiations grew tense, and at one point the Bruins owner Jeremy Jacobs threatened to walk out.

"There was more pressure for more and more meetings going faster and faster, with a smaller group of owners and a smaller group of players," Hainsey said.

Daly, owners, Steve Fehr and players were seen dashing upstairs and downstairs every 10 to 15 minutes. Donald Fehr was still sidelined.

Finally, late Thursday night, the owners' delegation knocked on the union's caucus-room door and asked for another brief meeting. Hainsey and a small group of players agreed to meet the owners, and the Fehr brothers approved.

"The players there and everyone made the decision that we were authorized to go in and listen to what was said, and come back and repeat it," Hainsey said.

Hainsey said that in the three-minute meeting the owners outlined a point in their pension offer. He said he informed the owners twice that the players were authorized only to listen and take the information back to their caucus room.

The players returned to their caucus room and decided it was time to call in leadership, including Donald Fehr, Hainsey said.

"We then went upstairs to inform them that we were willing to talk to them with our entire staff, and that's when we were told that could be a deal breaker," Hainsey said.

Hainsey declined to say which owner said the presence of Fehr could be a deal breaker, but Hainsey noted that the statement was made soon after the players had met alone with the owners. At the time four owners were involved in the talk: Jacobs, Murray Edwards of Calgary, Ron Burkle of Pittsburgh and Jeff Vinik of Tampa Bay.

In a statement Thursday, Burkle expressed surprise that "the Fehrs made a unilateral and 'nonnegotiable' decision" to return to the negotiating process.

"Not sure what 'deal breaker' means," Daly said via e-mail Friday when asked about Hainsey's account. "Our owners were very invested in the 'players/owners only' format and were disappointed in the unilateral change."

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646029 New Jersey Devils

Bettman Says Trust Is Not an Issue

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

Gary Bettman at a news conference in New York on Thursday. Lucas Jackson/Reuters Gary Bettman at a news conference in New York on Thursday.

Part two of the transcript from Commissioner Gary Bettman's news conference Thursday night, the question-and-answer session with reporters.

QUESTIONER: Gary, at this point does the union have to agree to those key three things you mentioned to get things started again?

GARY BETTMAN: Obviously if they want to meet, we will meet. But we're assuming they won't ask us to meet unless they have something to say that will move the process forward. And on the fundamental issues that Bill just articulated in very good detail, they know where we are.

QUESTIONER: Is trust an issue?

BETTMAN: No. And you know, that goes in the rhetoric of spinning and hype and everything else. There's no reason for anybody to suggest that trust is an issue. Listen, collective bargaining is hard stuff. And sometimes it's made even harder, depending on the goals and objectives that people have and organizations have. But the fact is, you have professionals in the room, and most importantly, be it the players or the owners or the people who work for the league and the clubs, you have people who love this game in the room and want to get it back on the ice as soon as possible.

QUESTIONER: Don told us the two sides were close. Had you heard that response from him before the voicemail was sent?

BETTMAN: Well, actually, that's not the first time he's said we're close when we weren't. I don't know why he did that, especially when he knew the parameters that had been laid out last night and what had evolved over the week. I find it almost incomprehensible that he did that.

BILL DALY: Especially in connection with the response we gave him, in which we made very, very clear what the parameters were. We went into

great detail as to how they didn't meet those parameters. And we both said, "We don't know where we go from here – we don't have any ideas with respect to next steps." They knew there was a major gulf between us, and yet they came down here and told you that we're close and could have a deal.

QUESTIONER: Had you heard that when you called him, Bill?

DALY: No, I actually didn't know about his press conference at the time I called and left a message for Steve Fehr. I went back and reported to our ownership and to Gary. And again, it was a simple equation from our perspective, because of the way the package had been presented.

QUESTIONER: When you say make-whole is off the table, is it just the amount that is off the table, or the concept itself that's off?

BETTMAN: The concept itself is off the table.

QUESTIONER: What do you have on the table right now?

BETTMAN: As a legal, technical matter, there are nine pages of issues, many, many, many of which are union demands that we have agreed to. So there has been collective bargaining on a whole host of things, but we've been unable to get the traction necessary to resolve the fundamental issues.

QUESTIONER: But what about the fundamental issues? Zero make-whole now, correct?

BETTMAN: You know what, I don't want to get into a public negotiation, you asked a question—

QUESTIONER: What are the facts, Gary?

BETTMAN: The facts are— excuse me?

QUESTIONER: Contracting.

BETTMAN: Player contracting, anything that we put on the table this week is off the table.

QUESTIONER: [Unintelligible]

DALY: In a number of sports leagues when you switch from one collective bargaining agreement to another, one economic system to another, you come up with mechanisms on which you can smooth the transition. The mechanism that we had proposed in this case, I think as everybody knows, is that while we're proposing a reduction in salary cap in 2012-13 to \$60 million, that we were going to allow clubs on a one-year basis to come into transition by having a cap of \$70.2 million, the cap that was set in June. That was our transition mechanism.

As Don suggested we haven't had specific discussions beyond our proposal on transition mechanisms. But they've made allusions to the fact in our last two proposals that we have to discuss those issues. And that one of the mechanisms they're interested in is compliance buyouts, in which you can buy out a player's contract, and it has existed under our recently expired C.B.A. All of that money which you pay those players to buy out those players would be outside the system, outside the share, outside the cap. That's more dollars that's coming from the clubs, going to the players, that's not counted in the system. For us that's a nonstarter, because we don't need it in this case.

Then this week for the first time we've heard about escrow limits, capping escrow. Another way to smooth the transition for players is not to take as much money out of their contracts that the escrow would require under our system. Again, it's money outside the system – it's a nonstarter. That's what are owners made clear to the players' association this week. They not only didn't accept that, they basically punted on the entire issue and said those are still open for discussion.

BETTMAN: Let me add something to that, just to put it in context. The make-whole, transition, those are basically the same concept. So we had the \$211 million on the table, we were looking at 55 percent – this was based on not having a damaged business – but we were at 55 percent, 52-plus percent, and then phasing down to 50-50, which is the fair and equitable deal that we've been seeking all along.

QUESTIONER: Did you tell the Board of Governors there was a drop-dead date for canceling the season?

BETTMAN: You know, I keep hearing that we have some magic date. You know what my magic date was? It was Oct. 11, when we should have opened the season with a new collective bargaining agreement. And the fact of the matter is, we'll get to a point, at that point we'll conclude we can't

have a season with integrity, and then we'll have to make a tough decision. I am certainly hoping that we don't get to that place. But when we do, we'll be there.

QUESTIONER: Have you set a date?

BETTMAN: We haven't set a date. We haven't. No, we have not set a date.

QUESTIONER: Why is five years the magic number for contracts?

DALY: Because that is what the owners said they wanted in return for walking away from the other player contracting issues, all of which they continued to think were important. So again, whether it was five years or six years or four years, it wasn't part of the package deal. So to cherry-pick that item and try to negotiate it from 10 to 8, which is where they are now, again, it wasn't the structure or framework on what we offered.

QUESTIONER: There must be something about that that has some value beyond six years or four years.

BETTMAN: Let's look at the following statistic: contracts six years or longer in 2004, one; currently, 90. The trend has gone completely in the wrong way, and that has a whole host of consequences to the game, and to the operation of our clubs.

QUESTIONER: Gary, do you think you can get a deal done amid all this distrust?

BETTMAN: I reject the notion that there's distrust. I don't even understand what that word means, O.K.? The fact of the matter is, what you're witnessing is very tough bargaining.

We kept giving and giving and giving. We made five different proposals. We did something completely unorthodox – we kept negotiating against ourselves. The union basically, up until recently where there started to be some movement, made the same proposal, dressed up a little differently, over and over and over again, and kept saying to all of you, "Oh look, we made a wonderful proposal." It was the same thing repackaged over and over again.

My concern is, and maybe the mistake was, we should have stopped negotiating against ourselves, because maybe the union's theory was that the owners didn't have the resolve – that would have been inconsistent with the history of this ownership group – but they didn't have the resolve, and that ultimately they keep giving and giving and giving and giving, and the union keeps taking and taking. At some point you've given as much and not more than you probably should have, and at some point you have to say this is the best that we can do, when you look at everything that it takes to run this league and run our clubs, and give the players their fair share.

QUESTIONER: Gary, why did you make the decision to not make yourself part of the negotiating group? What was your motivation?

BETTMAN: My motivation was really to put owners and players in the room, and the union came back and said, "Let's put in staff, and let's put in lots of people and lawyers." And we said, "Look, let's have owners and players – let them talk to each other." The other dynamic we had been using for almost five months had not worked. And the union then said, "Well at least we need one person in the room," and we said O.K., and so Steve wound up in the room. But we were trying to create a different dynamic.

That dynamic on Tuesday seemed to work very well. By Wednesday, almost inexplicably, the tone changed from the other side – can't tell you why – and that was it. We thought we were onto something good, based on at least the first day's result. And I tell you, the six owners that were in the room all felt good, that we were heading in the right direction, and gave a very optimistic report about the union to the owners, saying: "You know what? For the first time it really looks like we're getting traction."

QUESTIONER: [Unintelligible]

BETTMAN: Once we phase in, as I indicated, with the make-whole payments, we would then be 50-50 across the board, which we feel is fair. I'll tell you, there are some clubs who think the percentages should be a little bit different. But we believe that it's the fair thing to do, and we can, if we continue to grow the game, be in the right place with that.

QUESTIONER: Have you thought about the union decertifying?

BETTMAN: A lot has been written about decertification. For those of you who are actually writing about it, you almost might want to look into something called disclaimer, which is probably more likely to happen if it happens. The board was completely and thoroughly briefed on the subject on Wednesday. And we don't view it in the same way in terms of its impact

as apparently the union may. I don't know, we've never discussed it with the union. All we know is what you commentate about it. It's not something that we focus on the same way that you do.

QUESTIONER: Will you cancel more games at this point?

BETTMAN: Well, at some point. We've been tied up most of the week obviously. We've canceled through Dec. 14. As we get closer to the 14th, we'll have to take another look at the calendar.

QUESTIONER: You've put some things on the table. How does taking them off the table help?

BETTMAN: Because you put things on the table to get a response, to get a deal. And when you don't get a deal – if I justify to the owners, you know what, we gave up almost \$100 million on make-whole but we got a longer contract, so in effect we're buying more years. That's the way you try to sell these things internally. And then you don't get the years. It's not justifiable.

QUESTIONER: Gary how can any commissioner justify canceling two full seasons in a span of eight years in any major sport?

BETTMAN: First of all lockouts and strikes are something that has taken place in all sports. Baseball had eight consecutive work stoppages before they ushered in an era of labor peace. I believe the N.B.A. has had four work stoppages. Football has. I'm not happy about this, but I've got to play the hand that I'm dealt. And my responsibility is the long-term health of this game, and our franchises and our league.

And the fact of the matter is, I find it almost incomprehensible that the 82-game, save-the-season package wasn't accepted. We've been through four executive directors in the last eight years, and any collective bargaining is impacted by time, relationship – it's not just the people involved or even concept of trust, it's about getting a working relationship, and we haven't had the benefit of a long-term working relationship in our sport. That kind of instability isn't good for collective bargaining, isn't good for labor relations.

Am I unhappy about the prospect? You bet I am. It's absolutely something that torments me. But by the same token I have a long-term responsibility to this game and to the fans of the game to make sure we have a healthy product.

Too many people are forgetting where we were 10 years ago. And the fact is we didn't have a healthy game, and we had too many franchises that couldn't continue. We did what we had to do in 2004 to make it right, and we're focused with our owners on what we need to make this game healthy for our fans.

And for our players, incidentally. Our players have done very well under this collective bargaining agreement. There seems to be a tremendous amount of revisionist history about what happened eight years ago. We made what we believed was a fair agreement. The problem at the time was the union resisted a systemic change. That systemic change actually grew our game dramatically. An average player's salary went from \$1.4 million to \$2.4 million. And even if you include the rollback, it went from \$1.7 million to \$2.4 million.

So the players have been – and I think it's great – very well treated under this collective bargaining agreement. You look at our new arenas, you look at the way our teams travel, you look at the number of coaches, the number of trainers, the number of masseuses, the way we do training table, the hotels we stay at – this league has elevated itself to the highest level of first-class treatment, we believe, of our players, we hope of our fans, that it's ever seen. But there's a cost to doing that, and you need to have the right system to make it all work.

QUESTIONER: It seems you and the players are not that far apart on many issues. Fans can't see why you're having a hard time bridging that gap.

BETTMAN: That's why public coverage of collective bargaining is a real tough thing to do, because there are lots of nuances to our system and our collective bargaining. And as Bill said, this is a package, and everything fits together.

And when the union goes in and says, "We like this and this and this, and we'll take it and we're close together," but doesn't like this and this and this, which is important to us, that's why in effect you're further apart when somebody is trying to suggest you're closer than you are.

QUESTIONER: Gary, the union asked you about bringing in mediators again. Have you given them a response?

BETTMAN: We're not interested in mediation. We went through it a week and a half ago. It was of no value because of the position of the parties.

When the mediators weren't available this week, we did what we felt was our only formal mediation in terms of trying to move the process forward, giving where we could.

It's an interesting question, because if we were so close, why did we need mediation?

QUESTIONER: [Unintelligible]

BETTMAN: I get this third-hand from following what all of you do. So the season is supposed to open Oct. 11, and the union says, "That's not the real date – it's really the beginning of November." So we then say we need to drop the puck on Nov. 2 to get an 82-game season without undue compression. And then we hear it's being said, "No, it's really Nov. 10." And then Nov. 10 comes and goes, and it's U.S. Thanksgiving. And then that comes and goes, "Well, it's gotta be December." And now I'm hearing our magic date is Jan. 1. As I told you before, my magic date is to start the season on time.

QUESTIONER: If it comes to a situation where you have to cancel the season.

BETTMAN: And I'm not going to do it without credibility. When it gets to the point where we can't play a season with integrity, with a representative schedule, then we'll be done.

QUESTIONER: Have you decided on a minimum number of games?

BETTMAN: No. If you go back in history, in '94-95 I think we played 48 games. I can't imagine wanting to play fewer than that.

QUESTIONER: Gary, you talked about the three important issues as being part of the package. If you were to move off of those, would it be fair to say you need the players to move off something else?

BETTMAN: That's why I said before when I was asked the question, if we move off of those, the things that we would move off of in other areas that are important to players would be unpalatable to them, and it wouldn't get us to a deal. It's easy to say, "Well, just keep negotiating and keep offering more and more and more and more." At some point, you have to be in a position to say: "This is what we need. This is what we need to leave, this is what we need to see gained, this is what our 30 clubs need to be competitive and healthy."

And if you don't have that, you have to make the tough judgment and the tough calls. because frankly, as difficult and as painful as this all is, having an agreement that doesn't work and takes us back to an era when the game wasn't healthy and the game on the ice didn't have the magnificence that it has now, is not something that we're prepared to go back to.

QUESTIONER: Gary, you said before that you're losing \$18 million to \$20 million a day. At what point does it become a fight not really worth fighting because of the money that you're losing?

BETTMAN: We're losing \$18 million to \$20 million a day in gross revenues. Players are losing \$8 million to \$10 million a day in player salaries. It would have been better if we made the deal last August, or last June, or last February. But we didn't.

We are where we are, as horrible as it is.

QUESTIONER: Gary, is there concern that if you don't close here, there are franchises in jeopardy?

BETTMAN: My bigger concern is that if we make the wrong deal here, there are more franchises in jeopardy.

Thank you.

New York Times LOADED: 12.08.2012

646030 New Jersey Devils

At News Conference, Bettman Says He Is Disappointed

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

About an hour after rejecting the latest players' association proposal Thursday night in Manhattan, Commissioner Gary Bettman gave his longest news conference of the N.H.L. lockout to explain the owners' position in the

stalled labor talks and why they were so upset with the union and its executive director, Donald Fehr. The following is the first of a two-part blog post that provides a full transcript of what Bettman and the deputy commissioner, Bill Daly, told reporters.

GARY BETTMAN: This for me has been a week that has been if nothing else an emotional roller coaster. We had put in place a process that we hoped would move things along after having tried everything else, whether it was big groups, small groups, mediation, and that was to have owners and players meet. That happened on Tuesday.

And the sense that was reported to me was there was a great deal of optimism, good communication and hope. We reported that to the Board of Governors on Wednesday, and that sense of optimism, though, was something that almost inexplicably disappeared Wednesday afternoon when the four owners returned to the bargaining process. We're at a loss to explain what happened, but things were not of the same tone as they had been on Tuesday.

Nevertheless, the owners decided to try and continue to do everything possible to make a new collective bargaining agreement.

The key for all of us, particularly the owners but everybody with the league associated with the game, was to have a long-term agreement — that's what our fans deserve, that's what the game deserves, that's what the players deserve, and that's what all of our business partners deserve. And that's something we wanted to achieve with a system that would work appropriately and would continue to enable us to have great competitive balance and grow the game.

With that view in mind, the owners, particularly the four new ones that joined us — Ron Burkle, Jeff Vinik, Mark Chipman and Larry Tanenbaum, in addition to joining Murray Edwards and Jeremy Jacobs — they wanted to push ahead and do something bold. And so what they did, among other things, was put virtually a new \$100 million on the table Wednesday night in the hope that would help show that we wanted to get back to play, which we want to do as quickly as possible.

The union's response was shockingly silent, so to speak, in terms of reaction. There was almost no direct reaction — it was, "Thank you, we'll take \$100 million, an approximate \$100 million." The owners were beside themselves — some of them I had never seen that emotional. They said they don't know what happened, but this process is over — clearly the union doesn't want to make a deal.

So they went back and reported that to the players, and the player reaction was: "Well, don't leave — let's see if we can get back on track. Let's take an hour. Let's have cooler heads prevail."

It was in that context that once again the owners said: "We're going to make another bold move — [turns to Bill Daly and says, "If I get any of this wrong tell me, because you were in the room and I wasn't] — we're going to give up some of the things that are important to us, such as in the player contract area. But we're going to tell you the things that are vitally important to us that we need to have. And that was in response to the players telling us that the pension plan, the defined benefit pension plan that they were seeking, was now the key element.

Now earlier in the negotiations, we were told that the make-whole was the key element — fix the make-whole, and we'll have a deal. So we addressed the make-whole, and we didn't have a deal. Then it was player contracting, and we made some dramatic moves on player contracting, and that turned out not to be the key to the negotiation. So now it was the pension.

And the owners, in light of what happened with the \$100 million, said: "You know what? We're going to tell you the three or four things that we need" — and Bill can take you through those if you want — "and we need you to give us those things the way we've asked for them, because we've given up a lot of other things. And if you do that, then we'll get your pension done. There's a lot to work out, but we'll figure out how to do that, because we know now that's important to you."

And so last night, and again this morning, it was reiterated that we needed to have those key elements. We don't need movement in those key elements — we needed those key elements, because that was as far as we could go in light of everything else we had put on the table, and in light of everything else we took off the table.

So today, we were expecting an answer, a yes or a no. And our instruction from ownership was, if you get the yes, we can proceed and try and get the pension wrapped up and do the other things — and if the answer was no, then there was no point in continuing the discussions. We were told we

would get together at noon, 2, 4 – anyway, at 5 or 6 o'clock, Bill and Bob Battersman went over to find out whether or not it was yes or no. It wasn't intended to be a negotiating session. We would then come back together if the answer was yes. And the answer wasn't yes.

The take or give or bottom line on all this is, it appears that the union is suggesting because we made substantial movements in certain areas, that we're close to a deal. But those moves were contingent on the union specifically agreeing on other things, which, while the union may have move toward, didn't agree to.

This collective bargaining agreement is a total package, O.K.? Dollars are one element; the way the system works, player contracting, is another element. We haven't even yet discussed transitional rules, which has a cross component as well. The characterization that I just heard transmitted to us, that we were close, that reminds me of the last time the union said we were close, and we were a billion dollars apart. I'm not sure that spinning us all into an emotional frenzy over "Maybe we're close, and we may be playing hockey tomorrow" – it's terribly unfair to our fans, and it's unfair to this process.

We're going to take a deep breath and look back at where we are and what needs to be accomplished. But we have moved dramatically. We are proposing a long-term system that will pay players billions and billions of dollars over its term. But we have to have a system that works too. It's all part of the package.

I am disappointed beyond belief that we are where we are tonight, and we're going to have to take a deep breath and try to regroup.

One of the things that Bill informed the union of is that the things that we added to the table this week are now off the table. And as I told the union weeks ago, I was under increasing pressure to get the make-whole off the table. If you remember correctly, the make-whole came at our attempt to save an 82-game season back in early November, and that offer was given virtually no consideration, and lapsed. It was our best offer, it was the best that we could do, and then we tried to stretch a little more. Sometimes you feel like you're chasing your tail in this process, but we so much wanted to play, we went even further than we should have. And when it didn't get the right response I started hearing from the clubs, "Why is make-whole still on the table?" And I told the union I was under increasing pressure to take it off, but that I wasn't going to do that because I wanted to do everything possible to try and keep this process going to try and get to a deal.

[To Daly] Is there anything you'd like to add?

BILL DALY: I think this whole week has been about the package deal, the package process. We, the owners went in on Tuesday, it was a very healthy dialogue, good discussions, great energy in the room. Steve indicated on Tuesday night it was probably our best day of negotiation. We heard what was important to the players. We had previously said we had made our best offer, but we wanted to get a deal done. But they said player contracting was very, very important to them, and equally important to us. But in the spirit of wanting to do a deal we walked away from unrestricted free agency, we walked away from salary arbitration, we walked away from the entry-level system. In the context of making sure the term limits on contracts was something that vitally important to ownership, and we needed the players to recognize that. Also in the context of labor peace and the increasing importance of labor peace given where we are in December today, our owners said the term of the C.B.A. is extremely, extremely important — the longer the term the better. And as part of the package deal we suggested a 10-year deal with an eight-year reopener.

And finally, although Don says quite rightly we haven't had a lot of discussion on transition issues, this week and perhaps last week popped up for the first time this concept of compliance buyouts, which is a lot of money outside the system, at least potentially a lot of money outside the system. And then this week, shockingly for the first time, escrow was raised as a compliance rule. Again, as soon as they raised their head we made it very clear across the table as part of the package deal, moving away from the player contracting issues that were important to the clubs, that those compliance issues had to be taken care of — that we're not going to have compliance buyouts, that we're not going to have limits on escrow.

And the other important thing, as Gary mentioned, to the players was the pension. We suggested if we figured everything else out the pension would go away. And then if we figured everything else we'd put more money in the make-whole, because they suggested that was important to them.

Our owners jumped the queue last night in order to jump-start the process, added more money on the make-whole provision, walked away from the contracting issues. We got a response that quite frankly was insulting to our

owners last night. They wanted to leave the room. The players asked them to stay. They considered that, went back to the players and said, "We'll stay, and we'll re-engage, if you'll agree to the three things that we say are important to us, which is: the term of the C.B.A., term limits on player contracts – which is the hill we will die on – and the compliance issues.

And what we got today, quite frankly and disappointingly, missed the mark in all three respects.

So for the union to suggest that somehow we're close is cherry-picking, and it's unfortunate.

GARY BETTMAN: One other thing before I take questions. Also late last night, the union informed us late last night that the format that had been created, and on Tuesday had given us our most productive day – owners, players, one person from staff in the room – they said that was over, and that was non-negotiable, that anybody from any side could be in the room, and we each choose who is going to be in the room for their own side. So we did it today, based on the fact that we were just looking for a simple yes or no, and we didn't feel the need to match lines, so to speak.

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646031 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout: Owners appear to want total victory

Rich Chere/

Since the 1994-95 NHL lockout, 2,120 regular-season matches, three All-Star games, one Winter Classic and an entire Stanley Cup playoffs have been canceled because of labor disputes.

If commissioner Gary Bettman's facts are accurate, the league and its 30 teams have lost \$1.1 billion in revenue this season (an average of \$19 million per day) because of a lockout that Friday reaches its 84th day.

It is likely that on Monday Bettman will cancel the remainder of games in December. So, having already gotten the players to accept a 50-50 split of revenues (down from 57-43 in the players' favor) in the last collective bargaining agreement (CBA), as well as other concessions, how lopsided do the owners want to make their victory?

The shocking turn of events on Thursday seems to answer that question. The owners are looking for a rout, holding firm to what deputy commissioner Bill Daly says are three key issues:

- A 10-year CBA with an opt-out after eight.
- Limits of five years on free-agent contracts (seven years for a team's own players), with a cap of 5 percent on salary raises or cuts.
- No compliance buyouts would be considered escrow limits. Teams would be able to buy out one player contract without it counting against the salary cap.

So what happened on Thursday, when Donald Fehr, executive director for the players association, held a news conference in which he said the players had given up so much that it almost surely would lead to a quick agreement?

"I don't know why he did that," Bettman said of Fehr. "I find it almost incomprehensible that he did that. Maybe (the NHLPA) thought we didn't have the resolve, which would be inconsistent with this ownership group."

Minutes after Fehr left the podium, the league rejected the players' proposal, and he had to come back to report the bad news.

The owners, of course, tried their own power play when they asked for meetings that did not involve Fehr. The players saw it as an effort to match labor-savvy owners against inexperienced players.

"We are not professional negotiators," goalie Ryan Miller said. "We as players didn't have the experience or authority to make a final deal."

So what now? Fehr is asking his membership the same. While everyone waits for more games to be canceled, there were suggestions that players might ask for a vote on the league's last offer, some of which Bettman now insists is off the table.

"Yeah, of course, (a vote) can happen," Senators captain Daniel Alfredsson told the Ottawa Sun.

"I hope it doesn't happen, because I don't think most of the players feel there is a deal to get done for us right now."

But will it get any better?

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646032 New Jersey Devils

NHL lockout hot topic: What's the next step for the NHL and NHLPA to try to solve the lockout?

Charles Curtis,

It feels as if the owners and players have tried just about everything to end the lockout. And none of it has appeared to have worked thus far.

In October, the NHLPA gave three proposals to the league. They met in undisclosed locations, released memos of their offers and asked federal mediators to help.

This past week, they tried a face-to-face with a group of players and six owners, which appeared to bring some optimism. Any and all progress was all dashed to pieces on Thursday in the span of an hour, starting with Donald Fehr's announcement the owners had rejected the NHLPA's offer and finishing with a fiery Gary Bettman news conference in which he said offers including "make whole" were off the table.

Once again, the idea of a "disclaimer of interest" has come up as the union's next step. ESPNNewYork's Katie Strang reported there could be a "serious discussion soon amongst the union" about that very subject.

It's time for you to get creative. What haven't the two sides tried yet that needs to be attempted before the season is lost for good? Is it time to try the decertification route that's been widely discussed? Weigh in below with your ideas.

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646033 New Jersey Devils

Third NHL lockout shows league needs a commissioner free from owners' control

By MARK EVERSON

Brooks on It was 20 years ago we first proposed the creation of an NHL commissioner. But not like this. Exactly not like this.

The, ahem, brainstorm came in the wake of the 11-day April 1992 players' strike. That was the one that the late, great Roger Neilson was blamed (along with Mark Messier's costly shorthanded foray, pilfered and converted for a vital Penguins' power play goal — not to forget Ron Francis from 80-feet) for keeping those Presidents' Trophy Rangers from ending The Drought at 52 years.

That suggestion came when John Ziegler was NHL president, about to be deposed for being caught by surprise by that short strike. Ziegler was succeeded by Gil Stein, whose good intentions immediately were negated and deposed by Hall of Fame overambition, while the NBA's Gary Bettman was virtually unknown in hockey circles.

The idea proposed here was that an NHL commissioner should be "The Decider", the tie-breaking third vote in a triumvirate with a president of the franchises and a union leader of the skating workers.

That Commissioner's sole duty, his mandate, would be to further the best interest of hockey — not just the interests of the franchisees, nor just those of the laborers. He would be "The Protector of The Puck". It would require the franchisees and the players to agree to submit to someone with irreproachable motives and judgement.

Well-aware then that the simple scheme was naive, idealistic and childish, it now looks even better, so right in hindsight — the NHL now into a third lockout, orchestrated by the man who curiously, immediately, accepted the new title of commissioner. But Bettman's mandate is from the franchisees — to whom he answers — to maximize profits and control costs, such as labor.

With current negotiations broken down without a restart date, that 20-year-old unimplemented blueprint is so obviously golden in hindsight that it ought to be the model for the future for this game, to prevent Hockey from remaining forever doomed to this vicious cycle of lockout, fan loss, lengthy recovery, followed by another lockout, alienating its fans on a too-regular basis.

In 1992, one candidate for our idea of a commissioner would have been the late, great referee John McCauley, who was climbing in the league's hierarchy until his untimely passing, years after the hateful loss of his eye to an angry fist outside MSG following the NHL's 1979 Challenge Cup defeat by the Soviets.

Today, there is no shortage of men who would be excellent candidates with John Davidson, player, broadcaster, management. Seen it all. Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux, Ken Dryden, all of whom know both sides of the NHL.

There are plenty of others who would be worthy, and most of all, trustworthy. The issue isn't finding a True Blue Protector of the Puck. The issue is ending this system of regular, cyclical suicide.

But no, why would the franchisees cede power to someone who wouldn't be beholden to them? Why? The third lockout — the third owners' Lockout, remember — of this stupid, destructive, combative non-system should be reason enough to reasonable men.

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646034 New York Rangers

CBA Breakdown: NHL, NHLPA both moved closer on main issues despite Gary Bettman's insistence they remain far apart

By Pat Leonard

The NHL and the players' association had seemed to draw close on most of the key financial and contractual issues this week before talks broke off and commissioner Gary Bettman said "anything that we put on the table this week is off the table."

It's somewhat of a moot point to compare the individual issues also considering the league's insistence that this is about a "package deal," and giving in some areas is contingent upon receiving concessions in others.

Still, take a look at how the league's Wednesday proposal compared to the union's response on Thursday, prior to their fallout on Broadway:

REVENUE SPLIT (\*Resolved\*) – split was 57% players, 43% owners in previous CBA

NHL: 50% owners, 50% players

UNION: 50% owners, 50% players

MAKE-WHOLE PROVISION (Nearing resolution) – money committed from owners to players to offset losses caused by reset to 50-50 split; NHL's highest offer had been \$211 prior to this week

NHL: \$300 million

UNION: "We have an agreement on what we call the transition payments, which came out of what the owners called the 'Make-Whole' proposal a number of weeks ago," Don Fehr said Thursday. "We believe that issue is or should be resolved." Union previously had wanted \$393 million so presumably backed off that number.

LENGTH OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT (Nearing resolution) – last agreement was five years, plus two extra years players opted into, for seven total

NHL: 10-year agreement, with a re-opener clause after Year Eight

UNION: Eight-year agreement, with a player opt-out option after Year Six  
LENGTH OF PLAYER CONTRACTS (Still far apart, but closer) – previously unlimited

NHL: Five years, but teams can re-sign own unrestricted free-agents for up to seven years

UNION: Eight years

CONTRACT VARIABILITY (Still apart, but nearing resolution) – refers to difference in player's salary year-to-year; previously, year's salary could decrease by no more than 50% of the lowest year's salary in the contract's first two years

NHL: Maximum 5% annual variance from initial year's salary

UNION: For contracts seven years or longer, the lowest year salary must be at least 25% of the contract's highest year salary. Also, Don Fehr: "We have made proposals for what we call a cap benefit recapture ... if the player does not perform in any years of a contract that he's otherwise fit to play, we re-compute what the cap benefit would (be) by averaging those years in, and then the club has that cap charge over the remaining years of the contract."

PLAYER PENSIONS (Tentatively resolved \*)

NHL: Content to address pensions once major issues of revenue and contracting rights are agreed upon.

FEHR: "We believe and we hope we have an agreement on the pension plan for the players, which will be funded out of player money," Don Fehr said. "We have an agreement on it. That's a good thing."

COMPLIANCE ISSUES (Nowhere close) – refers to compliance buyouts (teams allowed to buy out one player contract without that money counting against the salary cap) and escrow limits (player contributions rise or decrease depending on whether league hits or misses estimated revenue each season)

NHL: No compliance buyouts or escrow limits

UNION: Proposed compliance buyouts and escrow limits

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646035 New York Rangers

Rangers' Nash aggravates groin injury, leaves Swiss League

By LARRY BROOKS

Brooks on The Rangers' Rick Nash was on a Friday morning flight from Zurich to New York after re-aggravating a groin injury late last week while playing for HC Davos of the Swiss League, The Post has learned.

The groin issue, which had first sidelined Nash for three games late last month, is not believed serious. The winger is returning for "precautionary reasons," according to an individual with knowledge of the issue.

Nash, of course, has not yet played a game for the Rangers--you do remember the hockey Rangers?--after having been acquired from Columbus this summer for a package including Brandon Dubinsky, Artem Anisimov, Tim Erixon and a first-round draft choice.

The 28-year-old recorded 18 points (12-6) in 17 games for HC Davos while playing on a line with San Jose center Joe Thornton.

Derek Stepan (Finland) and Michael Del Zotto (Switzerland) are the other two Rangers playing in Europe while Carl Hagelin returned from Sweden after suffering a shoulder injury and Ryan McDonagh returned from a short stay in the KHL.

Nash's future intentions will be informed by the results of the exam on his groin that will be performed by Rangers team physicians.

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646036 New York Rangers

Nash to get groin checked

By LARRY BROOKS

Brooks on Perhaps one day in the not- too-distant future, Rick Nash actually will get to make his debut on Broadway as a Ranger.

When that time comes, No. 61 wants to ensure he's ready to go.

This is why the 28-year-old winger flew from Zurich to New York yesterday to have his groin checked by Rangers team physicians after aggravating a previous injury last weekend while playing for HC Davos of the Swiss League.

"It's purely precautionary, but we're taking the 'Better safe than sorry' approach," Joe Resnick, Nash's agent, told The Post. "There's nothing for anyone to be alarmed about."

Nash, who was acquired over the summer from Columbus for a bounty featuring Brandon Dubinsky, Artem Anisimov, Tim Erixon and a first-round draft pick, recorded 18 points (12 goals, six assists) in 17 games for HC Davos while playing on a unit with Sharks' center Joe Thornton. He re-aggravated the injury a week ago tonight in his second game back after having previously missed three in late November with a tender groin.

Under lockout rules imposed by the NHL, Nash cannot be treated by the Rangers' training staff though he can be examined — at his own cost — by club physicians.

"Once Rick sees the doctors, he'll decide whether to return [to Switzerland]," Resnick said. "It seems like we might not be too far away from a deal here on a CBA, so what everyone is hoping is that he can get onto the ice with the Rangers as soon as possible.

"I know everyone is frustrated with what's happened so far, and Rick certainly is. He wanted to come to New York to win the Cup.

"He can't wait to get going."

Derek Stepan [Finland] and Michael Del Zotto (Switzerland) are the only two Rangers currently playing in Europe. Carl Hagelin returned last month from Sweden after sustaining a minor shoulder injury while Ryan McDonagh also returned in November after a relatively short stay in Russia.

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646037 NHL

Beyond the smoke and noise, real disputes slowly getting solved

SEAN GORDON

The answer is: probably not, but it's complicated and things aren't necessarily as dire as they seem.

Recall, if you will, when the mad-as-hell NHL commissioner, Gary Bettman, stepped up to the podium, raged against the cupidity of the NHL Players' Association leadership and darkly announced the league's latest, best, and most generous offer was officially off the table.

That was Thursday. But the same thing happened Oct. 18.

And the offer back then – centred on a 50-50 revenue split and the drearily named make-whole provision – was withdrawn for all of about a week.

Back-channel discussions swiftly resumed, six weeks later no one's arguing about 50-50 anymore, and they're barely squabbling over make-whole.

Now the battleground has shifted to contracting rights, and oh what a skirmish it was in Manhattan this week.

There were purple faces, fingers jabbed into chests, zany plot twists aplenty – the podium even got its own Twitter account.

But let's face it, there's more heat than light being generated here, and past practice suggests it's worthwhile to look beyond the tactics and verbal thunder.

The same way the mid-October eruption was progress disguised as a setback, the fact the parties are now arguing modalities rather than philosophy – ie., they're talking not about whether to limit contracts, but how long a limit to stick on them – can plausibly be analyzed as a step forward.

So where does the puck bounce from here?

The air war will surely ramp up; you may soon hear ownership sources saying the players should be allowed to vote on their proposal, that the union leadership – chiefly, executive director Donald Fehr and his brother Steve – is irresponsibly leading the members astray.

Likewise, sources from the players' side may emerge in the next few days to say a vote should and will take place on decertifying the union and plunging a \$3.3-billion enterprise into legal terra incognita.

Some dissenting voices may pipe up, much speculation will ensue on what that says about solidarity.

No new talks are scheduled, and deputy NHL commissioner Bill Daly famously declared a proposed contract limit of five years is "the hill we will die on."

Okay, then.

Seeing as the last hill – the revenue split – now has an owners' flag flapping atop it, the league needs a new strategic objective, and limiting player income by restricting contract lengths has a certain logic to it.

But as a union source said "are we really going to drive over the cliff for this?"

The league isn't inclined to make any new concessions, but the general sense from the ownership side is they would rather not speed off the cliff.

The gap, after all, is narrowing: the NHL is demanding a maximum five-year term with no more than a five per cent variance between years, the players have countered with eight and their own, less punitive, proposal to attenuate so-called 'back-diving' contracts.

Management originally wanted a five- or six-year labour pact. The union countered with a proposal for four, and later signalled it would accept five.

Now the league insists on 10 years, and the union countered with eight (both proposals contain opt-out provisions for the final two years, similar to the last contract).

These should not be insurmountable differences.

It's farcical for Bettman to claim Don Fehr was being deliberately misleading when he suggested on Thursday a deal is at hand.

Of course it is, it's just that the NHLPA isn't willing to swallow the owners' proposal whole.

Which brings us to why.

Boundaries on contracting – even if they're more modest than the full-bore demands of two months ago regarding free agency, arbitration rights and entry-level deals – are toxic to the union for a simple reason: cap-defeating long-term deals are the high tide that floats all vessels in a hard-cap system.

As one NHLPA insider put it: "The NHL would turn into the NBA, where a few guys make the maximum and everyone else is making peanuts. We're not going to have much of a union if there's no middle class."

And yet, they're accepting it – to a point.

The players, who have already yielded on revenues, just don't see why they should also have to accept stricter contract rules – with comparatively little in return.

There's a sense on the NHLPA side the plan all along for the owners was to recoup the cash they were seeking via prorated salaries – Bettman's assertion the NHL needs to play at least 48 games this year, suggesting a January start, will merely feed it.

The other theory is the owners are trying to shove Fehr out of the picture – if you want to handicap their chances, pick a player at random and check him out in the social-media environment of your choice (spoiler alert: they still love Fehr).

The owners, for their part, clearly consider they've gone above and beyond all reasonable efforts – even going so far as to temporarily remove Bettman from the equation last week.

It makes sense, from their standpoint, to crank up the pressure on the union, winning on points is less satisfying than a knockout.

So will the union decertify? Maybe. Is this the final impasse? Doubtful.

At some point someone is going to have to take yes for an answer.

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646038 NHL

Proud hockey mom's campaign to ban bodychecking in minor hockey

ROY MacGREGOR

Her biggest hurdle, she says, is getting past the religion of hockey.

The game, she says, is today far removed from the sentimental shinny games of so many memories. There is far too much nostalgia, she says, for something that no longer exists.

"It's a no-brainer," Andrea Winarski says.

She proudly calls herself a "hockey mom." She believes she is part of a national movement of hockey moms – and, she claims, a great many of today's hockey dads – to make a fundamental change to the national winter sport that many will counter would effectively destroy the game.

They want an end to bodychecking.

The businesswoman from Markham, Ont., and mother of three fanatical minor-hockey players, has launched a Facebook petition that is aimed at convincing Hockey Canada and the various provincial and city minor organizations to bring an end to such body contact at all levels from bantam hockey (age 14) on down.

Winarski is aware of the volatility of such a suggestion. "You should see some of the comments on my Facebook," she says. "I've been called a p-u-s-s-y and a lot worse than that."

But she isn't backing down.

Her two boys, Liam, 10, and Aidan, 9, – a third child, Ava, 6, is in her third season of organized hockey – will soon be in peewee hockey, where bodychecking begins in most jurisdictions (Quebec raised the age to bantam level a few years back). There was so much talk, and apprehension, in the stands about what would happen when the boys were allowed to hit that Winarski decided to find out more about the topic.

"I honestly hadn't paid too much attention to the whole thing," she says, "but I thought I'd go online and find an article or two. I was absolutely blown away after 20 minutes – and flabbergasted that the pediatrics associations in Canada and America and the Mayo Clinic had all recommended that bodychecking be removed from peewee hockey as early as 2000, and absolutely nothing has been done."

Since then, Winarski has become a bit of an expert on the medical warnings about hard body contact at such young ages. Most recently, a study in the current Canadian Medical Association Journal found that various rule changes aimed at making the game safer for youngsters not only reduced the number of penalties in a game but reduced injuries by three to 12 times the current rate.

Principal researcher Michael Cusimano says such serious injuries as concussions are often the result of aggressive bodychecking and account for 15 per cent of all injuries to hockey players ages 9 to 16. In a startling statement, the researchers said up to one-quarter of players suffer concussions in a single season.

In the Toronto doctor's opinion, bodychecking should be banned from minor hockey for all age groups.

Emile Therien, past president of the Canada Safety Council, agrees. The injury factor in minor hockey has reached a point where, in Therien's opinion, "it's child abuse" not to act on it. Therien, who attended American college on a full hockey scholarship (and is the father of Chris Therien, who played 11 seasons in the NHL), says it was the medical profession that forced the hockey world to act on eye protection a generation ago.

"It was a crisis then," he recalls. "We did nothing until the doctors led the movement to have players wear shields."

The same thing will happen, Therien predicts, in the case of bodychecking and concussions unless hockey organizations take it upon themselves to act.

Bodychecking at the lower levels of the game is a question many organizations (most recently Calgary minor hockey) have mightily struggled with: If you take out body contact, is it still hockey? If you put it in late – in previous generations, there was no age set for the introduction of hitting – will players be able to learn the physical game?

Winarski argues today's game is not yesterday's game – and this important fact is usually absent from any discussion.

Those – mostly older males – who hold to the view that it is part of the game are remembering a game that is long gone, she says.

In past generations, she says, children would begin in organized hockey as late as 8 or 9; today they start at 4. They have superior training, much more ice time, play year-round and the game is far faster.

"The professional training from the professional leagues has filtered down to the kids," she says. "It's a different game."

And, she adds, different equipment.

"They wear 'Teflon' shoulder pads," she says. "When they hit, it's not the same as hitting in 1970, with your leather or cloth pads."

And finally, she says the game has changed in another, profound way: The scientific knowledge of concussions and their long-term impact on the brain. The younger the brain, scientists now say, the greater the danger.

For this reason, Winarski does not squarely blame Hockey Canada and its various organizations for inaction. "To be fair, the information is so new. It takes time to internalize it all and realize just what this is doing to the game."

She believes those who quickly dismiss her arguments and believe bodychecking must be maintained have not been paying attention to what science has been telling the hockey world.

"I get a lot of very angry knee-jerk reaction," Winarski says. "They haven't read the research. It's just 'Don't touch hockey! Don't touch hockey!'"

There are, intriguingly, any number of life-long hockey people – older males, specifically – who believe there is merit to her point.

The vast majority of youngsters – as high as 99 per cent – will never have any "career" in the game. Once they leave organized hockey for recreational hockey, bodychecking is banned anyway.

Children, they argue, would have more fun if they did not have to worry about getting hit hard and might stay longer in the game, instead of dropping off dramatically around bantam age. Enrolment in minor hockey would rise.

As for those who might go on in the game, the Swedes – Peter Forsberg, Borje Salming, Ulf Nilsson, Anders Hedberg, Daniel Alfredsson, Mats Sundin, Mats Naslund, Nicklas Lidstrom, to mention only a few – came up through hockey with no bodychecking until much later, and can hardly be described as wilting flowers when it comes to contact.

There are, of course, arguments in the opposite direction.

Ask most kids how they feel and they will say they like the hitting, often even if they have themselves been injured. Nothing in the game – no coach, no video – can teach a player to "keep your head up" better than the threat of being knocked off your skates. It is also how the game has always been played: a tough, physical, skilled game in which Canadians have taken their greatest pride.

"It's not an issue of bodychecking being in or out of hockey," Winarski says. "We just constantly hear from a minority of people who are uninformed and nostalgic about the way hockey was. There is a very serious silent majority out there that needs a voice."

"I get hockey. I know people think it's sacred. But the game has changed. It's a different game today. This is an issue of stewards of minors providing an unsafe playing environment."

"I mean, we know better."

Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.08.2012

646039 NHL

Duhatschek: Owners have only themselves to blame

ERIC DUHATSCHKEK

Whenever it ends – in a week or a month or a year – I am prepared, like Fox News on election day, to declare a winner in the NHL lockout without even seeing the final collective agreement.

The players will win.

The players will win because the players always win.

The players won in 1994-95, even if the consensus was they lost by surrendering to a punitive rookie salary cap and other major concessions.

The players won in 2004-05, even though the consensus was that by agreeing to a hard salary cap, they got clobbered by NHL commissioner Gary Bettman at the negotiating table.

The players will win because the minute the ink is dry on a new collective agreement, agents and general managers will find clever ways to circumvent the spirit and language of the new deal.

This is the unchanging way of the NHL world, where 30 teams annually compete for one prize. Team owners get frustrated by losing and eventually instruct the people who work for them to do whatever it takes to stop losing.

So you get a situation where, in the 1990s, the Boston Bruins discovered the loophole that killed that collective agreement. The Bruins – run by a notoriously tough bargainer, Harry Sinden – devised a complicated system of paying high-end entry-level players a series of A and B schedule bonuses that virtually quadrupled their salaries. Contracts for Sergei Samsonov and Joe Thornton became the model for other clubs to skirt a system that was supposed to keep salaries down in the early stages of every player's career.

In the 2000s, the Columbus Blue Jackets killed the entry-level system and all its prohibitive restrictions by signing Rick Nash to a second contract worth \$27-million (all currency U.S.) over five years, a practice that eventually brought riches to all the top players in that category.

The Detroit Red Wings started the process of signing players to long-term contracts (Johan Franzen, Henrik Zetterberg) to mitigate the effects of their annual salary-cap charge. Others hopped on that bandwagon until the New Jersey Devils gave Ilya Kovalchuk a 17-year deal two summers ago and the NHL said enough. The league kicked the contract back on the grounds that it was a blatant attempt to circumvent the salary cap. In many respects, that contract got the league to where it is today – stuck on an issue, contract length, that threatens to undermine the 2012-13 season.

The point is this: Whatever language Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly come up with in the next collective agreement, whatever restrictions they impose, whatever they do to regulate a system designed to keep the playing field relatively even, it won't matter.

Teams will find a way to get around them. They always have. They always will.

That's not going to stop Bettman and Daly from trying to plug the most costly and egregious loopholes. It's simply their way of trying to protect the owners from themselves, and the main reason Daly described contract term limits as "the hill we will die on" as negotiations ground to a halt again.

Long-term deals were a here-and-now style of contract that gained popularity over the past two summers and resulted in some curious imbalances – Christian Ehrhoff earning \$12-million last year from the Buffalo Sabres, James Wisniewski earning \$7-million from the Columbus Blue Jackets. If the NHL were playing this season, the second-highest paid player in the game (tied with three others) would be Sabres defenceman Tyler Myers, because the first year of a seven-year, \$38.7-million contract is valued at \$12-million.

The league saw how this practice of front-loading long-term contracts evolved in the past 24 months, how it skewed NHL payrolls, and wants it stopped.

In the end, though, all Daly can do is play the part of the Little Dutch Boy in these negotiations. He can plug all the holes in the dam gushing out cash to the players, but he can't anticipate where the next crack may develop, or how costly it will eventually be.

When the witching hour does finally arrive, some time after Jan. 15, there will be one more push for a deal, likely in private, likely between Daly and Steve Fehr, the No. 2 man in the National Hockey League Players' Association. Then it'll be a flip of the coin. It'll be 50-50. It could go either way. Deal or no deal.

In 1994-95, the two sides settled and played a moderately interesting 48-game season. It wasn't a perfect agreement, but the two sides salvaged 60 per cent of salaries and revenues, plus an undetermined amount of goodwill.

In 2004-05, the opposite occurred. The two sides failed to come to an agreement and a full year of salaries and revenues was lost.

Either way, the outcome will be unchanged. The players win. No matter how many Band-Aids the owners may slap on a new collective agreement, they'll start spending like a Kardashian at Christmas as soon as they get the green light.

And that's a prediction you can take to the bank.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.08.2012

646040 Ottawa Senators

The fight of his life

By Wayne Scanlan,

His friends and supporters will tell you that Chris Kushneriuk is in a "hockey fight," but this time it's not a routine dust-up in the school of hard knocks that is the ECHL.

Kushneriuk, a 25-year-old pro from Gloucester — he turns 26 on Christmas Eve — is in the fight of his life. In June, after finishing out the 2011-12 ECHL season with Bakersfield, Kushneriuk learned, to his horror, that the gnawing pain in his side was from testicular cancer, and not a routine case.

Hockey players live in constant pain, but the discomfort Kushneriuk had dismissed as just more bumps and bruises, was a disease now settling in to his liver and lymph nodes. In the span of six months, cancer took Kushneriuk on a journey that would test his will, reaffirm his devout religious beliefs, and today lead him to the Indiana University Cancer Center and the care of Dr. Lawrence Einhorn, best known for treating American cyclist Lance Armstrong's testicular cancer.

"I'm very rooted in my faith," Kushneriuk says by telephone from Indianapolis. "I think God has guided me to this place because it is the place I had to go to get taken care of, that's kind of why everything has happened the way it has."

'Everything' includes the fact a faith-based charity in Indianapolis, run by an oncology nurse, has helped set up Chris and his mother, Lise, at a furnished apartment near the treatment centre.

"I always appreciate the prayers, and the continued support coming in from everyone," he says.

The support for Kushneriuk is not only welcome, it is vital. To treat Chris' complicated case, his family felt he needed to receive a specialist's care in the U.S., at enormous expense. The total medical bill is expected to be in the range of \$250,000 — much higher if surgery is required. John's father, laid off from his government job and currently unemployed, sold all his stock investments to help pay about \$145,000 — "enough to get him in the door" of the hospital, John says.

With a bit of luck and a lot of generosity the "hockey family" will look after the rest. Kushneriuk's two ECHL clubs, the Bakersfield Condors and Wheeling Nailers, have both raised money to help Kushneriuk "Krush" cancer. In the Condors dressing room, where Chris would have been this season, his jersey hangs in his stall, a daily reminder of their teammate's battle. They haven't forgotten him in Wheeling, Pennsylvania, either, where Kushneriuk scored a Game 7 overtime winner in a second-round playoff series in 2011. His former Nailers teammates raised money on a game

night and set up a website to help the public help Chris. The site, [chriskushneriuk.org](http://chriskushneriuk.org), also updates supporters with the latest news involving Kushneriuk.

In Ottawa, friends are staging a Dec. 15 fundraiser for Kushneriuk at the Great Canadian Cabin restaurant on York Street in the ByWard Market. Among the items to be auctioned is a Robin Lehner goal stick signed by the entire Binghamton Senators team, Ottawa's AHL farm club.

To meet Chris is to like him. With curly brown hair and a toothy grin, the six-foot tall Kushneriuk lights up every room he enters. At Robert Morris University, Kushneriuk was captain of the Colonials, and student athlete of the year while majoring in business administration. Twice he was named the Division I team's "most inspirational player."

Playful, fun-loving, Chris was deviously making plans to head off with his mother and catch some RMU hockey action at Ohio State University Friday night.

"It's only a couple of hours away," Kushneriuk says, "and it's nice to go while I can. I'm going to be feeling pretty out of it for the next two months."

Spearheaded by RMU head coach Derek Schooley, the Colonials have been selling wrist bands to raise money for Chris' cancer fight. Schooley took time out from a recruiting trip to personally take a cheque to his former star forward, whom he recruited from Wayne State University in Michigan after their hockey program folded in 2008.

"Everything he does is going to be out-of-pocket right now," Schooley told College Hockey Inc. "Anything that people can do to help is really appreciated. He's a world-class human being, he was a three-year captain with us. If anyone is going to beat this, it's going to be him because of his fighting spirit."

As a boy growing up in Gloucester, Chris showed interest in hockey, baseball and soccer, but it wasn't until a growth spurt at 16 that he became fast enough to play hockey at a competitive level. An industrious player, he didn't make a AA team until midget, reaching the provincial championships as part of a Gloucester Rangers team coached by Darrell Campbell.

That led to major junior tryouts and a place in Tier II hockey with the Kanata Stallions and Orléans Blues.

Chris also played competitive ball, a star third baseman for the Ottawa Nepean Canadians in 2004-05. Coach Don Campbell remembers Chris as a "great kid" and talented enough to get a baseball scholarship, if he'd chosen that path.

"Ah, I fooled around when I played baseball, I didn't take it seriously enough," Kushneriuk says. "I'm actually planning on joining a men's league in Ottawa this summer, with a friend of mine."

First, there is the matter of stem cell treatments on Monday, in which his white cell count will be boosted, then harvested, to be reintroduced to his body following high-dose chemotherapy sessions. They start on Wednesday. Kushneriuk will likely require surgery, "the easy part," he says, in February.

In Indy, he trusts. The panic Kushneriuk experienced when his cancer was first diagnosed has evolved into a firm resolve that he's in the right place, in the hands of the calm Dr. Einhorn, a man credited with dramatically improving testicular cancer survival rates via surgical procedures in the 1970s.

While the treatment is foremost in his mind, Kushneriuk still thinks of hockey every day.

"I might not be the same player after I get back from all these treatments, but mentally I'll be stronger than I've ever been," he says. "The fire still burns in me to play hockey, it's not a passion I'm going to let go of."

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646041 Ottawa Senators

Players would vote to reject NHL's latest offer: Alfredsson

by Ken Warren

Ottawa Senators captain Daniel Alfredsson insists NHL players are still standing firmly behind players' association boss Donald Fehr.

Alfredsson believes that if a union-wide vote was held on whether to accept the NHL proposal that could have ended the lockout on Wednesday or Thursday, it would be soundly defeated.

Following the off-Broadway drama which took place Thursday night between Fehr and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, tensions were high. There have since been rumblings of dissent in the union ranks.

"Of course (a vote) could happen," Alfredsson said following Friday's practice with the Carleton University Ravens. "I hope it doesn't happen, because I don't think most players feel there is a deal to get done right now for us."

The process would work something like this: If there was deemed to be enough of an appetite for a vote, the players' executive board would hold a conference call with the player representatives from each team, who would, in turn, canvas the skaters on their individual teams about the possibility.

Yet, according to Alfredsson, "from where we are now, I can't see us being close to that point. We feel very strongly about some of the issues."

That opinion was shared by Chris Kelly, the former Senator who now plays for the Boston Bruins.

"At the end of the day, we want to get a fair deal and I'm sure if you asked every player, the majority of players in the union support the union 100 per cent," said Kelly.

"The process we've been doing, guys have stuck with it. Obviously we hired Donald Fehr for a reason: To get the best possible deal. Especially at a time like this, you've got to put faith in a guy like that because that's his job and ultimately why we hired him."

Kelly, however, conceded a measure of disappointment, given that expectations of a possible deal had risen so high earlier in the week.

"It has been a roller coaster of emotions," he said. "You think you're close to getting a deal done and things kind of fall apart, but that's the way the negotiations have gone on. Hopefully we can get a deal done. Everyone's trying to stay positive, even though right now it's pretty tough to do so."

If there's any consolation from the fireworks Thursday and the silence in talks Friday, it's that the sides have been there and done that before.

Alfredsson, who hasn't allowed himself to be carried away with the highs and lows of negotiations, says it's now clear that the optimism of earlier in the week was overstated — by both sides.

"I don't know if we are that close," he said. "The first few days of this week was encouraging for everybody and I think maybe we read too much into that. Both sides were pretty quiet about what was going on and when you saw what happened (Thursday), you can tell we're not that close. We're in a wait and see mode. Until they start up negotiations again, the frustration continues."

The Senators' captain believes it is possible that the NHL could take back its latest offer, as Bettman claimed the league would do. "I'm sure they mean it," he said. "Otherwise, why say it? That's also part of negotiations."

By the same token, Alfredsson says, the players' association could also take a step back from the concessions it made in its latest proposal.

One of the pivotal sticking points is the term limits on player contracts.

The NHL wants a five-year limit on all contracts, with only a five per cent variance in each year of the deal; aiming to avoid the lengthy, "back diving contracts," where players' salaries decline dramatically in the latter years. NHL vice president Bill Daly said Thursday that it's "the hill we will die on."

Alfredsson, however, says the union is also steadfast in its stance.

"As a player, I don't see us agreeing to that."

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646042 Ottawa Senators

Senators prospect Chris Driedger not scared of Ottawa's 'goalie graveyard'

By Aedan Helmer

Ottawa's reputation as a "goalie graveyard" — popularized by the colourful local radio personalities on Team 1200 — apparently hasn't travelled out to Western Canada.

"I haven't heard that phrase, but I can understand it," said 18-year-old Chris Driedger, named the WHL goaltender of the month for November after posting a stellar 1.87 GAA and .935 save percentage in nine starts and helping his Calgary Hitmen to a 10-2 run.

Driedger didn't have to expand on his understanding of the Senators' reputation for starting goaltenders whose careers have dwindled between the Ottawa pipes either due to age (Tom Barrasso, Dominik Hasek, Martin Gerber) or other reasons (Patrick Lalime, Ray Emery).

But he's doing his part to make the phrase obsolete, as the Senators now hold the rights to top goaltenders in three different leagues, with Driedger ranked second among WHL starters, fellow 18-year-old Francois Brassard ranked third among QMJHL starters, and 21-year-old Robin Lehner ranked second in the AHL.

For all the ink spilled over the hotly anticipated battle between the B-Sens tandem of Lehner and Ben Bishop for the right to back up veteran Craig Anderson, it could soon be rivalled by the battle shaping up between Sens rookie camp roomies Driedger and Brassard.

"Brassard is a great guy and a great goalie. In a couple of years, it should be a great battle for ice time," said Driedger, who came out on the winning end of a similar battle last season in a "healthy rivalry" with Brandon Glover, two years his senior.

"I learned a lot about what it's like to fight for a job. You're just forced to make sure you never get away from your game."

His game has already earned notice from Hockey Canada, with chief scout Kevin Prendergast saying both Driedger and Brassard should be thick in the mix at this time next year when Team Canada names its roster for the 2014 world juniors.

And while Driedger said he'd love to represent his country at junior hockey's highest level, his sights are set a little further into the future.

"With this new wave of young goalies in the NHL, there are the Jonathan Quicks and Carey Prices of the world coming in to be franchise players in their early 20s. Obviously, I'm looking pretty far ahead, but it would be an honour just to get (to the NHL) and that's the ultimate goal," said Driedger, who grew up idolizing Patrick Roy, but now models his cool, calm and collected game after Vancouver's Cory Schneider.

Senators goaltending coach Rick Wamsley is in contact with Driedger on a weekly basis, reinforcing some of the technical pointers he imparted on the youngster during his first rookie camp last summer.

And judging by Driedger's early impressions of that camp, he could be in for a good ride.

"Seeing the prospects the Senators have in the system was pretty unbelievable, and taking shots from the three first-rounders (from 2011, Mika Zibanejad, Stefan Noesen and Matt Puempel), it's going to be huge down the road. The Sens are going to be a team to watch because there's so many good young players already in the mix."

#### ICE CHIPS

LW Jakub Culek could be forgiven for holding a bit of a grudge against the Rimouski Oceanic. After playing in the pre-season for the B-Sens, Culek was returned to his old junior team in Rimouski, but there was no room on the roster for a player who filled both an import and an overage spot. Culek waited more than a month for a trade to the Cape Breton Screaming Eagles, where he was scoring at a point-a-game clip until he was injured last Friday in a game against the Oceanic, which sent the Screaming Eagles to their sixth straight defeat. Culek left in the first period with an upper-body injury that was initially thought to be day-to-day, but according to a report in the Cape Breton Post, the injury will keep Culek out of the lineup for 4-6 weeks ... Only two Senators prospects will have a chance to represent their countries at the world juniors, with LW Stefan Noesen widely expected to survive the cuts at Team USA's camp, and D Mikael Wikstrand named to Team Sweden's preliminary roster.

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646043 Ottawa Senators

Locked-out NHLers in Ottawa won't back down

By Bruce Garrioch

There was no shortage of NHL talent on the ice with the Carleton Ravens men's hockey team Friday.

Daniel Alfredsson, Chris Neil, Peter Regin, Chris Kelly and Grant Clitsome were among those taking part in the scrimmage and it looks like the Ravens are going to have them around for a while longer.

Senators captain Alfredsson didn't watch the drama taking place on Broadway Thursday night play out, but he's not surprised negotiations being and the NHL and NHLPA fell apart.

"Not really," said Alfredsson when asked if he was disappointed. "I know there's been a couple of good days leading up to this and where we were at this stage everybody was really hopeful something would get done.

"I feel the same way. We also know how negotiations can be and you can't read into things until you know exactly what has gone on.

"There's issues that need to be resolved and that looks like it's not going to happen in the next few days, but hopefully negotiations start up again and we're still a step further ahead than a week ago."

With two days of earnest negotiations, many felt the two sides had closed the gap and were on the verge of getting a deal in place to save the season.

Alfredsson said he felt many were getting ahead of themselves.

"I don't know if we are that close," said Alfredsson. "The first few days this week were encouraging for everybody and I think maybe we read too much into that.

"Both sides were pretty quiet about what was going on and obviously with what happened (Thursday) you can tell that we're not that close. We're in the wait-and-see mode until they start up negotiations again. The frustration continues."

The players are willing to be patient.

"It's a little disappointing. It's been a roller-coaster of emotions," said Bruins centre Kelly. "You think you're close to getting a deal done and then things fall apart. That's the way negotiations have gone on.

"Hopefully, we can get a deal done. Everybody is trying to stay positive, but it's pretty tough to do so. It needs to (get back on the rails). There have been times before talks have stopped and they've found a way to negotiate again. Hopefully, the same will happen this time."

Kelly said they have to leave it to Donald Fehr to negotiate in the best interests of the players when asked if the NHLPA should bring the league's last offer to the membership.

"We hired Donald Fehr for a reason: To get us the best possible deal," said Kelly. "And, especially at a time like this, you've got to put your faith in a guy like that and let him do his job because that's ultimately why we hired him.

"You never know what's going to happen. You wonder how things transpire, if it's more for media show or how they feel. It's an emotional time for everyone involved."

Alfredsson said he's not convinced there won't be a deal.

"Of course it can," said Alfredsson. "I see this as a negotiation, especially us, we're getting close and closer. Both sides believe firmly in some of the structures of the deal and that's the biggest hurdle right now.

"I can't see negotiations totally stopping. It's going to take some time to get back together and once they do, I believe they are one step further ahead."

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646044 Ottawa Senators

Former Ottawa Senators captain Alexei Yashin named GM of Russian women's team

QMI Agency

Alexei Yashin is returning to Ottawa.

The former Senators captain was named Friday as the general manager for Russia's national women's team.

He'll be back in Ottawa next spring, when the city hosts the women's world championship April 2-9.

"I think for the ladies it's a great gift for the new year," Vladislav Tretiak, president of Russian Hockey Federation, said in a statement.

"Alexei is a fine man who did a lot for our country. The solution will benefit both our coaching staff and give new challenges to the general manager."

Yashin will lead the team into the 2014 Olympic Games on home ice in Sochi.

The 39-year-old played 21 seasons as a professional hockey player, including 12 in the NHL split between the Senators and New York Islanders.

He helped Russia win gold at the 1992 world junior championship and 1993 world championship.

Yashin also represented his country in three Olympics, winning silver (1998, Nagano) and bronze (2002, Salt Lake City), and finishing fourth at the 2006 Turin Games.

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646045 Philadelphia Flyers

Players voice frustration with NHL

Sam Carchidi,

The day after labor negotiations between the NHL and the players' union imploded, the face of the league, Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby, strongly hinted he would not return to the talks, and former Flyers winger Scottie Upshall harshly criticized the league for its stubbornness.

Crosby attended meetings in New York City during the week and seemed baffled by what had transpired.

"I think it's pretty tough to get guys' trust back after that," he told reporters after working out at a rink in suburban Pittsburgh on Friday.

The league rejected the players' counterproposal before NHL officials went on a verbal tirade against union leader Donald Fehr, saying he had misled everyone by claiming the parties were close to an agreement.

"We don't understand anything anymore," Upshall, a Florida Panthers winger, said in a post on Twitter. "They [owners] want less salaries, done. Less rights, done. Anything else? U want our arms and legs too?"

Dustin Penner of the Los Angeles Kings added on Twitter: "Why is common sense so uncommon?"

Based on the dollar figures that have been exchanged on various issues, the league and the union seem closer to an agreement than at any point in the lockout, which reached 83 days on Friday. That said, both sides are furious that the stalemate is lingering.

Games have been canceled through Dec. 14, and more cancellations are expected to be announced Monday. The NHL could eventually cancel the entire season for the second time since 2004-05.

"It absolutely is something that torments me," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said of the possibility. "I'm not happy with this, but I've got to play the hand that I'm dealt."

Crosby is probably done being involved in negotiations and seems on the verge of playing overseas in the Swiss League.

"This stuff is getting ridiculous, all these games," he said. "I'm here to play hockey. I'm not here to negotiate. I support the players. I witnessed how hard guys worked and how bad they want this to work. But to see this happen, it's terrible. It makes everyone look bad."

The league put together a three-part package that asked the union to agree to a 10-year collective bargaining agreement, five-year player contracts, and no compliance buyouts or escrow caps.

No thanks, the union responded on Thursday.

The league then pulled its \$300 million "make whole" offer - money that would go toward guaranteeing contracts - off the table. It made that proposal based on a 10-year CBA that included an "escape clause" after eight years, along with a five-year maximum limit on player contracts, with a yearly increase capped at 5 percent.

The players want an eight-year CBA with a six-year "opt out" plus an eight-year maximum on individual contracts, with yearly increases that could go to 25 percent.

Thursday's unintentional comedy show - Fehr was claiming the sides were close to an agreement at the same time the union was receiving a voice mail from the league, soundly rejecting its counterproposal - has soured fans. Many posted scathing comments Friday on Twitter.

Sandy benefit. Organizers of "Operation Hat Trick," the Nov. 24 benefit hockey game in Atlantic City, said NHL players raised \$500,000 for the victims of Hurricane Sandy.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.08.2012

646046 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL owners stunned, disappointed

Staff

The NHL released statements from four owners after negotiations with the players' union broke down on Thursday. The owners \_ Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, Winnipeg's Mark

Chipman, Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum and Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik \_ took part in the meetings Tuesday and Wednesday.

Statement from Ron Burkle, Penguins:

"The idea to put players and owners together in the same room was a refreshing idea. Commissioner Bettman should be thanked for proposing it and the Fehrs should be thanked for agreeing to it.

"The players came with a strong desire to get back to playing hockey.

They were professional and did a good job of expressing their concerns and listening to ours.

"We wanted to move quickly and decisively. We have all spent too much time without any real progress at the expense of our fans, our sponsor and the communities we serve. It was time to make bold moves and get a deal. Many people think we got over our skis and they are probably right, but we wanted to do everything we could to get back to hockey now. We didn't hold back.

"We made substantial movement on our end quickly, but unfortunately that was not met with the same level of movement from the other side. The players asked us to be patient and keep working with them. It's not what they do and they wanted us to know they were committed. We understood and

appreciated their situation. We came back with an aggressive commitment to

pensions which we felt was well received. We needed a response on key items

that were important to us, but we were optimistic that we were down to very few issues. I believe a deal was within reach.

"We were therefore surprised when the Fehrs made a unilateral and "non-negotiable" decision - which is their right, to end the player/owner process that has moved us farther in two days than we moved at any time in the past months.

"I want to thank the players involved for their hard work as we tried to reach a deal.

"I hope that going backwards does not prevent a deal."

Statement from Mark Chipman, Jets:

"I'd like to thank the NHL for giving me the opportunity to participate in this very important process.

"I came here optimistic that we could find a solution. That sense of optimism grew after our first few sessions, including the small group discussions late last night.

"Regrettably, we have been unable to close the divide on some critical issues that we feel are essential to the immediate and long-term health of our game.

"While I sense there are some members of the players association that understand our perspective on these issues, clearly there are many that don't.

"I am deeply disappointed that we were unable to bring this extremely unfortunate situation to a successful conclusion and I wish to apologize to our fans and sponsors for letting them down."

Statement from Larry Tanenbaum, Maple Leafs:

"I was pleased to be asked to join the Player/Owner negotiation sessions. I had hoped that my perspective both as a businessman and as one of the owners of the Toronto Maple Leafs would be helpful to the process. Like all other teams, this work stoppage has hurt our fans, our employees and our business. Neither the owners nor the players will ever recover the losses incurred with this work stoppage.

"I understand how important it is to have a strong league and 30 healthy teams. I must admit that I was shocked at how things have played out over the last 48 hours. The sessions on Tuesday felt cooperative with an air of goodwill. I was optimistic and conveyed my optimism to the Board of Governors at our Wednesday meeting. However, when we reconvened with the players on Wednesday afternoon, it was like someone had thrown a switch.

The atmosphere had completely changed. Nevertheless, the owners tried to push forward and made a number of concessions and proposals, which were not

well-received. I question whether the union is interested in making an agreement.

"I am very disappointed and disillusioned. Had I not experienced this process myself, I might not have believed it. Like all hockey fans, I am

hopeful this situation can be resolved as soon as possible. I miss our game."

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"After working this week with our players toward what we hoped would be a new agreement, owners presented a proposal we believed would benefit

those great players, ownership, and, ultimately, our fans for many years to come. While trust was built and progress was made along the way, unfortunately, our proposal was rejected by the Union's leadership. My love for the game is only superseded by my commitment to our fans and I hold out hope we can soon join with our players and return the game back to its rightful place on the ice."

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.08.2012

646047 Philadelphia Flyers

Pro leagues, NCAA file brief against NJ sports bets

AP

NEWARK, N.J. -- NBA Commissioner David Stern scolded Gov. Christie and said New Jersey "has no idea what it's doing" by seeking to allow sports betting in the state in a deposition published Friday in the ongoing legal battle between the governor, the four major professional sports leagues and the NCAA.

Stern and the heads of Major League Baseball, the NFL, the NHL and the NCAA were questioned recently by lawyers representing the state as part of the leagues' lawsuit seeking to stop New Jersey from instituting sports gambling.

"The one thing I'm certain of is New Jersey has no idea what it's doing and doesn't care because all it's interested in is making a buck or two, and they don't care that it's at our potential loss," Stern said when asked how the advent of sports betting in New Jersey would harm the NBA.

"And wholly apart from the fact that a governor, who's a former U.S. Attorney, has chosen to attack a federal law which causes me pause for completely different reasons since I've at times sworn to similar oaths about upholding the law of the United States," Stern continued.

MLB commissioner Bud Selig said in his deposition he was "appalled" that New Jersey would look to sports gambling as a fiscal solution.

"I know states need money. I really mean that," he said. "I understand all the problems. Federal government needs money, going over a cliff, cities need money. Chris Christie needs money. But gambling is so ... the threat of gambling and to create more threat is to me -- I'm stunned. I know that people need sources of revenue, but you can't -- this is corruption in my opinion.

"I have to say to you I'm appalled. I'm really appalled."

A spokesman for Christie didn't immediately return a message seeking comment Friday.

The leagues and the NCAA sued Christie in August after he vowed to defy a federal ban on sports wagering. The Legislature enacted a sports betting law in January, limiting bets to the Atlantic City casinos and the state's horse racing tracks. The state plans to license sports betting as soon as January, and in October published regulations governing licenses.

A judge is expected to rule this month on the leagues' motion for an injunction to stop the law from taking effect.

In his deposition, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell was asked about holding games in England and Canada, countries with legalized sports gambling. The leagues contend allowing New Jersey to sanction sports gambling would damage their integrity.

"Well, we're playing in their country, we're coming to them," Goodell responded. "And we're only there for a short period of time; we're there for two or three days. It's not what we choose, it's not what we believe is in the best interests of sports, but we don't dictate the rules or the laws."

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said the fact that New Jersey's law exempts the state's colleges and any college games played in the state shows that lawmakers recognize gambling "isn't good for our game." He sounded confident when asked if the NHL had contemplated any changes to its policies should New Jersey's law stand.

"Not to sound flip on this point but it's inconceivable to me how we could lose this lawsuit, so we haven't been doing that," he said.

New Jersey's move is seen by supporters as a way to bring new revenue to the struggling casino and racing industries and to reclaim a portion of the billions of untaxed dollars flowing to organized crime or offshore illegal gambling operations.

But in its court filing Friday opposing the state's motion to dismiss the lawsuit, the leagues and the NCAA called Christie's efforts a "blatant violation of federal law" and his constitutional challenges to the federal law "specious."

The 20-year-old federal law at the heart of the dispute, the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act, prohibited states from authorizing sports gambling, but exempted Nevada and three other states that already had some form of legalized sports betting -- Delaware, Oregon and Montana.

New Jersey claims the law usurps the authority of state legislatures and discriminates by "grandfathering" in some states. The leagues countered Friday that Congress has the power to prevent states from enacting laws that conflict with federal policy, and that the Constitution's commerce clause doesn't require uniformity in its application to different states.

The NCAA has already announced it will relocate several championship events scheduled to be held in New Jersey next year.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.08.2012

646048 Philadelphia Flyers

NHL owners disappointed after CBA talks break down

Tim Panaccio

In case you missed it, NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman, during his lengthy rant about the tactics of NHLPA and executive director Donald Fehr, referred to how "upset" his owners were with what took place in New York on Wednesday.

Four owners spoke out: Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle; Winnipeg's Mark Chipman; Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum; and Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik.

They were among the six NHL owners who participated in the mini-group setting with just player/owners this week.

Here's what they had to say.

Statement from Ron Burkle:

The idea to put players and owners together in the same room was a refreshing idea. Commissioner Bettman should be thanked for proposing it and the Fehrs should be thanked for agreeing to it.

The players came with a strong desire to get back to playing hockey. They were professional and did a good job of expressing their concerns and listening to ours.

We wanted to move quickly and decisively. We have all spent too much time without any real progress at the expense of our fans, our sponsor and the communities we serve. It was time to make bold moves and get a deal. Many people think we got over our skis and they are probably right, but we wanted to do everything we could to get back to hockey now. We didn't hold back.

We made substantial movement on our end quickly, but unfortunately that was not met with the same level of movement from the other side. The players asked us to be patient and keep working with them. It's not what they do and they wanted us to know they were committed. We understood

and appreciated their situation. We came back with an aggressive commitment to pensions which we felt was well received. We needed a response on key items that were important to us, but we were optimistic that we were down to very few issues. I believe a deal was within reach.

We were therefore surprised when the Fehrs made a unilateral and "non-negotiable" decision – which is their right, to end the player/owner process that has moved us farther in two days than we moved at any time in the past months.

I want to thank the players involved for their hard work as we tried to reach a deal.

I hope that going backwards does not prevent a deal.

Statement from Mark Chipman:

I'd like to thank the NHL for giving me the opportunity to participate in this very important process.

I came here optimistic that we could find a solution. That sense of optimism grew after our first few sessions, including the small group discussions late last night.

Regrettably, we have been unable to close the divide on some critical issues that we feel are essential to the immediate and long-term health of our game.

While I sense there are some members of the players association that understand our perspective on these issues, clearly there are many that don't.

I am deeply disappointed that we were unable to bring this extremely unfortunate situation to a successful conclusion and I wish to apologize to our fans and sponsors for letting them down.

Statement from Larry Tanenbaum:

I was pleased to be asked to join the Player/Owner negotiation sessions. I had hoped that my perspective both as a businessman and as one of the owners of the Toronto Maple Leafs would be helpful to the process. Like all other teams, this work stoppage has hurt our fans, our employees and our business. Neither the owners nor the players will ever recover the

losses incurred with this work stoppage.

I understand how important it is to have a strong league and 30 healthy teams. I must admit that I was shocked at how things have played out over the last 48 hours. The sessions on Tuesday felt cooperative with an air of goodwill. I was optimistic and conveyed my optimism to the Board of Governors at our Wednesday meeting. However, when we reconvened with the players on Wednesday afternoon, it was like someone had thrown a switch. The atmosphere had completely changed. Nevertheless, the owners tried to push forward and made a number of concessions and proposals, which were not well-received. I question whether the union is interested in making an agreement.

I am very disappointed and disillusioned. Had I not experienced this process myself, I might not have believed it. Like all hockey fans, I am hopeful this situation can be resolved as soon as possible. I miss our game."

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Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.08.2012

646049 Phoenix Coyotes

Reflecting on the fallout from Thursday's labor negotiations

Staff

What a peculiar scene it must have been Thursday evening in New York City.

In the span of about 30 minutes, the optimism that the NHL Players' Association preached to the media was replaced by the harrowing reality that both sides, at least publicly, are on opposite ends of a widening gap in negotiations.

And all it took to convey the change was a voicemail message.

The phone call, placed to PA special counsel Steve Fehr by Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly, not only rejected the PA's latest offer but also took the concessions the league made earlier in the week off the table.

No new negotiation sessions are planned and a cancelation of more games is likely imminent. The last batch of games was axed through Dec.14.

From afar, it was intriguing to see the events in New York unravel via Twitter. Here were my favorite summaries from the night:

Michael Grange of Sportsnet comparing the exchange to a break-up, and Bruce Arthur of The National Post paints a scene of destruction.

And here are the statements from four owners involved in the week's talks.

Ron Burkle (Penguins): "The idea to put players and owners together in the same room was a refreshing idea. Commissioner Bettman should be thanked for proposing it and the Fehrs should be thanked for agreeing to it. The players came with a strong desire to get back to playing hockey. They were professional and did a good job of expressing their concerns and listening to ours. We wanted to move quickly and decisively. We have all spent too much time without any real progress at the expense of our fans, our sponsor and the communities we serve. It was time to make bold moves and get a deal. Many people think we got over our skis and they are probably right, but we wanted to do everything we could to get back to hockey now. We didn't hold back. We made substantial movement on our end quickly, but unfortunately that was not met with the same level of movement from the other side. The players asked us to be patient and keep working with them. It's not what they do and they wanted us to know they were committed. We understood and appreciated their situation. We came back with an aggressive commitment to pensions which we felt was well received. We needed a response on key items that were important to us, but we were optimistic that we were down to very few issues. I believe a deal was within reach. We were therefore surprised when the Fehrs made a unilateral and "non-negotiable" decision – which is their right, to end the player/owner process that has moved us farther in two days than we moved at any time in the past months. I want to thank the players involved for their hard work as we tried to reach a deal. I hope that going backwards does not prevent a deal."

Mark Chipman (Jets): "I'd like to thank the NHL for giving me the opportunity to participate in this very important process. I came here optimistic that we could find a solution. That sense of optimism grew after our first few sessions, including the small group discussions late last night. Regrettably, we have been unable to close the divide on some critical issues that we feel are essential to the immediate and long-term health of our game. While I sense there are some members of the players association that understand our perspective on these issues, clearly there are many that don't. I am deeply disappointed that we were unable to bring this extremely unfortunate situation to a successful conclusion and I wish to apologize to our fans and sponsors for letting them down."

Larry Tanenbaum (Maple Leafs): "I was pleased to be asked to join the Player/Owner negotiation sessions. I had hoped that my perspective both as a businessman and as one of the owners of the Toronto Maple Leafs would be helpful to the process. Like all other teams, this work stoppage has hurt our fans, our employees and our business. Neither the owners nor the players will ever recover the losses incurred with this work stoppage. I understand how important it is to have a strong league and 30 healthy teams. I must admit that I was shocked at how things have played out over the last 48 hours. The sessions on Tuesday felt cooperative with an air of goodwill. I was optimistic and conveyed my optimism to the Board of Governors at our Wednesday meeting. However, when we reconvened with the players on Wednesday afternoon, it was like someone had thrown a switch. The atmosphere had completely changed. Nevertheless, the owners tried to push forward and made a number of concessions and proposals, which were not well-received. I question whether the union is interested in making an agreement. I am very disappointed and disillusioned. Had I not experienced this process myself, I might not have believed it. Like all hockey fans, I am hopeful this situation can be resolved as soon as possible. I miss our game."

Jeff Vinik (Lightning): "After working this week with our players toward what we hoped would be a new agreement, owners presented a proposal we believed would benefit those great players, ownership, and, ultimately, our fans for many years to come. While trust was built and progress was made along the way, unfortunately, our proposal was rejected by the Union's leadership. My love for the game is only superseded by my commitment to our fans and I hold out hope we can soon join with our players and return the game back to its rightful place on the ice."

The turn of events reminded me of a conversation I had with former Coyote Ray Whitney last week.

Whitney was in town, like many NHLers, to take part in the camp at the Ice Den in Scottsdale. In light of Thursday's developments, some of his comments seemed fitting.

"It's more important that we get a deal that's beneficial to both sides so we're not in the same situation in five years and if that means them giving a little more or taking a little more, or us giving a little more or taking less, whatever it is in that middle is kind of where we have to agree as a group on both sides that this is what's best for us long term not just gonna get us through the next five years."

Whitney signed a two-year deal worth \$9 million with the Dallas Stars this past summer at the age of 40. He'll be 41 in May.

But even if this season is wiped out, he plans to keep playing.

"I don't think it'll be the end of me," he said. "So I think I'm safe in that. I have another year left. But people ask me that does it affect guys at the end of their careers. It affects all of us. I would still love to have that year back in '04 and I would still like to have that year back in '94. When you look at what you think what you could have accomplished in your day, you'd like to have played full seasons. As somebody who loves the game and somebody who's been around it since they were 10, I just hate seeing work stoppages like we've had."

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646050 Pittsburgh Penguins

Crosby devastated by failure to yield deal

By Josh Yohe

Sidney Crosby has had enough.

The Penguins' captain worked out at Southpointe with teammates only hours after a late plane ride home from New York, and he made it clear that the NHL labor dispute has left him wondering.

"To go through all that," said Crosby, a primary figure in negotiations between the NHL and its players' union over the past four days, "and to get a response like that, is pretty devastating."

The NHL swiftly turned down the NHLPA's latest proposal Thursday night, and news conferences from NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Don Fehr have left many feeling the season is in jeopardy.

Crosby displayed strong disagreement with the tactics.

"Gary said at his press conference that they're drawing a line in the sand," Crosby said. "Then just say that (during negotiations). Don't waste guys' time there discussing stuff for three days of trying to make something work, and then come out and say that."

Negotiations aren't dead. Crosby, in fact, believes a deal is relatively close, at least in terms of the numbers.

Although many expected more games to be canceled Friday, the NHL remained silent.

The league and union did not speak Friday and will not meet this weekend. The sides could potentially meet next week, and there is a possibility they could speak over the weekend.

The NHL is expected to cancel another batch of games — likely through Dec. 31 — on Monday.

"The foundation is there," Crosby said. "I don't think those talks were for nothing."

Still, hockey's most famous player left New York with a bad taste in his mouth. He looked numb during Fehr's second news conference Thursday and made it clear that he doesn't have intentions to return to the negotiating table anytime soon.

"For me," he said, "I think I'm going to do what I can. But after spending those three days there, I think it's pretty tough to get guys' trust back after that."

The next destination for Crosby likely will be Europe, should the lockout go on much longer.

He said starting in September that he will play in Europe if a deal isn't reached. Crosby is clearly growing closer to joining fellow superstar Evgeni Malkin overseas.

Malkin is playing in the KHL. Crosby could sign a deal in the Swiss League soon.

"I just want to play hockey," he said. "As far as whatever option is best, I'll start thinking about it a lot more. This stuff is getting ridiculous, all these games. I'm here to play hockey. I'm not here to negotiate. I support the players. I witnessed how hard guys worked and how bad they want this to work. But to see this happen, it's terrible. It makes everyone look bad."

Crosby said he does not regret his decision to enter negotiations in New York.

"Not at all," he said. "I think we all have the best interest in mind, and that's getting the game back on ice. Our proposal speaks for itself."

So, too, does the reality that the season is on thin ice.

"I'm disappointed," Crosby said. "This whole process shouldn't be to this point. I really thought we made progress over the few days. Both sides were clear on what they wanted. We found a way to move their way. If that's the position they're going to take, don't have everyone go discuss stuff and then throw it out the window like that."

Josh Yohe is a staff writer for Trib Total Media. He can be reached at [jyohe@tribweb.com](mailto:jyohe@tribweb.com).

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646051 Pittsburgh Penguins

Sidney Crosby frustrated by lockout, inching towards playing in Europe

By Dave Molinari

Sidney Crosby says he doesn't regret immersing himself in the NHL's labor negotiations earlier this week.

But after seeing the talks break down at a time when the NHL Players' Association believed it was closing in on an agreement, Crosby doesn't sound as if he's interested in taking such a prominent role in future bargaining sessions.

"I think I'm going to try to do what I can," Crosby said Friday. "But after spending those three days [involved in the talks in New York], I think it's pretty tough to kind of get guys' trust back after that."

Crosby returned from New York late Thursday night and was on the ice at Southpointe by mid-morning.

Because even though there likely won't be NHL games for a while -- no resumption of negotiations has been announced -- Crosby seems to be inching closer to going to Europe to play.

Switzerland appears to be his most likely destination, although Crosby said he does not have anything in place at this point.

Which is not to suggest that that couldn't change at any time.

"I just want to play hockey, so as far as whatever option is best there, I'll start thinking about it a lot more, because this stuff is getting ridiculous," Crosby said. "All these games [not being played]."

There were traces of raw emotion in Crosby's voice and visage, especially while discussing the take-it-or-leave-it elements in the most recent offer the NHL presented to the players.

Nonetheless, he said that he will resist the temptation to go to Europe simply because he's frustrated with where the collective bargaining agreement talks stand.

"When something like [the negotiations breaking off] happens, you don't want to make emotional decisions or anything like that," he said.

"I think I've tried to be optimistic and things like that, and given it every chance possible, but I have to make sure I keep playing hockey."

While Crosby contemplates going to Europe, Penguins defenseman Deryk Engelland has returned from a professional visit there, at least for a while.

Engelland, who has spent most of the past two months playing for the Rosenborg club in Norway, was among the group of Penguins who took part in the workout at Southpointe.

Engelland said he came back for the holidays, not because of the apparent progress made in the CBA negotiations earlier this week, and that he hasn't decided whether he will rejoin that club.

If he does go back to Norway, Engelland said, it won't happen until after Christmas.

He also raised the possibility that if the NHLPA and league don't have an agreement by then, he might simply return to his offseason home in Las Vegas.

Being in Norway likely helped Engelland avoid any temptation he might have had to become obsessed with the back-and-forth of the NHL-NHLPA negotiations the past couple of months.

Crosby, conversely, has been monitoring developments in the lockout closely for a long time, but being part of the group of players that sat across the table from a half-dozen owners this week seemed to ratchet up his emotional stake in the process.

Certainly, that would explain why he was so exasperated after deputy commissioner Bill Daly sent NHLPA special counsel Steve Fehr a text message early Thursday evening, informing him that the NHL had no interest in a proposal the union had served up a short time earlier.

Later, commissioner Gary Bettman would tell a news conference that the NHL's most recent offer had included items the league expected to elicit a yes-or-no response, not serve as the basis for further negotiating.

Nearly a day later, the sting of Bettman's emphatic rejection still showed in Crosby's tone and words.

"To kind of go through all of that and get a response like that is pretty devastating, I think, for everyone," he said.

Especially when Crosby believed that there had been genuine progress made, particularly during the early rounds of talks between the players and owners, when Bettman and Donald Fehr were not involved.

Enough that he still thinks "the foundation is there" for an agreement in the relatively near future. Assuming both sides are willing and motivated to work toward one.

"I think that if it's a case where, like Gary said in his [news] conference, they're going to draw a line in the sand, just say that," Crosby said. "Don't waste guys' time, in there for three days discussing stuff for three days, trying to find a way to make something work, then come in and say that.

"I don't really know what the next move is from here, but that's not really the best way to get a deal done, I don't think. As far as trying to get progress, I don't think that helps anything."

Post Gazette LOADED: 12.08.2012

646052 St Louis Blues

Backes spells out players' position in NHL talks

By Jeremy Rutherford

Blues captain David Backes was one of 18 NHL players who spent substantial time at the bargaining table in New York this week.

"I was in the room for 2½ full days, and by full days I don't mean 9 (a.m) to 5 (p.m.)," Backes said. "I mean start at 8 and leaving at midnight was an early night. They were long days. It was very promising, as there were no leaks going out. We had a willing partner ... making real progress."

A collective bargaining agreement to end the three-month-old lockout seemed imaginable, especially after Don Fehr, director of the players' association, stepped to the podium and told an audience that the sides had "complete agreement" on dollars and that other differences were "not unbridgeable."

But then in a surreal scene, Fehr returned to the podium minutes later to relay a message the union received via voice-mail from the NHL, which deemed the players' offer unacceptable. Fehr's encore was followed by Commissioner Gary Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly angrily lambasting the union's interpretation of the status of the negotiations and its handling of the situation.

"Pretty bizarre," acknowledged Backes, who by that time had left New York. "But the fact that we're still locked out seems pretty bizarre."

A new accord doesn't appear imminent, as the league and union went without communication Friday, and the prospect of even a partial season seems to be diminishing, although many realize after the latest turn of events that developments can happen quicker than a line change.

"It's a kick in the groin where we went from Thursday at 3 until Thursday at 10 p.m.," Backes said. "But I was optimistic and I guess I still am. Ebbs and flows, I guess. We'll all see where it goes."

To know where it goes is to know what the league and union covered this week and where they are today.

While the NHL is saying that its recent proposal is now off the table, it would seem after the players agreed to split revenue 50-50 and the league raised its make-whole offer to \$300 million that the sides are close on the dollars that will be exchanged. But while increasing the make-whole number from \$211 million, the NHL claims that Fehr was well aware that the league wanted three union concessions in exchange:

1. A five-year maximum on individual player contracts.
2. A maximum variance of five percent in a player's salary from year to year, which would eliminate the 'back-diving' deals that became popular under the last agreement.
3. A 10-year agreement with a mutual option to opt out after eight years.

Backes, however, said Friday that the players didn't view the NHL's make-whole offer of \$300 million – \$50 million of which would be earmarked for pension funding – as being contingent on the contract issues.

"It wasn't positioned that way, first of all," Backes said. "They indicated that they had things that were important to them ... That's great. They're important to us, as well. So what they're saying is that we need to give up (contract) rights that we had previously, and in exchange for that, they will give us an extra \$89 million, which we already had (under the previous agreement) ...they'll just agree to take less from us."

Since Thursday, many fans have wondered why the union is so opposed to a five-year limit on contracts. T.J. Oshie and Roman Polak are the only Blues players currently holding a five-year deal. Backes would be in the second year of a five-year contract this season.

Backes explained: "If (Sidney) Crosby is an unrestricted free agent and signs a five-year deal for \$8-12 million (per year), then everyone is slotted under there. If Crosby gets five years, I'm lucky if I get two. If he's making \$12 million and doesn't take term to have security in exchange for lower numbers at the end, then his salary-cap hit is that high number and you end up with a basketball system where you have LeBron (James), (Dwyane) Wade and (Chris) Bosh making all the money. Hockey is not like that. You can't play five guys the whole game."

The other bone of contention – the length of the next agreement – is also mystifying. The owners want a 10-year deal to sell to fans and sponsors who might decline to jump on board under a shorter agreement in fear of another work stoppage. The players countered with an eight-year deal, with an opt-out clause after the sixth year.

Why wouldn't the players want a longer CBA?

"It's tough to predict economics," Backes said. "It's tough for us to bargain a deal for guys that aren't in the league right now. The league wants to lock in a longer-term deal in our eyes because this is going to be a great deal for them. Why not have six plus two? What are they scared of?"

The answer to that question might be Fehr.

While the league may not be "scared" of the union leader, owners are certainly fearful of the path on which he's leading players. That's why after two successful days of negotiations with Bettman and Fehr out of the room, owners told players that Fehr's inclusion Thursday would be a deal-breaker.

"That was very confusing to a lot of the guys," Backes said. "Don and (assistant director Steve Fehr), they are the people we chose to represent us. We're not well-educated businessmen; we're hockey players. We expressed our views, had some phenomenal discussions with the owners. But we're not billion-dollar businessmen that cut deals in boardrooms all the time. That's why we've hired Don Fehr."

On Thursday, when Fehr returned to the room, only Daly and league attorney Bob Battersman were in the room to hear the union's response.

"When you only see two of them, you think they're not taking it very seriously and they don't want a deal," Backes said. "The money was agreeable by both sides, the pension was agreeable by both sides. What was keeping this deal from being signed, sealed and delivered was how long an individual player contract could be, what the variance in that contract could be and how long the term of the (agreement) was going to be.

"You're telling me that we're going to blow up the season, blow up everything that we have in front of us, potential sponsorships and (tick) fans off more, for not being able to agree to those certain things. I just have a hard time believing it. Is that not close? You wonder why guys were getting antsy ... we thought the deal was done."

Not yet, and perhaps not soon. After establishing legitimate hope earlier in the week, not even the players are sure there will be a hockey season.

"I wish I knew," Backes said. "It's very disappointing with how close we were with a week of good progress ending the way it did. But that's their right to walk away and take things off the table. We have that same right too, but have chosen not to exercise it and try to get a deal done."

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 12.08.2012

646053 St Louis Blues

TipSheet: NHL talks reach breaking point

By Jeff Gordon

The National Hockey League's self-destructive tendencies are strong as ever.

The league and the NHL Players Association made great progress towards resolving their labor battle this week. New voices drove the owners' side of the negotiations after Gary Bettman voluntarily removed his commissioner's crown and stood out in the hall.

And when it came time to finish the deal, the hard-liners tried one more power play and . . . all heck broke loose again. There was no deal after all, despite great movement on both sides.

In fairness, obstinate NHLPA czar Donald Fehr has the same infuriating effect on owners that Bettman has on players. But Bettman started the war and Fehr is just playing stubborn defense.

This impasse drags on because Bettman enjoys issuing ultimatums and hockey players do not like backing down.

This is how their negotiating game goes:

The owners make an offer. The owners mull it over and offer a counteroffer. The owners reject it out of hand. Bettman pulls key provisions of their offer off the table and the owners storm off, exasperated by this disloyalty of their charges.

One of the sticking points is player contract length in the next collective bargaining agreement. The league wants a five-year limit.

"This is the hill we will die on," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told reporters in New York.

Only a moron would give an NHL player a contract of six years or more. And yet, by Bettman's count, more than 90 players have contracts of six years or longer.

How could this be? Many NHL owners and general managers are morons. Since morons need a lot of help running a business, the NHL is fighting to the death over contract limits.

God forbid general managers and owners be left on their own to negotiate the length of player deals. Apparently these knuckleheads will pull out their crayons and sign their names to anything agents ask for.

This latest impasse prompted this frustrated assessment from ESPN.com's Pierre LeBrun:

What should have been a fairly doable mathematical adjustment this past summer has transformed into perhaps the most ridiculous labor impasse in the history of pro sports.

Honestly, I can't wrap my head around this one.

Are the owners and players really going to let the season get canned over the differences that remain in the two offers?

I would make the argument that the players are crazy to take that kind of financial hit rather than accept what the league and owners offered Wednesday night.

Similarly, the owners are out of their minds if they don't see elements in the NHLPA's counteroffer that they can live with to get hockey back this season.

Are we really going to drop the ax on an entire season because the owners are THAT adamant about five-year term limits for player contracts? And are the players THAT opposed to five-year contract term limits that they will let an entire season's worth of salary go down the drain?

It's pure madness in my opinion. All of it. Both sides.

#### MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE

Questions to ponder while wondering if the NFL is serious about shuttering the concussion factory known as "kickoffs":

Is Kobe Bryant the best Turkish Airlines spokesperson ever?

Had Tennessee not landed Jones as coach, would Peyton Manning have been a realistic option?

When will college football coaches reconsider the motivational play of head-butting their helmet-wearing players?

#### QUIPS 'R US

Here is what some of America's leading sports pundits have been writing:

Mike Tanier, Sports on Earth: "It is time now for another edition of Nightmare Scenarios of the NFC West! Let's say that the Rams beat the Bills this week, the Vikings next week, and lose to the Bucs in Week 16. The Seahawks, meanwhile, have a little hiccup, tying the Cardinals (the potential for a 6-6 game is clearly there), losing in Buffalo next week (a blizzard rolls in), then getting mad at their own foolishness and walloping the 49ers in Week 16. The 49ers also slump with an upset loss to the Dolphins, followed by less shocking losses in Foxboro and Seattle. That would put the 49ers and Seahawks at 8-6-1 entering Week 17, with the Rams at 7-7-1. Are you ready for the best part? The Rams face the Seahawks in Week 17, while the 49ers host the Cardinals. A pair of upsets would leave the Rams, 49ers and Seahawks at 8-7-1. And the NFC West crown would go to ... the Rams, by virtue of a 3-0-1 record against common foes. The only thing that could have made this scenario even better would have been a Cardinals win last week last week, making possible a four-way 8-7-1 tie. That would be pure heaven. And while the nightmare scenario above is pretty unlikely, so is the whole idea of the Rams beating the 49ers on two 50-plus-yard field goals because the 49ers insisted on starting a quarterback who turned into a performance artist at his own 17-yard line."

Greg Cote, Miami Herald: "The Bears' Brandon Marshall said some NFL players use Viagra to boost their performance in games. Hmm. I think I need to start paying more attention to what the heck is going on inside those pileups!"

Norman Chad, syndicated columnist: "If you ever wondered what an NBA team might look like post-apocalypse, this season's Wizards might be it. The Wizards' malaise is more than a generation old, but the current decline began in 2008 when the team insanely gave Gilbert Arenas a six-year, \$111 million contract. This would be like the Vatican elevating Father Guido Sarducci to cardinal for life. As it were, the Wizards, over the last four seasons, are 19-63, 26-56, 23-59 and 20-46. The last time they made the playoffs was 2008, the last time they won a playoff series was 2005 and the last time they won an NBA title — their only time — was 1978."

Jayson Stark, ESPN.com: "Two years ago, the Giants won the World Series and made major changes in their cast. This year, they won another World Series and were willing to pay out extra years and dollars to keep their band together. Four years and \$40 million for Angel Pagan? Three years and \$20 million for 37-year-old Marco Scutaro? Those were price tags that had lots of people in baseball shaking their heads. But the Giants have always constructed their team with a different playbook than the rest of the sport. So this is nothing new."

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle: "The PGA Tour will outlaw belly putters, and thank you! That spares us the next logical move: A putter anchored to the golfer's nose, the 'trigger' being a sneeze."

#### MEGAPHONE

"Joe Thomas, he can have his opinions all he wants. It's kind of like a crazy ex-girlfriend, you know? It's been over a year. Get over it. But I don't know. I guess when you get paid over \$100 million by one team, it's kind of easy to point the finger at another guy and hate on him for trying to get another contract."

Chiefs running back Peyton Hillis, hammering a former Browns teammate.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 12.08.2012

646054 Tampa Bay Lightning

Talks breakdown frustrates Bolts players

By ERIK ERLENDSSON

The sky is not falling on the NHL labor talks. It just looked that way following the drama that unfolded Thursday night when the latest negotiations fell apart without a deal.

Following what appeared to be a breakthrough in discussions to end the nearly three-month long NHL lockout, events took a drastic and sudden about-face when the league rejected a proposal from the NHL Player's Association during a press conference held by the NHLPA in which the union discussed how close the NHLPA felt the two sides were to making a deal to get the game back on the ice.

The performance played out in front of an assembled media core and quickly spread like wildfire across the Twitterverse that had many befuddled as to how rapidly all the good will turned ugly.

To those inside the negotiating room, the three days of worked turned into a strong sense of frustration about how it unfolded.

"Obviously there is a high level of frustration on our side as we feel what's a major, major moves we continue to make and feel that there is a deal to be had," said Lightning forward B.J. Crombeen, who participated in the negotiations in New York. "It just continues to drag on and drag on as they are trying to get every penny. And we find it very frustrating because I think that it's pretty plain and clear to see by everyone the concessions that we made."

That came on the heels of what Crombeen felt was two good days of discussions that involved four owners — including Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik — but kept NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA head Don Fehr out of the room which resulted in discussions moving in the right direction. Even NHLPA special assistant Mathieu Schneider told a Sirius/XM radio Friday that the sides were on the verge of a deal but when the players asked to have Fehr and the rest of the executive staff reenter the talks, the owners warned them it could result in talks breaking off.

That request by the NHL was not received well by the players.

"It's a childish move in my opinion," Crombeen said. "I think (the owners) have been around negotiations long enough to know that we cannot make a deal without our leadership and the people that we brought in to do this. We have some very smart players on our side, but they are not trained lawyers. Don and the entire NHLPA staff has been amazing through this whole process and to try to cut them out it's very disrespectful to us and to them. But it's obvious that's what they are trying to do and like I said I don't disagree that there were a couple of days but we are not in a position to negotiate and to make a deal and that's where we need these people."

"It's pretty clear that they are trying to push the union away from their legal advice and players are not going to buy that that's why you have a union why we have these people employed."

But when you push past all the rhetoric and theatrics that took place Thursday evening, a lot was accomplished by both sides that has brought this lockout closer to an end. And that's what has to be seen through all the rubble from the fallout once the emotions begin to tone down.

"I'm not going to sit here and say that I wasn't a bit sour about it because clearly we are not playing hockey," veteran Lightning defenseman Eric Brewer said. "You don't have to be completely destroyed by the way it is, this is the way that it goes they all know that better than we do. The key is not to let it get off track, take a couple of days."

"But know that there was some ground made up there and that week was not lost even though everything seems like it's gone, that's clearly not going to get anything done. If we are going to look at it that way then something even more drastic needs to be done right away. Let's just take a breath, we are where we are and there is a deal to be made there."

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 12.08.2012

646055 Tampa Bay Lightning

NHL CBA stance frustrates Tampa Bay Lightning's B.J. Crombeen

By Damian Cristodero

While contemplating when the 2012-13 NHL season might be canceled, it is useful to consider what happened in 1994-95, when a 48-game schedule was played after a 103-day lockout ended Jan. 11.

And with commissioner Gary Bettman saying at a Thursday news conference, "I can't imagine we play fewer (games) than that," this season, in the 84th day of its lockout, is approaching a point of no return.

"Am I unhappy about the prospect? You bet I am," Bettman said. "But I have to play the hand that I'm dealt."

And that is where he loses B.J. Crombeen.

The Lightning right wing said it is "mind-boggling" the league angrily broke off talks with the players association on a collective bargaining agreement and called it a "bully tactic" for Bettman to say owners wanted only a yes or no to their latest offer and no negotiations.

"They're trying to squeeze 5 more cents out of a deal that can be done," Crombeen, a member of the union negotiating committee, said Friday. "It's very frustrating. They're just saying 'It's our way or the highway.' You look at the deal we had and the deal we're going to get, every single aspect (the players are) giving up a lot."

Players have agreed to a 50-50 revenue split after getting 57 percent last season. The league has offered \$300 million (up from \$211 million) for the "make-whole" provision for guaranteeing current contracts. Though the union agreed to the amount, it does not believe it is enough to guarantee all contracts.

The league wants a 10-year deal with a reopen clause for both sides after eight years. The union proposed an eight-year contract with a reopen clause for players after six.

Owners agreed to keep the status quo on entry-level deals (three years), unrestricted free agency (27 years old or seven years in the league) and salary arbitration. But they want a five-year limit on contracts, though teams could sign their own free agents for seven years. Players proposed an eight-year limit.

The league also balked on limiting escrow payments by players (those ensure players do not receive more revenue than they are entitled) and amnesty buyouts of player contracts that would not count against the cap. Both, deputy commissioner Bill Daly said, are "money outside the system."

"We moved drastically in almost every area," Crombeen said, "and their big gift was to give us back free agency and salary arbitration and entry-level contracts to what they are right now. It's mind-boggling that they expect us to think that's a fair and equitable deal. It's the wrong way to go about negotiations."

But Toronto owner Larry Tanenbaum questioned in a statement whether the union really wants to make a deal. And the Denver Post's Adrian Dater said on Twitter he heard from a player he didn't name that union head Donald Fehr, when shown the owners' proposal, told players "we could get more" and to "hold out."

"I can tell you with 100 percent certainty that is 100 percent false," Crombeen said.

The good news, Crombeen said, is Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik, one of six owners in on face-to-face talks with players this week, was "good" and "reasonable."

Still, he is part of a league that has taken everything it had offered off the bargaining table.

"As difficult and as painful as this is," Bettman said, "having an agreement that doesn't work is something we're not prepared to do."

"The deal is sitting at their finger-tips," Crombeen said. "They just refuse to sign it."

The sides didn't talk Friday. They won't meet this weekend, but they may talk by phone, Canada's Sportsnet reported.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 12.08.2012

646056 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning's Crombeen fires back at NHL: "They're trying to squeeze 5 more cents out of the deal"

Posted by Damian Cristodero

For Tampa Bay Lightning right wing B.J. Crombeen, the good news coming out of this week's face-to-face meetings between players and owners to discuss a new collective bargaining agreement was that Lightning owner Jeff Vinik was "good" and "reasonable" during talks.

But Crombeen, a member of the Players' Association negotiating committee, said it is "mind-boggling" the league on Thursday angrily broke off negotiations, and said commissioner Gary Bettman's assertion that Thursday was all about a yes or no answer from the union on the league's latest offer was a "bully tactic."

"The deal is right there in front of them," Crombeen said Friday. "It's pretty simple for them if they want to make a deal, but they made it very clear to us that they don't. They're trying to squeeze five more cents out of a deal that can be done, and we can be back playing hockey sooner. It's very frustrating, but I wouldn't say I'm overly surprised because of the way they acted throughout the whole process."

"If you lay their proposal, which they say is yes or no, and our proposal side-by-side, the difference is minimal," Crombeen continued. "They're just saying it's our way or the highway. It's the wrong way to go about it. They can say how much they're giving up and how much they're going beyond what they're supposed to, but you look at the deal we're giving up and the deal we're going to get and in every single aspect of it we're giving up."

It is difficult to argue the players will not come out of this poorer.

They have agreed to a 50-50 split in revenues after last season getting 57 percent. The league has offered to up the money it puts into the "make-whole" provision to \$300 million from \$211 million. But the union, while agreeing to the provision, contends that does not fully guarantee that current player contracts can be honored.

The league has agreed to simply keep the status quo on entry-level contracts (three years), unrestricted free agency (27 years old or seven

years in the league) and salary arbitration. It also proposed a five-year limit on contracts (though teams would be able to sign their own free agents to seven-year deals) with a yearly salary variance of just five percent in order to stop the cap-circumventing practice of back-diving contracts. It wants no limit on player escrow payments and does not want amnesty buyouts of player contracts, both of which deputy commissioner Bill Daly called "money outside the system."

The league also wants a 10-year CBA with a re-open clause after eight years for either side. Players want an eight-year deal with an opener for the players after six years. It proposed an eight-year limit on contracts with the lowest salary year not less than 25 percent of the highest.

The players did get a pension, though funded with their own money.

"It's mind-boggling that the pension, which has no effect on them, they're going to return to us and we're expected to give them a very, very tight contract life with a variability that's going to squeeze the middle class out of the game," Crombeen said, adding about the league's proposed 10-year CBA length, "The average (career) for players is four to five years, which is essentially two groups of players that are going to go through the league and have no say in the agreement they're going to be part of. There's also a very high risk projecting what the economy and industry is going to look like in 10 years. It just doesn't make a whole lot of sense for them to say we have to agree to all those things. How they can think a yes or no answer at that point is how you negotiate, they're not ready to get a deal done."

It certainly will be harder now with emotions frayed and the league pulling off the table everything it has proposed. Of course, things can go back on the table pretty quickly, and it still is believed by many the league hopes to have games during the Christmas holiday. That said, if it is to play a 48-game schedule similar to the one used after the 1994-95 lockout, games should be started by early January, and as Bettman said Thursday, "I can't imagine we play fewer than that."

Bottom line, Crombeen said: "We moved drastically in almost every area we had and their big gift was to give us back free agency and salary arbitration and entry-level contracts to what they are right now. It's mind-boggling that they expect us to think that's a fair and equitable deal."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 12.08.2012

646057 Toronto Maple Leafs

Fans are squeezed as NHL and players face off

Staff

Every missed goal hurts, but the real heartbreakers come in overtime, when the puck clangs off the post instead of finding the net. Hockey fans now stand united in enduring that pain — but it has nothing to do with any action on the ice.

After two days of intense bargaining, team owners and the National Hockey League Players' Association seemed tantalizingly close to a deal ending the sport's 84-day lockout. Then (clang!) it all fell apart.

There's still time to salvage a stunted season. But only if both sides in this dispute set their greed aside, compromise, and treat fans as something other than sheep to be shorn.

That point seemed achingly near. But as negotiators for the players expressed optimism about their latest offer, and assured the media that talks were going well, owners sent a message blasting the union's bid and cancelling everything that had been put on the table.

It's hard to root for either side in this mess, although National Hockey League commissioner Gary Bettman raises the ire of fans like no one else. That's, in part, because he's an American perceived as messing with Canada's national game. Bettman aside, for the average fan with bills to pay even as NHL tickets grow unaffordable, it doesn't matter who is right — millionaire players or billionaire owners. None have earned the public's trust.

Neither side puts fans first, even though riches enjoyed by every player and grasping owner largely come from working people who go to games, cheer for teams, dream of sharing Stanley Cup glory, and spend their hard-earned dollars on hockey merchandise.

The two sides remain locked in a power struggle. It remains unresolved because each thinks it has more to gain by holding out than giving in. It's similar to a bitter divorce with fans caught in the middle. Only instead of being the kids, they're treated like the Tupperware.

Without being at the bargaining table it's impossible to fully assess the talks. But all indications are the two sides were indeed close before Thursday's breakdown. The league is holding out for a 10-year collective agreement, with a five-year cap on individual contracts signed with players. In addition, those contracts would allow for only a 5-per-cent variance in year-to-year pay for each player.

The union is reportedly willing to accept an eight-year collective agreement, with a potential opt-out after six years. It wants eight-year maximum contracts for individual players, including a 25 per cent variance in pay.

Other issues are on the table. But NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly says these constitute "the hill we will die on." In fact, nobody is going to die over this, least of all pro hockey's covetous owners and pampered players. It should be possible to split the difference on the main demands dividing them. But that would require each to abandon hope of entirely getting its way, and they aren't ready to do so.

This intransigence doesn't carry much pain for union or management. Both sides are losing money as arena doors stay locked and paycheques go unissued. But it's not like owners are heading for the food bank, or even cutting down on caviar. The same goes for players. Meanwhile, people selling souvenirs, waiting on tables at sports bars, and providing countless other services associated with the hockey industry only become poorer.

The real risk to hockey isn't obvious or particularly immediate. It's that fans will one day wake up and see that Canada's national game has turned into little more than wad of dollars slapped back and forth, like a puck, between perpetually feuding players and owners. When fans find their love of the game is used only to exploit them, the players and the league might finally change their selfish ways.

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646058 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: It's getting 'surreal', says labour expert

Kevin McGran

The theatre that was the breakdown of NHL labour negotiations — with talk of "hills" the sides will "die on" and worries about cancelling the entire season — has become a huge distraction.

The NHL sent in a handful of owners — including MLSE chairman Larry Tanenbaum — with the idea that new faces might come up with new ideas.

But by the time it had all ended, hope had been shattered and only the melodrama had been ratcheted up.

"Every time this thing goes down, I worry about it ever coming up again," said George Smith, a lecturer in labour negotiations at Queen's University. "It's quite clear that (NHL commissioner Gary) Bettman's message and the message from the NHL is that the players are unreasonable and Donald Fehr is getting in the way. The problem is we're getting so much spin."

Smith is a seasoned labour negotiator, having handled the management side in some high-profile talks with CP Rail and Air Canada. What he's witnessing with the NHL and NHLPA seems surreal to him.

"When I listen to these guys go blow by blow and 'he said this and he said that,' it's like 'What are you talking to us for? Get back in there and negotiate.' . . . Trying to paint the other guy as the bad guy (is unproductive) and this idea of hills we're going to die on, what is that?"

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly had made that comment when saying the league would insist on five-year limits to player contracts with a seven-year limit for a team to their own free agents. The players are offering eight-year limits.

The sides are also apart on length of the CBA and transitional payments for players with salaries that may be reduced to get the league to a 50-50 split in revenues.

There's talk now that more cancellations are in the offing. Both sides accuse the other of working to some "real" deadline. When Bettman mentioned he couldn't imagine playing less than a 48-game season, fingers pointed immediately to a mid-January end date. The theory becomes: There's no point in negotiating seriously until you reach what you believe to be the other guy's final deadline.

"Think about what a crazy game of chicken that is," said Smith. "The theory about end-dates would be really surprising. As a negotiator, we work to deadlines but we work to the same deadlines and deadlines are positive because things get done. But that is totally counterproductive."

"In the meantime (look) what they're doing to their fan base. People are saying, screw them, I'm fed up. I'm hearing that more and more."

Players, via Twitter, chimed in their disappointment.

"I'm done caring. We keep moving and giving. This one-way street sucks," said Montreal's Brandon Prust.

"Pulling offers off the table in December? This on and off business is ridiculous!!! Just Sit down, negotiate and figure it out!" said Anaheim's Matt Belesky.

It was thought by many to be a stroke of genius by Bettman to bring in owners who hadn't been at the table before. Tanenbaum, Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, Tampa's Jeff Vinik and Winnipeg's Mark Chipman were believed to be among the doves.

"Larry Tanenbaum was, from what I hear, very eloquent in his presentations especially when they talked about revenue sharing and how much money should go to other teams," said radio personality Bill Watters, a former Maple Leafs executive. "His point was this lockout is not going to make us any more money."

"He essentially said this is about making a 30-team league very strong."

One team executive who could not speak on the record due to the league's threat of fines for commenting on the collective bargaining process, agreed Tanenbaum was a good choice because he gets along well with players.

"He brings a sense of reason to the room, he's a good communicator, he listens, he's a dealmaker," said the executive. "Players would look at him very positively."

The question becomes, then, if the players couldn't get a deal with doves like Tanenbaum and Burkle (who'd worked with Sidney Crosby behind the scenes), what chance do they have with hardliners?

"I don't think for a moment that that group of owners or that group of players had a mandate to resolve the dispute," said Smith. "I never expected a deal would come out of that smaller group. It was more about building some momentum and goodwill. And apparently it did. . . . Then they go back to these are the 'hills we're going to die on.'"

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646059 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Owners skating circles around players in labour fight: Kelly

By Cathal Kelly

Now that it's got two wheels hanging over the side of the cliff, it's clear the NHLPA's approach to the lockout was doomed from the outset.

Outmanoeuvred at every point, the players miscalculated on several crucial points.

First and foremost, they have approached this as a generic labour fight. It isn't. It isn't even a sports labour fight. It's a hockey labour fight, a completely unique beast.

Instead, they've been flipping through the Workplace Negotiations 101 playbook, where labour has the advantage over management. Take an auto shutdown.

As soon as it kicks off, GM or Ford or whomever is losing big money. Their supply channel runs dry. Their competitors pick up the slack. They need to

get to back to work to satisfy shareholders and analysts, who only think as far as quarterly returns.

Labour, on the other hand, can afford to suffer in the short term. Their earning window is open for decades. Small concessions mean long-term dollars. Each passing day increases the pressure on management to resolve the problem.

In the NHL, this power balance is flipped on its head.

Ownership has a monopoly on hockey. Previous lockouts have taught them that fans will return, no matter how long they're gone. In this instance, management knows that incremental gains will spin out into tens of millions of dollars saved over the coming decade.

Players are the ones who must think short term. If an average NHL career is six or seven years long, a lost season represents as much 15 per cent of their total earnings from hockey. In many cases, it accounts for far more.

It may be antithetical to the athletic mindset ('Never stop'), but no amount of variation from the 50/50 split can uniformly benefit the union membership enough to make up for that loss. That's the whole point of unions — to spread the joy and pain around equally. At this point, the NHLPA is fighting for its 1 per centers.

Nevertheless, the union has followed the auto-fight route — dig in, and then take it to the customer. They held off real bargaining until the last minute. They continue to move forward like time is their ally, though the noose has grown so tight we can see the blue in their faces from the back of the room.

The split of the money, the 'make whole' pact, the length of contracts — these are parentheticals.

There are only two issues here, the same ones that govern all negotiations: Who wants it more? Who has the leverage?

Jay Krupin is a vastly experienced labour negotiator with the Washington, D.C.-based firm of BakerHostetler. Add this to his bona fides — he's also a hockey fan. Unlike everyone involved on the players' side just now, he's also a pragmatist.

"The owners want to change the economics of hockey. They want that more than the players want to make more money. Then it becomes an issue of leverage. And the owners have the leverage."

This is what Fehr, an American with a background in that country's national pastime, cannot see. There is no pressure from below, not in the States. ESPN doesn't give a damn about this story, as they did in similar instances with the NFL, NBA and MLB. The PA's PR machine is pumping out memos no one reads. The owners know that, and the owners are all Americans.

Far more importantly, while stoppages have badly wounded baseball and, to a lesser extent, basketball, they've been an odd spur to the NHL's business. There's a pecuniary case to be made that lockouts are good for hockey. Since the league's revenue has grown to record highs in each of the years since the lost season of 2004-05, why wouldn't owners want to access that cheap stimulus package again?

This fact seems to escape Fehr. In one of his New York news conferences on Thursday, he flippantly admitted he wasn't conversant in the particulars of the previous lockout. Fehr is a man for a fight, but given how this thing has shaken out so far, he isn't well suited to this fight.

Even the weeks spent arguing over 50/50 seem pointless in retrospect. The NBA took three months to come to roughly the same revenue split. Many of those franchises share owners and/or buildings.

Knowing that recent deals are always the benchmark for new deals, why didn't the PA retrench around that number from the outset? Duking it out on 50/50 smacks of theatre. But of course, Fehr gets paid either way.

Krupin believes there was one point on which the PA might have bent ownership to its will. That advantage passed untaken five weeks ago.

"I didn't believe they'd lose the Winter Classic," Krupin says. "When they let that go, I knew they were ready to lose the season. Now that it's gone, there's really no reason to have a season."

What would you do now?

"If I was an owner, I'd hold pat."

And if you were working for the PA?

"Try to negotiate on some small issues, to save face. Take what you can and live to fight another day."

So — give in.

What we have now is the ragged end of a chess match between a master and a novice. Ownership is chasing the NHLPA's king across the board toward an inevitable end, but the union does not have the sense to retire.

Surrender isn't their best option. It's the only one they have left.

They must now be coming to a realization that should have dawned on them from the outset, that management is not only willing to lose another season, but that it's been hoping to all along.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.08.2012

646060 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Don Cherry says he has 'never seen Gary Bettman so livid' over NHLPA's latest offer

The Canadian Press

Don Cherry's never seen Gary Bettman like this before.

The Hockey Night in Canada commentator took to Twitter on Thursday night to comment on the NHL commissioner's heated news conference in New York City.

"I have known Gary Bettman since he was named commissioner," Cherry wrote. "I have never seen him so livid as he was tonight at the press conference.

"He was almost shaking. That was no act."

Bettman held the conference after two days of intense but optimistic negotiations with the NHL Players' Association fell apart.

Union head Donald Fehr held a news conference in the early evening when he said the NHLPA had tabled an offer that he felt made real progress to ending the 82-day old lockout.

Minutes later, Fehr spoke to the assembled media again, saying the owners had rejected the offer.

Bettman then held a third news conference where he explained the NHL's reasons for turning down the NHLPA's offer and took some shots at his union counterpart.

Cherry theorized on Twitter as to what happened with the owners behind the scene.

"There were owners who I'll call doves who were against the hawks. The hawks said ok we'll do it your way and the doves put an extra 100 million on the table and when the association said ok but . . . The doves turned into hawks themselves," Cherry wrote. "I believe the hardliners said to the doves ok we did it your way and the association thinks we are weak . . .

"Now we'll do it our way . . ."

The former Boston Bruins coach then added: "Looks like I will see a lot more of Marlies, Junior and Minor Midget games this year."

Cherry was still tweeting on the situation Friday morning.

"The fans are blaming Fehr for the situation we are in now. Remember I said a month ago I don't like the sound that Fehr didn't come out of retirement to lose.

"I've got a solution so Fehr won't be blamed. Have a secret ballot, yes I said secret ballot. If you take a show of hands you're not going to say nay if the guy in front says yay. Guys don't want to look like a chicken and caving into the NHL.

"If the vote says we carry on with the fight we carry on the war. If the vote says let's accept the offer, accept it. Majority rules I think that's the way it should be. With a secret ballot you have nothing to lose!"

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646061 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Putting on a show rather than doing a deal: Cox

By Damien Cox

NEW YORK—Marvellous theatre. Bravo!

And the ticket price was most agreeable. Free, just like Shakespeare in the park.

For a process that has been about as exciting as Novocaine for months, mark down the first Thursday in December, 2012 as one for the books.

MORE: Talks break down after league rejects players' latest offer

Absolutely nothing was accomplished, mind you. But my goodness, both the league and the players association delivered their lines with great drama and conviction, executing their scripts flawlessly.

In a hotel ballroom in Times Square, just blocks from grand theatres where the world's greatest thespians have plied their craft, the only surprise after duelling press conferences in the early evening was they didn't pass the hat.

First, Don Fehr was Neville Chamberlain, confident a lasting peace was at hand, and that the two sides were "on the road to a quick end to this dispute." Sidney Crosby was "hopeful" as he conducted interviews along with 13 other players.

Then, suddenly, there was a halt. Players stopped their scrums, and went back on to the small stage to await instructions.

Ten minutes later, Fehr walked back in to say he had received a voice mail message from the league, that there was a "development," and was "disappointed" that talks between the league and players had broken down.

Less than a half-hour after that, behind the same lectern, it was Gary Bettman's turn to be "disappointed." The NHL commissioner lashed out at Fehr and said it was "incomprehensible" that Fehr had suggested the two sides were close and chastised him for getting the hopes of hockey fans up that the season might soon start.

Then, as Bettman and his deputy, Bill Daly, were speaking to the assembled media, a number of players, including Manny Malhotra, Ron Hainsey, Chris Campoli and Daniel Winnik, walked in to the gathering and stood at the back of the room, grim-faced with arms crossed, listening to Bettman speak.

A little muscle for the cameras, as it were.

"What you're witnessing is very tough bargaining," said a seemingly emotional Bettman.

Oh, is that what that was? One was mostly struck by the purposelessness of it all. None of it meant a thing.

The league even trotted out statements from four owners brought in to participate this week — the first time owners have been heard from since the lockout began — to punctuate their stated belief that what had started well on Tuesday had gone bad by Wednesday night, even after the owners had put \$100 million (u.s.) more in "make whole" funds on the table.

"It was like someone had thrown a switch. The atmosphere had completely changed," said Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment chairman Larry Tanenbaum in a statement. "I am very disappointed and disillusioned. Had I not experienced this process myself, I might not have believed it."

Winnipeg owner Mark Chipman said that while he senses "there are some members of the players association that understand our perspective on these issues, clearly there are many that don't."

Pittsburgh co-owner Ron Burkle, whose presence along with that of his Crosby, his star player, seemed to signal a change in the way talks were progressing, said: "I hope that going backwards does not prevent a deal."

Crosby, on the other hand, had a very different take on the proposal that was given from the union to the owners at about 5:30 on Thursday, and was rejected shortly afterwards.

"I think we're really happy with the proposal that we gave them," said Crosby.

So now, rather than it being players united against Bettman, we have players and their owners butting heads. Both sides got what they want given that both owners or players know we're nowhere near a true deadline.

The players were convincing in their seeming belief they were poised to tie the skates and tell the boys to come home from Europe. Game on!

Bettman and the owners, meanwhile, were successful in creating the impression they can get on just fine with the players — until Fehr sticks his nose in.

So where are we actually? Closer to a deal? Well, close on some issues, and still a ways apart on others, difficult ones. The key issues appear to be limits on the length of contracts — the league wants five years, the players offered eight — and the term of any new collective bargaining agreement. The league wants a 10-year deal — most fans do, as well — while Fehr's contention is anything longer than five or six is unreasonable.

Then there are so-called "compliance" issues, the way in which the transition is made from the old economic system to a new one. These could prove thorny.

Now, the weekend may go by with no talks or games, and most likely the two sides will re-engage next week.

Maybe by then they'll be ready to leave the theatre to the professionals.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.08.2012

646062 Toronto Maple Leafs

Cue the conspiracy theories after latest NHL lockout disagreement

Cam Cole

VANCOUVER — The two-word expletive that means "go forth and multiply" can be delivered in all sorts of ways.

But in the context of a relationship, probably nothing in the world says it more clearly than being dumped by voicemail. Unless it's by text message.

So when NHL Players Association executive director Donald Fehr walked off the podium after his press conference Thursday in New York — having told the assembled media that, with all the concessions the players' side had offered in a new proposal, there wasn't enough difference left in the two sides' positions to prevent a new collective bargaining agreement — he probably wasn't expecting to be stopped short of the door by a message left on his brother (and deputy) Steve's cell phone.

"Unacceptable," said the message from Bettman's second in command, Bill Daly. "Everything's off the table."

As reporters watched, fascinated, Don Fehr returned to the podium. Maybe it dawned on him that the message had probably been left while he was still on TV answering reporters' questions.

He was not happy, but he does a decent job of hiding the exact width and breadth of his displeasure. He's been through these wars before, in baseball.

Gary Bettman's been through them before, too. Repeatedly. But when he arrived for his moment in front of the microphones, he was one seething heap of New York lawyer. He's a pretty good actor, but I'm not sure, given the colour in his face, that his anger was a put-on.

It's pretty clear what happened: talks, which had begun so well on Tuesday, began to deteriorate late Wednesday night when the owners put nearly an extra \$100-million into the "make whole" pool, meeting the players halfway in essence, and in Bettman's words, "the union's response was shockingly silent. It was 'thank you, we'll take the \$100-million.'"

The owners left behind their counter-offer, which Bettman said required a simple "yes or no, not a negotiation session." Fehr tried to negotiate off it Thursday and the league hit the roof.

And immediately, the conspiracy theories began.

Was all that sudden bonhomie from the owners' side on Tuesday — the meeting suggested by Bettman between six hand-picked owners on one

side and as many players as the union wished to send on the other — an elaborate setup?

Were Bettman's "moderates" — Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, Winnipeg's Mark Chipman, Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum and Tampa's Jeff Vinik — really the NHL's Trojan horse, sent in to catch the players off-guard and get them stampeding toward a resolution? All the while knowing that as soon as Fehr was back in the room, he'd sniff out the ruse and throw up a roadblock, and make himself an easy scapegoat for the inevitable recriminations that would follow the next breakdown?

Is it too much to have a horse and a goat in the same paragraph?

Some of them, I've never seen so emotional. They told me the process is over

On the other side, could the whack-a-mole game Fehr's been playing with the union's ever-moving target be happening because — though he must have known from the start that he was playing a losing hand — he's worried about what his own legacy might be, if he's unable to stem the tide of givebacks to the owners?

Could the players, 18 strong, have been so naive as to think that there wasn't something just a little fishy, a little orchestrated, about the sudden thaw from the owners' side? Were they really surprised when Jeremy Jacobs and Co. revealed the iron fist inside the velvet glove once it got down to specifics?

"The owners are beside themselves," railed Bettman. "Some of them, I've never seen so emotional. They told me the process is over."

It does kind of make you wonder what the players are thinking right now.

Maybe Fehr has been telling his guys that a collective bargaining negotiation is like buying a car.

That the rock-bottom price the salesman gives you at the beginning is going to change, perhaps several times, before the haggling is all done, so don't get all shirty about it. Keep battling and eventually you'll get a better deal.

If you can't get the price you want, maybe he'll throw in some options. You tell him to keep the extended warranty, maybe you'll get air-conditioning and the sun roof.

It sounded good.

So Bettman's opening gambit in the summer was a bloody insult? Everyone could see that. But in the end, he'd come around a little bit. You couldn't expect to win the negotiation, exactly, because he's the only dealer in town, unless you had your eye on a Lada, in which case Russia was only about two hard days away by air.

But hang in there and you could maybe walk away with your dignity.

If that's what the head of NHLPA has been telling his players, Thursday evening's events must have hit them like a stiff boot to the solar plexus and had them wondering if their hired gun was delusional.

Surely, they're smarter than to think they were — are — going to win this fight.

Surely they knew which way the day was going to end from the moment they found out that the only representatives the league had deigned to send to hear their proposal were Bill Daly and the dreaded Dr. Death, lockout lawyer Bob Battersman.

No Bettman; he was back at NHL headquarters, making Montgomery Burns steeples with his fingers, composing his speech. And no owners; they had begun leaving in shifts during the day, getting out ahead of the storm.

Fehr put on a pretty good song and dance, making it sound as though it would have to be a really cynical league to reject the players' offer of a maximum eight-year contract length, an eight-year CBA term with an optional out after six, a nip here, a tuck there — never exactly what the NHL had asked for, but closer.

But what he really was doing was a bit of sleight-of-hand. The sides weren't close, and he knew it. He kept changing the game and as soon as the league would try to put one fire out, another would spring up.

His statement that the players were proposing the eight-year maximum on contracts (the NHL wanted five) appears to have touched a nerve.

The five-year limit, Daly said, is "a hill we will die on."

The players — hell, anyone who loves the game — had better hope he doesn't mean that.

The thing about having burned the house down once before, only to build a bigger one in its place at zero cost, is that it makes the arsonist think it's just that simple.

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646063 Toronto Maple Leafs

Brian Burke shows warmth amid NHL's labour darkness

Sean Fitz-Gerald

Some things never change. Fifty-five years ago, while Johnny Bower was setting an American Hockey League record for consecutive shutouts, the Hall of Fame goalie was motivated by many things. But money might have topped them all.

"I got \$50 for the first shutout," said Bower. "And then after that it went up to \$100 and so on. You know, \$50 was a lot back then, but of course I would have to take the guys out to lunch every time I got a shutout. So I was left with maybe \$10."

Bower, whose shutout streak with the Cleveland Barons in 1957 totaled 249 minutes and 51 seconds, ended up making \$150 in bonuses. It is not known whether Abbotsford Heat goalie Barry Brust, who broke Bower's record last month with a shutout streak of 268 minutes and 17 seconds, received similar incentives.

But even at a modest US\$75,000, Brust's salary eclipsed Bower's.

Read more ...

TORONTO — Each of the children descended the ramp slowly. Some had breathing apparatus to pull alongside, some were in wheelchairs, and some were attached to intravenous drips from bags with grave-looking symbols affixed to them.

Christmas music was playing softly in the background as they entered the room from the main hallway. And one by one, as they reached the end of the ramp, they smiled; first at the sight of Canadian Forces personnel dressed as elves, who helped distribute gifts, and then at the welcome line that was waiting around the corner.

Former Toronto Maple Leafs captains Wendel Clark and Darryl Sittler were there. At the front of the line was the team's current president and general manager, Brian Burke.

"A lot of these kids have no idea who I am when I walk in," Burke said. "It's not the same recognition as with a player. But after a little visit, and leaving a present and maybe signing something for them, I get a big kick out of it."

As processes to save a National Hockey League season continued to grind to uncertain outcomes in New York on Thursday, Burke spent time inside The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. In a normal year, without a lockout, the Leafs players would be the star attractions at the annual event.

This is not a normal year.

And Burke is not a typical sports executive. Well-known for his thundering diatribes and his oft-cited mantra — "pugnacity, testosterone, truculence and belligerence" — the 57-year-old has become fixture of community outreach during his four years in Toronto and, notably, during the lockout.

Last month, he spent the night sleeping outdoors in a sleeping bag to help raise money for Covenant House, which helps homeless youth. The event raised more than \$500,000. (On Thursday, a member of the Leafs organization said Burke returned to his office just after dawn to steal a short nap on his couch before heading to an appearance at a hockey clinic for children.)

In the spring, he made an appearance in Halifax for Ducks Unlimited Canada. In July, he once again marched in Toronto's Pride parade.

Last year, he donated a four-year-old gelding to the Toronto Police Service Mounted Unit after paying a visit to its barn earlier in the year. He named the horse Moose, which is the nickname the family had for his late son Brendan, a well-built 21-year-old who died in a car accident two years ago.

Burke also works with the Special Olympics, the Canadian Safe Schools Network, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada and has made a number of appearances for and alongside firefighters and the Canadian military.

I think you also have an obligation, if you're the general manager of a Canadian team, where it brings so much muscle, you have an obligation to make things better in the community where you live

"I think the coolest part of my job is that you can use the muscle of the title to do charity work," Burke said. "I did just as much charity work when I was a lawyer as I do now. But it's 'Brian Burke, attorney,' who cares? So you're the GM of the Toronto Maple Leafs; that title brings some juice and some muscle to it, and I think it enables you to do a lot more."

Being the general manager of a storied franchise that has not qualified for post-season play in eight years — he joined the Leafs on Nov. 29, 2008 — has led to the creation of dueling perceptions. On one side, there is Burke, the goodwill ambassador who serves as a champion of noble causes. And on the other, there is the Burke who feuded with reporters and various media outlets last season; who had to fire his head coach after signing him to an extension; and who has to feel the public wrath of the extended post-season drought.

"To me, they're distinct, and I don't confuse them," Burke said. "In other words, if someone says to me, 'You haven't made the playoffs with the Leafs,' I wouldn't say, 'Yeah, but I slept out for Covenant House.'"

Family handout

Family handout Last year, Brian Burke donated a four-year-old gelding to the Toronto Police Service Mounted Unit after paying a visit to its barn earlier in the year. He named the horse Moose, the nickname the family had for his late son Brendan, left, who died in a car accident two years ago.

He said he does not listen to the criticism.

"To me, your job performance as a general manager will dictate your longevity," he said. "This stuff won't change that. They're unrelated."

There was no relation on Thursday as Burke stood, smiling, in his military-themed Maple Leafs jersey. If the children did not recognize him, their parents did, as they shook his hand next to a wall of team-themed stuffed animals.

"I think you also have an obligation, if you're the general manager of a Canadian team, where it brings so much muscle, you have an obligation to make things better in the community where you live," Burke said.

How does he manage his time?

"Well," he said, smirking, "things are a little slow right now."

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646064 Washington Capitals

For one night, professional hockey returned to Washington

By Katie Carrera ,

Thursday night, for the first time in nearly seven months, Verizon Center was home to a professional hockey game. Rather than the usual NHL fare, though, it was the American Hockey League's Hershey Bears facing off against the Norfolk Admirals, reminding those in attendance once again that it might be awhile before they see the Capitals play on F Street.

In my story in Friday's paper, which you can check out in full here, I talked to several fans at the AHL showcase about the bittersweet feeling of being back in Verizon Center — but not for the main attraction.

More fans in attendance for the Bears-Admirals game voiced their frustration about the lockout to Post videographer Whitney Shefte. Check out what they had to say:

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646065 Washington Capitals

NHL negotiations break down again

By Katie Carrera ,

NHL labor negotiations broke down in spectacular fashion Thursday as the league rejected the latest proposal by the players and took several provisions it proposed during the three days of talks this week off the table.

The evening began with NHLPA Executive Director Donald Fehr stating that the two sides had reached a "complete agreement on dollars" including the make whole provision. Some disagreements remained on contracting issues but Fehr was quite optimistic and insistent that the two sides were close to striking a deal.

Not long after that initial press conference concluded, Fehr returned to the podium. His brother and special counsel to the NHLPA Steve Fehr received a voicemail from NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly stating that the league rejected the union's proposal.

"It looks like this is not going to be resolved in the immediate future," Fehr told reporters in New York when he met them a second time. (video here)

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman vehemently denied that the two sides were nearing an agreement and criticized Fehr for suggesting as much and creating false hope. (video here)

"I'm not sure that spinning us all into an emotional frenzy," Bettman said, "Over maybe we're close and we're going to be playing hockey tomorrow, is terribly unfair to our fans and it's unfair to this process."

So where do things stand now? This week owners offered to increase its make whole payment to \$300 million as well as maintain the unrestricted free agency eligibility age and salary arbitration requirements the same as they were in the previous collective bargaining agreement. In return, the owners wanted the players to agree on three other issues: a 10-year CBA, a five-year term limit on individual player contracts and no transition issues — no escrow limits and no compliance buyouts. The offer was a "total package" as Bettman described it, essentially take it or leave it.

To those three issues the players countered with proposals of an eight-year CBA that included an option in the sixth year, individual contract limits of eight years and a variance rule that Fehr said addressed the league's concern of back-diving contracts. Fehr added that the two sides had not yet discussed transition issues.

"What we got today, quite frankly and disappointingly, missed the mark in all three respects," Daly said. "So for the union to suggest that somehow we're close is cherry picking and it's unfortunate."

With the rejection of the NHLPA's offer, the league took the make whole proposal, not just the dollar amount but the concept itself, off the table along with other components according to Bettman. Daly went so far as to call the individual contract limits as "the hill we will die on" thus removing any doubt that contracting issues — once thought to be the simple part of these negotiations — are now a major hurdle.

Where things go from here, no one really knows. Bettman declined to name a "drop-dead" date for the season but acknowledged that he didn't envision playing less than 48 games.

Noteworthy links:

- The four moderate owners who took part in negotiations this week — Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, Tampa Bay's Jeff Vinik, Winnipeg's Mark Chipman and Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum — released statements expressing their disappointment in talks breaking off. Check them out and some analysis of the message at Puck Daddy.

- ESPN's Pierre LeBrun offers a take many of us can probably relate to: You have got to be kidding me.

- Do the events of these negotiations look a lot like the ones from 2004-05? Erik Duhatschek of The Globe and Mail thinks so.

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646066 Washington Capitals

NHL lockout 2012: CBA talks go off rails

By Stephen Whyno

On Thursday morning, Washington Capitals forward Jason Chimera made it clear he wasn't going to get sucked in to getting too optimistic about talks to end the NHL lockout.

"I rode the roller coaster for a long time," he said. "I don't want to anymore."

Thursday night that roller coaster, and the course of negotiations toward a new collective bargaining agreement, appeared to go off the rails entirely. Minutes after NHL Players' Association executive director Donald Fehr said the sides were in "complete agreement" on many issues, he went back to reporters in New York City and told them: "There has been a development. It's not a positive one."

The league responded to the players' offer with a firm no, delivered via voicemail from deputy commissioner Bill Daly to NHLPA special counsel Steve Fehr. Talks broke off and rhetoric returned, leaving the 2012-13 season in peril.

"We're at a loss to explain what happened," commissioner Gary Bettman said. "I am disappointed beyond belief that we are where we are tonight and we're going to have to take a deep breath and try and regroup."

The drastic 180-degree turn within minutes, in at least the public perception of the talks, appeared to be a new low during a lockout that has featured plenty of them. Previous laughable moments included mediator Guy Serota getting taken off the case for his Twitter feed and name-calling of Bettman by players.

This time, tensions and stakes are high and answers are hard to find about what went wrong and, more importantly, what's next. What happened is complicated in the scope of these CBA talks but can be boiled down to this: the NHL made an offer that it considered a "package deal," not for negotiating. The NHLPA tried to negotiate off it, "cherry-picking" aspects of the proposal that it liked.

Fehr and the players thought it was a step forward. Bettman and the owners were incensed that there wasn't a "Yes" answer to three key issues: a five-year contract limit, 10-year CBA and no compliance buyouts or caps on escrow.

When the NHLPA offered an eight-year contract limit, eight-year CBA and expressed interest in compliance issues, the league

"We were advised in a voicemail message that the moves the players made were not acceptable, that there was no reason to stay around for meetings tonight or tomorrow, that they would be in touch, and that something, everything, that's not clear, is off the table," Donald Fehr said.

Bettman and Daly made it clear that the "make whole" provision, which would pay players back over time for their immediately reduced salaries, was off the table.

"The concept itself is off the table," Bettman said.

Gone is the optimism that was starting to emerge in these talks earlier in the week. Daly called the five-year contract limit "the hill we will die on" and Fehr said "We've got to figure out a way to reach an agreement, if one is possible."

There is still time to save some semblance of a season, even though the rest of the December schedule is expected to be canceled soon. Bettman insisted Thursday night that the NHL hasn't set a deadline by which a deal would have to be made in order to play this year.

"The fact of the matter is, we'll get to a point and at that point we'll conclude we can't have a season with integrity and then we'll have to make a tough decision," Bettman said, also implying no fewer than 48 games would work. "I am certainly hoping that we don't get to that place. But when we do, we'll be there."

It's uncertain when negotiations will resume. Fehr had said Thursday evening that he believed a settlement could be reached rather quickly, but his about-face was alarming.

"It looks like this is not going to be resolved in the immediate future. I hope that turns out to be wrong, but that's certainly what the message is that we have today," he said. "That's not withstanding the fact that we are clearly very close if not on top of one another in connection with most of the major issues."

There's not even an agreement on how close the sides are. The NHL added \$100 million to "make whole" this week, leading to Fehr's positivity. But contract issues remained a sticking point.

Now everything is.

"Regrettably, we have been unable to close the divide on some critical issues that we feel are essential to the immediate and long-term health of our game," Winnipeg Jets owner Mark Chipman said in a statement. "While I sense there are some members of the players association that understand our perspective on these issues, clearly there are many that don't."

Count most of those on the outside of negotiations as those who don't understand or know what will happen next. Players reached Thursday night were tight-lipped about what's next. Disclaimer of interest could be the NHLPA's move to push the process along. Fehr wouldn't say.

Something has to give, though, before the 2012-13 season goes the way of 2004-05.

"Am I unhappy about the prospect? You bet I am. It absolutely is something that torments me," Bettman said about canceling a second season in eight years. "I'm not happy about this, but I've got to play the hand that I'm dealt."

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646067 Winnipeg Jets

Ready for takeoff

By: Tim Campbell

New duties and new responsibilities among the coaching staff will mark the Winnipeg Jets' second revival season -- if it ever gets going.

Jets head coach Claude Noel, who because of the NHL lockout has been virtually silent since the summer, told the Free Press late this week that the addition of assistant coach Perry Pearn has been a catalyst for change.

Noel has tasked Pearn with lead roles for both the team's power play and penalty-killing.

Assistant coach Charlie Huddy will continue to work with the team's defencemen and the penalty killing, while assistant coach Pascal Vincent will remain hands-on with the power play.

"I had to get a feel for a guy with so much experience, NHL and experience in other leagues, and how to best utilize it," Noel said. "That took me some time."

Noel will certainly be hoping for better results ahead. The Jets were ranked 24th of 30 teams in penalty-killing last season at 80.1 per cent. Their power play was No. 11 at 17.9 per cent but when the two special-teams percentages don't add up to 100, there's work to be done.

"I really like the chemistry we have with this staff," Noel said. "And I've given some objectives to Perry in regards to working with both Charlie and Pascal. We'll take it one year at a time."

On the bench and during games, Noel has decided that he'll be flanked by both Huddy and Pearn full-time, with Huddy changing the defence and Pearn working with the forwards.

Vincent will be initially asked to contribute from high above the ice.

"But he won't be upstairs every game and all of the games," Noel said. "I've been in that position before. Pascal is a very intelligent young coach and I know he's very passionate and I know that will be a very difficult thing for him to deal with. But I'm going to make sure he's not too far away from our players during games."

"Look, there's enough work for all of us to go around. And what it does is frees me up to continue to develop relationships with the players. I have responsibilities in managing this whole thing, coaches, trainers and staff and dealing with players."

"Last year, everything was so busy all the time and there were a lot of things I wasn't able to do. I want to do more them and do them better."

Noel said he has spent a good deal of time thinking about a potential frantic, compressed season that could still be played.

"I think all the coaches are going to be in the same boat, that there's going to be a difficult time and process because there will be so many factors involved here," he said. "Seven or eight of your players are playing, others are practising to a degree and you'll have other guys you're not sure about or what they're doing."

But even after any resumption of normalcy, a certain fly-by-the-seat-of-one's-pants theme is almost certain.

"It'll be more intense, a shorter span, how many games in how many days? And team dynamics? What will that be like? And the 13 or 14 players who have not been in heavy competition, somewhere in there there could be problems, things you can't anticipate or things you can anticipate but you don't know who and what."

While the lockout has dragged on, said he has worked diligently at keeping busy -- he brought the Jets' coaching staff together again for meetings last week, for instance -- and trying to catch up in some personal ways.

"Really trying to get organized," he said. "When we came here two years ago with the Moose, we moved here on Sept. 1 and I went straight to Vancouver. That year was busy, and I didn't really unpack my desk and get organized very well. And then that season rolled into the Jets and I had to build a staff.

"So this has at least given me some time to get organized and unpack some things at home."

Self-evaluation and self-improvement have occupied much of his lockout time.

As well, he has found ways to get onto the ice, working with three minor-hockey teams on Mondays at the MTS Iceplex.

"I have way too much energy right now and my passion level is quite high. So on the ice I am a raging lunatic at times," he said.

That's the gung-ho Noel Jets fans know and they'll be glad to hear with his whistle and coaching hat, he has similar expectations for pros and kids.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.08.2012

646068 Winnipeg Jets

Jets' Little disappointed at NHL stalemate

By: Ed Tait

Watching the back-and-forth of negotiations and duelling press conferences between the National Hockey League and the NHL Players' Association was riveting drama for a few hours Thursday night.

But then there came a point when even the most-fervent optimist must have felt like his heart had been ripped from his chest -- especially after NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Don Fehr both indicated the progress made earlier in the week had screeched to a halt and talks had been shelved.

Ladies and gentlemen, Bryan Little of the Winnipeg Jets:

"I didn't plan on (watching the press conferences), but I turned to it and I was watching it for about an hour and a half. I was pretty much glued to it and was interested to see what both sides had to say.

"I was really disappointed. Listening to Don talk, for the most part it was positive and first and then he came back and it kinda went downhill from there. And then when Gary came up it didn't look good and you could tell he was frustrated. When he was talking you could tell there is still a lot of work to be done and there's a huge gap still.

"It was strange to watch that, to be honest," added Little. "It didn't really seem like it was organized. Don was up there talking and within minutes he got that phone call and came on and it was pretty much downhill and all negative from there. It dragged on and I turned the channel after awhile because Gary was talking for awhile. After it started to get negative I didn't care what he said, I just wanted to turn the TV and go to bed.

"I watched the football game for a bit and I'm not even a football fan."

Now the question is where the talks go from here. There are reports it is expected that after the two sides cool off and perhaps touch base this weekend, that negotiations could begin again early next week.

It is expected the NHL will cancel another chunk of games -- they've already spiked all contests up until Dec. 14 -- with that announcement possibly coming Friday or Monday.

But there's also a hope that some of the traction made earlier last week can be rediscovered when talks resume. The NHL offered a package that increased the deferred transition money paid to the players to \$300 million under a 10-year agreement and also included term limits on player contracts.

The NHLPA wants to negotiate off that offer, but the league insists it will not negotiate against itself and has pulled the proposal.

"Hopefully today brings some new things and we can move on from there," said Jim Slater. "Going from last night, it didn't look good. But the guys here, we're still positive we're going to get something done at some point... maybe not here in the next little while but hopefully down the road."

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.08.2012

646069 Winnipeg Jets

Voices of reason a reason to hope

By: Tim Campbell

They tried something new in negotiations for a new NHL collective bargaining agreement this week.

Four owners were added to the mix and interacted directly across from players. Participation from NHL and NHLPA counsel and staff was limited to one extra each.

The dynamic was designed to, and did, foster communication and a better understanding of the other side.

And for a day, some listening to ideas and provisions and the reasons for them went both ways, and though the details stayed inside, optimism was impossible to keep in the room,

The moderates on both sides seemed to have seized their opportunity for a foothold. Reason won the day.

For a day.

And then, well, we all should have known better.

This labour dispute has already been too protracted, too dug in, too obstinate in so many directions. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr don't like any characterizations of lack of trust hurting these talks, but it's there in plain sight.

The league doesn't believe Fehr and the union want to make a deal. At least not yet.

The players' side is quick to point to all the reasons the NHL is unwilling to dance, be it player contract issues, make-whole or transition payments or term of deal.

The sniping at Bettman, Fehr, Boston owner Jeremy Jacobs or the revolving door of players in and out of meetings just never goes away. Trusting people just don't do that.

After this week's early optimism, the suggestion's been made that the NHLPA just didn't trust owners talking directly to players any longer.

After a frantic day Wednesday where both sides had their mini-volcanoes but still moderates urging each other to keep at it, be reasonable and not give up, Thursday's acrimony was unavoidable.

Why?

Because it was not yet the correct time for the moderates to save the day.

They may well have paved the way to a deal, if there's one to be had in the coming few weeks that are left, but Fehr and his leadership are not yet ready to put a series of provisions in front of all the players and say, as one sage participant in the NHL's economy and culture put it the other day:

"We thought we could get X, right now we've got Y but I think this is about the best we're going to do."

Equally, the same words don't seem to have yet come from Bettman to his group of owners.

So again Thursday, after nearly two days of leak blackouts, the details began flowing -- always bad news if you want to be hopeful -- followed by aggressive recriminations. With their new money in hand, Fehr suggested the dollar amounts just about matched and that a deal ought to be close.

Bettman followed, and as a large audience could see he was particularly offended and animated as he explained this week's moderate-generated offers were a package deal not to be cherry-picked and saying things we're close was a mistake.

Now the week's progress, initiated by the moderates, has been tossed in the trash can and the hard-liners on both sides have their opening to resume control.

Will a deal come with the hawks on each side in charge?

It's very hard to see how, given the short time frame left before, as Bettman hinted Thursday, a viable season of at least 48 games can still be conducted.

Bettman may have said the most salient thing in Thursday's flurry, that it was time to step back and take a deep breath.

But maybe the examination period will drive home the reality that for those truly interested in a deal, the moderate voices will eventually be the ones coming up with the resolution.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 12.08.2012

646070 Winnipeg Jets

Time for players to cast ballots

By: Gary Lawless

Neither does Don Fehr. Otherwise there would have been a vote. And there should have been one. Maybe there still should be.

I understand Fehr's job is to get the best deal for his players and holding a vote could undermine his bargaining position. But we're at the brink. The season is on the line. If the NHL loses the season, the next offer it makes will very likely put next season in jeopardy as well. I'd say it's time to take the temperature of the players as a whole.

There's lots to lose. If I was a player, I'd want a vote. Not a show of hands but an anonymous vote.

I'm in a union. Sometimes the agendas of leadership and its constituents don't coincide. It happens for many reasons. They can be practical, ideological or sinister. Take your pick.

Both the union and ownership will be happy to spin things their way right now. My job, and yours for that matter, isn't to buy everything or anything they have to say. It's to listen and sift and sort and come to an opinion.

Long ago in this process I took the position that a 50-50 split of hockey related revenues and less player mobility was best for this market and the Winnipeg Jets.

In case you don't recall, this city once lost its NHL franchise and its fans paid a heavy emotional debt for 15 years. Excuse me if I care less about the rights of millionaire NHL players that move in and out of our community and more about the people that shop at my grocer and buy this newspaper and pay taxes that support our infrastructure.

Call me pro-owner. I'll look you in the face and tell you I'm pro-Winnipeg and be very happy to do so. Don Fehr doesn't care about the health of this franchise. He cares about player rights. That's what he was hired to do. But I don't have to sing from his song book.

Fehr has fought a good fight. Brilliant at some points. But he's on the verge of flying too close to the sun. Some of his players, and my guess is a majority of them, realize this.

There comes a point when the loss of real dollars outweighs the victories of principle Fehr is chasing. He's out-bluffed the owners again and again. But sooner or later he's going to get called.

Right now he's telling the players there's more to be had. It's easy to see Fehr's argument and he's been consistently right. The owners have continually caved.

But when he's wrong the price will be staggering. Some players will be unable to return from the abyss. So, shouldn't they decide if they want to make that blind leap?

Fehr says he works for the players and they make all the decisions. Again, I don't believe that. There is a tight power base that controls the rest of the group. Not every player in the league has a say. Unions simply don't function that way.

The players bristle at the suggestion they are cattle but in every union there has to be some shepherding. Leadership bullies those that don't fall in line.

Right now the players are projecting a united front. It's what they've been schooled to do. I just don't think it's entirely authentic.

Perhaps I'm wrong. Certainly some of the more vocal players Thursday night on Twitter would suggest so. But I believe there is a silent majority that is afraid to use its voice.

A deal was there to be made this week and it had a little something in it for both sides. It should have closed, but Fehr and his lieutenants, for their own reasons, didn't like it. Their voices were loudest.

The union likes to say every player has a voice. I say it's time to hear them all.

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646071 Winnipeg Jets

Jets lockout penalizes downtown businesses

By Ross Romaniuk

It isn't only a perception that the National Hockey League's drawn-out work stoppage is making businesses bleed near the arenas where its Canadian teams play.

The damage to bottom lines in Winnipeg and several other cities is borne out in hard figures compiled by a major credit and debit card processing firm.

Moneris Solutions Corp. has found that restaurants, fast-food joints and bars in the immediate vicinity of NHL arenas in Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Calgary have suffered an overall sales drop of 11.23% this year, compared to what they brought in on game days in 2011.

Though his Arkadash Bistro and Lounge on downtown Portage Avenue didn't begin operating until May, after the Winnipeg Jets had been eliminated from playoff contention last spring, Kelvin Peters says he's "not at all" surprised by the numbers.

"If they're not running," Peters said Friday of the Jets and their games, "we're not able to generate as much business as we would like from that."

For "drinking establishments" alone, Moneris says, the cut in business is more alarming.

"When it comes to bars, it's down about 30%," Chuck Davidson, vice-president of policy with the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, said on Friday of the decline.

"Obviously, our hope is that they'll resolve this situation as quickly as possible," Davidson added of the NHL's lockout of its players, almost three months old while collective bargaining talks drag on.

"It will benefit restaurants and bars close to MTS Centre that were reaping the benefits last year."

Specifically, Moneris reports that bars and lounges near NHL arenas have sustained a 34.68% sales drop compared to game days last year. Meanwhile, the losses to fast-food eateries and restaurants, respectively, have been calculated at 6.93% and 10.54%.

Fortunately for Peter Ginakes, his downtown Pony Corral restaurant and bar hasn't taken much of a hit since the Jets were locked out in September, with all games since then cancelled.

"It hasn't hurt our location downtown so far," Ginakes told the Winnipeg Sun, adding that his sales appear on par with or even slightly up from where they were last year.

Though he's "booked solid right up to Christmas," he said, he's concerned about an expected drop in traffic during the holidays after Dec. 25 if Jets games remain shut down.

"Downtown, there's no one in the towers or in the buildings then," Ginakes explained.

"That (Jets) injection of bringing people downtown from the suburbs helps us a lot."

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646072 Winnipeg Jets

Hainsey unsure how union gig will sit with Jets fans

By Paul Friesen

Safe to say Ron Hainsey is getting more ink and TV time these days than he got all of last season.

But is that a good thing?

When you consider this winter's lasting image of the Jets defenceman might be as the extra appendage of NHLPA boss Don Fehr, I believe you have your answer.

As a member of the union's negotiating committee, Hainsey has been on the front lines like no other member of the Jets — and next to Fehr for the fallout.

It's inevitable some of the spray of fan outrage aimed at Fehr will wind up landing on Hainsey, if and when the game gets back on the ice.

"For Winnipeg it's especially difficult because they got NHL hockey back," Hainsey said in an interview from his Connecticut home, Friday. "And the players, absolutely to a man, myself at the top of that list, loved playing there. It was a different environment from where we were. You make a bad play in your own zone, there's a groan from the crowd."

Likewise, you become the face of what's perceived as money-grubbing players, and you're not exactly gunning for the most-popular-player award, particularly when you earned \$5 million and didn't score a single goal last season.

It is, as they say, the perfect storm.

What if Blake Wheeler had been the Jets player rep? Or defenceman Zach Bogosian?

The faithful could probably forgive and forget in the time it takes to sing O Canada for the home opener.

"The fans aren't going to like the situation regardless of who's at fault," Hainsey said. "At the same time, I decided to do this a year ago, to do something players have done before me. It's a difficult spot, because fans are what drive the game."

I've been asked how Hainsey will get along with management after all this, too.

"I couldn't tell you," he said. "It would be irresponsible for me to even speculate on that. Having said that, I didn't go in with blinders on. This is the business aspect of the game. It's not fun."

Hainsey says the face-to-face talks with Jets chairman Mark Chipman in New York this week were professional.

No shouting matches, no swearing across the table. Both men there to do a job.

Teammates say Hainsey's the perfect man for it.

"We've got to have guys in that room that can handle the big dogs they send in, and Ronnie's one of those guys," Jim Slater said. "He's not afraid to go in there and speak his mind."

While some players may be intimidated by a billionaire in a suit, Hainsey apparently isn't.

"If anything, the ownership should have a lot more respect for him, that a guy like that can go in there and stand up," Slater said. "Because not a lot of guys can."

He's also kept teammates on top of every development, while trying to resist the emotional swings. Thursday night, the coaster hit the loop-de-loop.

"There's clearly waves," Hainsey said. "This is the second time we seemed to be getting closer and closer and closer, and ended up with a break-off. That's the pattern."

Maybe the next wave gets this thing home, and Hainsey finds out if he's the lockout's local lightning rod. I give the guy credit for being willing to get his hands dirty.

He is, after all, a 31-year-old in the final season of his contract, giving up a good chunk of a \$3 million salary this year, to fight the good fight. Who knows if he'll ever sign another deal?

Of course, that's not likely to get him a standing ovation.

"I borrow a Don Fehr quote," Hainsey said, chuckling. "I am out of the predicting business."

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646073 Winnipeg Jets

Lack of compromise in NHL lockout insulting to Canadians

By Ted Wyman

I'm not sure there are any official numbers on something like this, but it's safe to say Thursday's NHL melodrama in New York was one of the most-watched programs in Canada.

Yup, we care so much about the NHL that we are glued to TVs and Twitter feeds, while a bunch of billionaires and millionaires try to figure out a way to divvy up our hard-earned entertainment dollars.

Why do we care that much? Because hockey is a way of life for Canadians and the NHL is part of our fabric as a nation.

This is not just some pastime for the wealthy and bored. This is Saturday night with the family, it's street hockey with your buddies when you were a kid, it's pretending to be Hull or Howe or Gretzky or Crosby, it's outdoor shinny under the lights, it's Don Cherry.

It's our culture and a huge part of people's lives in this country.

This is why this squabble between the rich and the richer is so insulting to Canadians.

We desperately want to spend our money on hockey. We want to buy tickets and jerseys and car flags and beer. We want to watch triple headers on Saturday. We want to worship the players, wear their names and numbers on our backs, dream about what it would be like to be one of them.

And what do we get for that?

Slaps in the face from both sides. Thank you sir, may I have another?

Thursday's sham in New York left a bad taste in the mouths of Canadians from coast to coast.

The players and their union boss made a terrible decision to raise people's hopes when they knew there was no chance the owners would accept their

counter-proposal. The owners continued their firm stand, which they believe is necessary to rescue hockey south of the border, even though few people there even know games are not being played.

All this played out on TV and in social media and legions of Canadians hung on every word.

This little PR battle that featured players' association boss Don Fehr playing games and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman getting uncharacteristically irate, was just the latest offence against the sensibilities of hockey fans.

When the smoke cleared, many a Canadian was left holding a middle finger in front of the TV or computer screen.

We know Canadians won't officially break up with hockey. People in this country will always come back to a game they love. But the powers that be in hockey can't keep kicking the fans around.

Because of social media, people are able to follow proceedings up to the minute. It's been such an intense roller-coaster ride and people can't take that kind of motion forever without getting sick.

Even the last lockout, which killed the 2004-05 season, didn't have the same effect on people's emotions because they simply didn't have the same access to information.

This time, it's unacceptable. Even if they are trying to do something for the betterment of the game, just as they did seven years ago, their complete lack of compromise is disgraceful and shamefully disrespectful to the fans.

In one of his bogus press conferences Thursday, Fehr had a message for the bystanders who are affected most by this travesty. "You can tell the hockey fans of Canada that it looks like this is not going to be resolved in the immediate future."

The proper response here would be to tell Fehr, Bettman and all the players in this dark drama that we don't care anymore, that we won't support the league when the games eventually return.

But it simply wouldn't be true. There's just too much hockey in our blood.

And that's why they know they can play us for fools.

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646074 Winnipeg Jets

'It's amazing how much can change in 24 hours': Jets talk NHL lockout

By Paul Friesen

Jim Slater on Hainsey's future with the Jets: "If anything, the ownership should have a lot more respect for him."

Members of the Winnipeg Jets were as surprised as anyone to see the NHL labour talks go up in flames Thursday night.

"It's amazing how much can change in 24 hours," Bryan Little said after yet another skate at the Iceplex. "That's why they tell us not to get our hopes up. If you were watching last night, it changes in minutes... you could see everyone was excited something might get done. There was definitely some traction. But it was pretty much shattered last night."

A day earlier, Little had been hopeful he'd soon be suiting up with his Jets teammates, a handful of whom continue to rent ice four times a week.

"Everything seemed to be good, and then something changed and it just turned really bad," Jim Slater, another Jets player skating locally, said. "Gary (Bettman) didn't seem too happy with the whole situation. I don't know if this was their plan all along, who knows? Enough of the P.R. battle. We've gotta get something going here."

"It's not about who looks better in the fans' eyes or the media's eyes."

Slater and Little both slapped aside the suggestion union boss Don Fehr is the problem.

"Obviously we feel Gary's a problem, too," Slater said, referring to the NHL commissioner. "We really trust Don and what he's doing... we still are behind him 100%, at least I am, and I know a lot of other players are, too."

The talks had been progressing with Fehr and Bettman on the sidelines earlier this week, then fell apart when Fehr got back involved.

One report said the NHL warned players that bringing Fehr back in could be a deal-breaker.

"Gary wasn't in there, either," Little said. "You can make arguments like that all day. At the end of the day we still need both Gary and Don to make a deal."

Neither player expects that to happen for a while, now.

If the stalemate runs into the holidays, expect another wave of players looking for jobs in other leagues, including overseas.

"I've heard from a lot of guys Christmas was the date they're looking for," Little said. "If nothing's done, maybe they'll go over. I'm one of those guys. If it doesn't look good after Christmas, I've got to play somewhere this year."

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 12.08.2012

646075 Websites

ESPN / Sifting through the CBA wreckage

By Scott Burnside

NEW YORK -- Ever happen upon a nasty car crash and later think about the devastation and how it happened? Maybe how lucky you felt at having avoided it?

We thought of those kinds of things as we walked away from the smoldering wreckage that has become the labor negotiations between the NHL and the league's players.

Here, then, are some random thoughts as we wait and see how things unfold:

Trust?

We have heard that term a lot since the two sides began this macabre dance last summer. Does it matter? Of course. Think about your own relationships -- spouse, boss, friend, co-worker. If you don't in your heart trust that they will be honest with you or that they will consider what you say with some sort of respect, then that relationship is scarred. It has been clear from the outset these two sides don't trust each other. That lack of trust has impaired any kind of meaningful ongoing dialogue, and it has led to misleading the public and, in some ways, their own constituents. For smart, dynamic men like commissioner Gary Bettman, NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr and their lieutenants, this negotiation is a smear on their reputations.

Junk Example 1

Fehr came to the media Thursday night and went on and on about how close he thought they were to a deal, when he had to know that the owners were going to reject the proposal because it didn't meet their three areas of concern. The league asked for a yes-or-no answer from the players' association on three pivotal issues: capping contracts at five years, a 10-year term for a new CBA and no buyouts or caps on escrow as part of the transition to a new deal. Instead of responding as the league asked, the union tried to negotiate those issues. Forget whether those issues are valid or not. Fehr's act with players in attendance was shameful, a blatant attempt to paint the owners as the villains who walked away with a deal in the offing. It simply wasn't true. Have to wonder what Sidney Crosby, a major player in these talks and one of the reasons for the rush of optimism that attached itself to talks earlier in the week, thought about the sad little drama that played out in a Manhattan hotel Thursday. Those are the kinds of petty stunts that can quickly erode a leader's base of support.

Junk Example 2

There is no doubt that someone from the owners' side told the players that if they wanted to bring Fehr back to the table after a couple of days of promising talks with just owners and players in the room, it was a potential deal-breaker. The league can spin how it went down, but it is clear such a message was conveyed to the players and there is no excuse for that. The owners may hate Fehr, and it's clear he has got under the skin of the

ownership group, but suck it up. He's their guy and, if there's a deal to be had here, it will be with Fehr at the table. The continued efforts to hack away at Fehr's credibility with the players only galvanizes a membership that is mostly desperate to play hockey again. Another example of the league's failed strategy.

#### Textbook

One governor told us this week that the league and its players have created a textbook case for how not to engage in labor negotiations. So many smart people making stupid decisions.

#### Demands Or Negotiations?

The talks fell apart in large part because the players would not agree to three specific demands made by the owners. Lots of people will point to the players' attempts to modify those elements as bargaining, that's what you're supposed to do in this situation, no? But the owners insist that they can't or won't move off those because they represent elements that are needed to offset concessions made to the players in other areas like make-whole money to help guarantee existing contracts. Our guess is that the league will move off at least one of those core issues.

#### CBA Length

The contract term is an interesting element because you can see both sides. First, does anyone in their right mind want to think about another of these soul-sucking negotiations in four, five or even six years? No. In order to get sponsors to come back to the charred NHL table, a long-term deal is essential. But Fehr points out that a deal that lasts a decade means that not just one generation, but likely two generations of players would end up playing under a CBA they didn't vote for. Things change, he said. That's why they would prefer a shorter deal, six years or so. We're guessing that a final deal comes in around eight years.

#### Contract Cap

Bill Daly said the five-year limit on salary length is "the hill they will die on." Wow. Holy hyperbole, Batman. But this is one of those issues that Bettman and Daly believe is critical to the long-term financial health of the league. They have been warning GMs for years now that they don't like the long-term deals, especially those that are front-loaded with significant drop-offs in value as the contract moves along. There will be a provision to punish teams for those kinds of deals in a new CBA, but capping the length of contracts over the last CBA will be a central issue for the owners. Bettman pointed out that there was one contract six years or longer in 2004; now there are 90. "The trend has gone completely in the wrong way, and that has a whole host of consequences to the game and to the operation of our clubs," Bettman said. The players don't like it because it is another restrictive element, something that inhibits a player's right to bargain freely with a team, but it's hard to imagine players as a whole would lose a season over the five-year limit.

#### Empty Table?

The commissioner made it clear that anything the owners offered to the players this week in New York was off the table, especially the offer of a \$300 million in make-whole money to help guarantee existing contracts. Bettman reiterated that some owners wanted the make-whole money off the table before this week, and owners were shocked by the players' lack of enthusiasm for the increased pot. So is it really gone? No way a deal gets done without make-whole monies. But this is where Fehr's strategy gets delicate. The league has given more than they said they would on a number of issues, including make-whole. Will they give more? Fehr appears to think they will. But players will be wondering if they overplayed their hand if the owners won't get back to that level of make-whole money again.

#### A Deal To Be Made?

Still, for all the chaos of the past 48 hours and the resounding thud with which talks ended, call us crazy, but we still think a deal gets done. Too much is at stake for both sides to get this close and not get the game back on the ice. Bettman said he can't imagine playing a schedule of less than 48 games, so we're guessing games would have to start no later than the end of the month. We are hearing some quiet buzz about a New Year's Eve or New Year's Day start. Works for us.

ESPN LOADED: 12.08.2012

646076 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Spector on Benson: The next big thing

Mark Spector

There is no history for the "exceptional player clause" out West, because there has been no modern day John Tavares to petition the Western Hockey League for early entry.

Well, WHL, meet Edmonton's Tyler Benson.

"We've never had that kid out West," confirms a former WHL GM and current NHL scout. "This is a different situation than we've ever seen."

As the 14-year-old Benson tears through the Alberta Major Bantam Hockey League with nearly five points per game, the whispers are growing around Alberta.

He is big enough, at 5-foot-11, 180 pounds, to play Major Junior hockey next year. He is more than good enough -- 82 points in 17 games thus far -- and Benson is indeed precedent setting, well on his way to annihilating St. Louis Blues draft pick Ty Rattie's AMBHL record of 131 points in a single season.

"Seeing (Connor McDavid) being able to do it, maybe I can too," Benson said recently. He spoke before a rare two-point night that could have been much better, had St. Albert goaltender Joshua Dechaine not consistently thwarted Benson's South Side Athletic Club teammates with one spectacular save after another in a 3-0 SSAC win.

He is in only in Grade 9 and doesn't even have his learner's license yet, yet Benson is tantalized at being compared to Tavares, McDavid and the other player for whom the Ontario Hockey League invoked the "exceptional player" clause, defenceman Aaron Ekblad.

Would he leave home as a 15-year-old, to ride the busses across the WHL?

"Maybe," he said carefully. "It's a family decision. I'll keep training hard, getting stronger. I think if they gave me the opportunity and I thought I could play there, I'd like to play in the Dub next year."

He is that special, special player, as his points totals would attest.

Benson has great size, quick feet and hands, a wicked shot, and perhaps most importantly he possesses that magical knack that only the best seem to have.

As he carried the puck into the constant traffic he faces from opponents, Benson has the carnal ability to increase his time and space on the ice by knowing just when to hit the brakes, speed up, or curl quickly to give the defenders some time to back off. He transitions from entering traffic to having time to make a play, a rare, natural gift that only the very best hockey players possess.

While WHL scouts chew on the question of whether he should be playing Midget AAA hockey instead of Bantam AAA, few disagree that Benson -- whose older brother Cole plays for the Edmonton Oil Kings -- will go first overall in the May bantam draft.

Playing either centre or wing, Benson averages just under five points per night: 35 goals, 47 assists, 82 points in 17 games. And he plays a selfless game, moving the puck and setting up teammate after teammate for his unbeaten (16-0-1) Southgate Lions.

"It's been very successful, getting lots of points, lots of attention. Helping my team win games," he said. "It's been a little surprising, how many (points) I've been getting. I like to set goals, how many points (he can get). Also, I knew how many Ty Rattie had. That's the record, and I wanted to reach that this year."

He'll go through a defender as easily as going around him, another advantage that will wane as the size of the competition evens out at higher levels.

"My size helps quite a bit, just to out-battle guys. It really helps," he said. "But the games are going to be getting harder, I know that."

If a kid is 5-foot-11, 180 pounds at age 14, how big will he be as a 22-year-old? Maybe 6-foot-2, 205 pounds? Perhaps even bigger?

"Come this time next year, he could be an inch taller and 10-15 pounds heavier. He could survive (the WHL), no question," said his coach, Taylor Harnett. "I've been with the SSAC since 1999, and I've seen a lot of good players come and go. I remember Jordan Eberle, how he stood out when

he played for the Notre Dame Hounds. He stood out, but it was nothing like what Tyler's doing.

"He's the full package."

Tavares, Eberle, McDavid...

These are heady times for the son of an elementary school teacher, and a father who is in the oilfield construction business. And it's all just beginning.

"In my mind, no question he goes No. 1," said Tri-City Americans GM Bob Tory. "The numbers he's putting up, and the consistency he's doing it with it's amazing. It's special, really special -- as good as I've seen, probably, in the last 10 years.

"He's ahead of a guy like Gilbert Brule, who was a great junior. He could be a Jonathan Toews type of player. He's big, he's strong, he skates real well, skill level is real good ... Heard nothing but great things about his brother and his family...

"They come around once every 10 years or so. He's on that (Nathan) MacKinnon, McDavid type of planet."

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