

# SPORT-SCAN DAILY BRIEF

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646077 Anaheim Ducks

Locked-out NHL players Setoguchi, Clifford keep in game shape by spending time with the ECHL's Reign

By J.P. Hoornstra Staff Writer

## ONTARIO

When he was 18 years old, Devin Setoguchi's slapshot was clocked at 96 mph at an event for NHL scouts. A few months later, he became the eighth player picked in the 2005 entry draft.

Several onlookers were marvelling at Setoguchi's scorching slapshot again Friday. This time, instead of scouts, it was his teammates at the Reign's morning skate.

Was there a feeling in the air that Setoguchi's time in Ontario was running out?

At one point Thursday, the marathon collective bargaining agreement talks in New York seemed destined to end the NHL lockout. Ultimately, no deal was reached.

The NHL Players Association made a proposal, the NHL roundly rejected it, and Setoguchi, a Minnesota Wild player, and Kings forward Kyle Clifford went back to work in Ontario, honing their superior skills on an ECHL rink.

"It definitely makes it easier that I'm here, I'm working out, I'm skating, I'm playing," Setoguchi said, "but at the end of the day, it's still frustrating to not be practicing and playing with the team, with the league I've been playing in for seven years. It definitely makes it easier to be here, to be playing, winning and having fun playing hockey."

After NHL commissioner Gary Bettman pulled the league's last offer from the table, rumors of player dissension circulated in the media. Clifford said that's not the case, offering strong but measured responses to the latest round of give-and-take.

"If it was easy it'd be resolved by now," Clifford said. "At the same time you want it to be all over, but you want to do what's right, too. We can't just bend over and let them do whatever they want. We want to get a fair deal, what's right for us long-term. I mean, it's a lot of money we're arguing over here."

Setoguchi was less measured, saying he was "really fired up" one day after talks broke down.

"We know there's a couple of things in place, but obviously Gary blatantly said that everything that was proposed is off the table now," he said. "We start all over again and get back in the meeting room. I can see things getting done because there's a couple things we agreed on this past week. That's always a bonus."

The league and the players' union had not scheduled a formal meeting Saturday. How long the new CBA should last, and whether individual player

contracts should be capped at five years, are the main issues separating the sides.

Reign coach Jason Christie reiterated that he isn't worried about the impact on his team if the lockout ends. He's had several regulars take turns as healthy scratches - including Setoguchi last week and Clifford on Friday - to keep all his healthy players fresh.

Both Clifford and Setoguchi are averaging at least a point per game, but so are C.J. Stretch and Dan DaSilva, both of whom are on ECHL contracts.

The Reign rank third in the 23-team league in goals per game at just less than 4.0

"We've got players who play the game," Christie said. "We've shown it this year, we've shown it last year."

If the lockout ends, the Reign can probably count on losing some players to the American Hockey League, too. Their AHL affiliate, the Manchester Monarchs, are using four players who helped the Kings win the Stanley Cup last year. DaSilva is himself a veteran of six AHL seasons, though he hasn't been given any assurances that he'll get called up once the lockout lifts.

"If the NHL breaks open and we have a season, it should be interesting to see what happens and where guys go," he said. "You just hope for the best."

LA Daily News: LOADED: 12.09.2012

646078 Buffalo Sabres

Myers injured in Austria but should return in a week

The Sabres have had plenty of injury problems during the lockout (Corey Tropp and Cody Hodgson in Rochester, Tyler Ennis in Switzerland) and there was plenty of concern when reports surfaced out of Austria that Tyler Myers was heading for an MRI on his ankle after being injured while playing Friday night for Klagenfurter AC.

This web update translated from German should allow the Sabres to breathe a little easier with the report that Myers has stretched ligaments and could be back by Friday. Disaster apparently averted.

If the NHL season ever starts, remember that Myers is tied for the second-highest salary in the NHL for 2012-13 at \$12 million. And he's not missing that money; he got \$10 million in a signing bonus July 1 as the first part of his seven-year, \$38.5 million deal.

Myers has two goals, seven assists and is minus-8 in 16 games in Austria.

---Mike Harrington

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.09.2012

646079 Buffalo Sabres

Fehr update: NHLPA head insists deal was close

After his speech Saturday afternoon in Toronto to the Canadian Auto Workers, NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr spoke to some reporters and maintained his stance that the players and the NHL were "very close" to making a deal Thursday night before talks broke down.

Fehr, remember, seemed to indicate a similar feeling during his initial press conference Thursday before having to return to the podium to say the league had rejected the players' proposal. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman then said it was "almost incomprehensible" Fehr felt an agreement was close.

Fehr confirmed Saturday no further talks are currently scheduled and he has not spoken to NHL officials since they broke off.

"They have not indicated a willingness to continue discussions," Fehr said. "They're the ones that called a halt to the process. ... The players have never made threats to walk out. We've had any number of threats from the other side."

---Mike Harrington

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.09.2012

646080 Buffalo Sabres

Saturday lockout chatter: Fehr wants to 'keep at the process'

There were no bombshells dropped by NHLPA head Donald Fehr when he spoke Saturday to a meeting of the Canadian Auto Workers at the Sheraton Centre in downtown Toronto. He's not resigning, the union likely isn't decertifying. It seems to be the hope -- maybe against hope -- that negotiation will eventually work.

"I had hoped when this invitation came and even earlier this week to be in a position to tell you that we had successfully concluded an agreement and that the lockout was over," Fehr said. "As you know, I can't do that. I can't tell you when it's going to end. I can tell you that the only way it ends is to keep at the process and hope that eventually we are able to find a way through the thicket of issues that are there."

There are currently no new sessions scheduled and the league is likely to whack the rest of December games as soon as Monday. Fehr, as you would expect, questioned the wisdom of the NHL -- and all sports -- using lockouts as a negotiating tactic.

"This happens in an industry which does not face the kind of competitive pressure that employers talk about in bargaining in many other industries," Fehr said. "There is no other major hockey league in North America. There is no outsourcing problem. We can't move the plant to Bangladesh. But it doesn't seem to matter. And it doesn't seem to matter what the economic circumstances of the league is."

Fehr said he was proud to help rebuild the NHLPA and to foster participation from its roughly 750 members (the union, remember, completely broke down under Bob Goodenow during the '04-05 lockout).

"I learned a long, long time ago from [late baseball players head] Marvin Miller that in the end if you really don't have any idea what to recommend or none of the choices are good, or none of the options appear to be tremendously better than the others, that what you do is trust your membership," Fehr said. "They'll tell you what the right thing to do is."

(At this point, you have to wonder what the players would tell Fehr to do if things were put to a vote. I don't see, for example, the likes of Matt Ellis or Cody McCormick having to worry about whether they could sign a five- or seven-year deal.)

Said Fehr in his closing remarks, "If anybody has a brilliant idea about how to solve the lockout, don't keep it to yourself. ... My own hope and, far more importantly the hope of the players, that we'll find a way to get through this and get the guys back on the ice much sooner rather than later."

Elsewhere:

Go to this link for John Vogl's story from Page A-1 of today's paper recounting an exchange of texts and emails he had with Ryan Miller on the negotiations.

CBC's Elliotte Friedman has a conversation with Winnipeg defenseman Ron Hainsey, who is being described as the NHLPA's "bad cop." Hainsey admits he's pondered the thought that no NHL team will offer him a contract next year when his contract runs out as a means of retribution for his union activities.

Hainsey is in the Miller zone for having well-spoken perspectives on league issues. We had a long chat with him last season in First Niagara Center about NHL realignment, when news broke the Jets were going to remain in the Eastern Conference again this season, and he was hugely impressive.

Canadiens goalie Carey Price, speaking Saturday to Montreal Gazette writer Dave Stubbs about whether there will be a season: "There's got to be. We've got to. Why wouldn't we? [NHL hockey] was growing so much, it was at an all-time high. If we don't play this year, it's going to hurt everybody."

---Mike Harrington

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.09.2012

646081 Chicago Blackhawks

Lockout aside, would the Red Wings like to see the holiday games come back?

Most of the players at the Troy Sports Center Friday said no, they preferred to spend the holiday with family.

"I don't like that at all, no one likes that," Dan Cleary said Friday. "That can't happen. I hope it doesn't."

Told the NBA plays games on Christmas, Cleary said: "I don't care."

Niklas Kronwall wouldn't like playing on the holiday.

"Me personally, I love Christmas," he said. "It goes back to the traditions that we've had growing up. Christmas is the time of year that you spend with your family."

Labor update: Union chief Donald Fehr is sticking to his belief that the league and players were close to a deal before talks broke off Thursday night. Fehr repeated his stance Saturday during a speech to the Canadian Auto Workers union in Toronto, according to the Associated Press. Fehr said no talks are scheduled but added that negotiations are further ahead than a week ago, even after the collapse of talks.

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Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.09.2012

646083 Detroit Red Wings

Locked-out NHL players give fans exciting hockey in Windsor

By George Sipple

WINDSOR -- Playing in the "Rock Out the Lockout" charity hockey game with other locked-out NHL players was a welcome change for several Red Wings who have otherwise been skating a couple times a week in Troy.

Justin Abdelkader, Jonathan Ericsson and Johan Franzen scored for the winning side as the White team beat the Black, 17-11, before an estimated crowd of 4,500 in the 6,500-seat WFCU Centre. Cory Emmerton and Dan Cleary scored for the Black.

Kevin Westgarth of the Kings scored four goals for the White, three in the first period against Wings goalie Jimmy Howard.

"It's just a lot of fun," Howard said after the first period. "We're out there for a great cause, and it's just fun opportunity to be out there and playing with the guys."

Before the game, players donated a check for \$10,000 to Sparkles From Above, a charity benefiting children with cancer. Proceeds from ticket and apparel sales also will go to Sparkles.

"The pace was sloppy early," said Dan Cleary, who helped bring the NHL players together with ex-Spartan Shawn Horcoff and Steve Ott. "We kind of came back a little bit, and a guy named Westgarth started owning us.

There wasn't any hitting and not much defense, so it wasn't as if Howard could be faulted for most of the goals he allowed.

"I thought it was awesome," Cleary said of the event. "You gotta thank for the Spitfires organization. Bobby Boughner and Warren Rychel and the Sankos -- Ron and Steph Sanko -- did an amazing job organizing."

All of the players said they want to be back playing hockey in the NHL and remain optimistic a deal still can be made.

"We all want to be playing real games, but if we're not playing we might as well do something good with our time," Cleary said. "Try to give back. You always gotta give back to the fans, to charities. It's very important.

"I'm real proud of the guys for coming, the other NHL players. It says a lot about them."

Fans cheered as players were introduced. That was important to the players.

"I just hope they don't vilify us," Cleary said of fans who might be frustrated that the sides haven't agreed on a collective bargaining agreement. "Everyone loves hockey -- we all love it the same.

Even after last week's turn of events, Fehr still hopeful

MYERS

Donald Fehr concluded his speech with a bit of an icebreaker.

"If anyone has a brilliant idea on how to solve the lockout, don't keep it to yourself," Fehr said when he addressed the Canadian Auto Workers in Toronto on Saturday. "We express hope that we're able to find a way through this and get the guys back on the ice sooner rather than later."

Fehr said the two sides were close to doing that on Thursday; but after a bizarre series of events and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman denying that, talks broke off. But on Saturday, Fehr reiterated that he believes the players and league are close to a deal.

"I think we're very close," he told reporters following his speech. "But you have to keep talking. So far they're unwilling to do it."

As for the possibility of decertification, Fehr said, "that's always an option and it has been exercised in other sports. Beyond that, I can't comment."

The league and players' association left Thursday on a nasty note. A visibly angry Bettman said the two sides were not close to a deal, that the league would not budge on certain items -- including five-year player contract limits -- and that no further talks were planned.

Deputy commissioner Bill Daly, in an email to the Associated Press on Friday, said, "I have no reason, nor any intention of reaching out to the union right now. I have no new ideas. Maybe they do. We are happy to listen."

Former Blackhawks defenseman Chris Campoli said the union remains very strong.

"Don's our guy, our leader and we believe in him," he said. "The last few years the association's come a long way in restoring respectability. There's not going to be a deal without him there. He has the complete backing of our membership."

It was an interesting week, folks, no doubt. And while I rarely interject opinion into stories -- notice I didn't say Twitter -- I'm going to now. I do believe the two sides are close. And I still believe a deal will be done. I said from the start that I thought they'd be playing some time in December or January, and I will go down swinging with that.

If I'm wrong, I'm wrong. I'll just add it to the tote board.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.09.2012

646082 Detroit Red Wings

Lockout or not, Red Wings like having Christmas off

No cheer for Christmas games

By George Sipple

When it seemed more plausible that a collective bargaining agreement could be reached this past week, there was talk that the NHL might begin the season with games on Christmas Day.

But the NHL and players association failed to iron out their differences, leading to speculation that the league will soon announce more games will be cancelled.

Games are currently canceled through Friday. In late November the league canceled all games through Dec. 14, in addition to the All-Star Game scheduled for Jan. 27 in Columbus, Ohio. The Jan. 1 Winter Classic had already been eliminated.

The NHL hasn't played games on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day since the early '70s.

"The fans are great. We're in Windsor, close to Detroit. This is a hockey hotbed. They love their hockey, and I'm thankful. We're trying to do a little bit. It's for the kids. It's Christmastime."

Horcoff, who was part of the negotiations that eventually broke down Thursday in New York, said he remains optimistic the sides can come back together and play a shortened season.

"We just couldn't get it done in three or four days that we spent there," Horcoff said. "It's something that I think is frustrating for everyone, but especially for the fans."

"There's just not much time left. You've probably got at max a month or so in order to get those games in. We're running out of time but it's a long ways away. I hope after a couple days, cooler heads prevail and we can get back at it."

"We're closer. We made progress. It's not like we're farther apart. We made progress on the key issues, we're just not there yet. The worst thing would be to take time off and not meet. You gotta get in there. Some talks go good and some talks go bad, but at the same time you're figuring things out, trying new ideas ... and you're moving forward."

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Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.09.2012

646084 Detroit Red Wings

Locked-out Red Wings sparkle for charity

By Ted Kulfan

Windsor — NHL fans anxious to see hockey finally got a chance.

Locked out by the NHL now for 84 days, 36 NHL players came out Saturday at WFCU Centre in Windsor and played an entertaining charity game benefiting SPARKLES, an organization that supports children with cancer.

Approximately 4,500 fans attended the game, all the proceeds (still to be added up) from which are headed the charity's way. The participating players also presented a check for \$10,000.

"It was awesome, a great turnout, and run real professional," said forward Danny Cleary, a Red Wings player representative and a co-organizer of the event along with the Edmonton Oilers' Shawn Horcoff (Michigan State) and Windsor businessman Ron Sanko. "We all want to be playing real games but if we're not, we might as well do something good with our time giving back to charity."

"I'm real proud of the guys for coming."

The White team defeated the Black team, 17-11, in an entertaining back-and-forth game that was fun for skaters, but maybe not as much for goaltenders.

Still, goalie Jimmy Howard enjoyed being back on the ice in a competitive hockey environment.

"Just being in the dressing room and talking to a lot of the guys," Howard said, was one of Saturday's highlights.

Fans have expressed frustration and anger with both sides of the NHL labor dispute. But reaction was positive Saturday in Windsor, with loud cheers during the player introductions and continuing throughout the game.

Long lines for autographs before and after the game showed there was no apparent anger, at least in this particular crowd.

"There were only positive things (from the fans) when we were signing autographs (beforehand)," defenseman Jonathan Ericsson said. "We appreciated the fans who came here."

Said Cleary: "I just hope they don't vilify us. Everyone loves hockey, we all love it the same."

"The fans are great. We're in Windsor, close to Detroit. This is a hockey hotbed. They love their hockey and I'm thankful."

"We're trying to do a little bit. It's for the kids. It's Christmas time."

One of the highlights wasn't an offensive play but a big hit involving Todd Bertuzzi and Niklas Kronwall — a case of neither player seeing the other until the final second and Bertuzzi appearing to get momentarily stunned.

"I got Kronwalled," said Bertuzzi, of the defenseman's popular crowd-pleasing checks. "I feel OK. (But) geez."

Kronwall pleaded innocent on the hit.

"He's on my blindside, it's more on him," Kronwall said. "Honestly, none of us expected that. It just happened."

Detroit News LOADED: 12.09.2012

646085 Detroit Red Wings

Players grateful for fan support at Windsor charity game, optimistic NHL season can be saved

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

WINDSOR, Ontario — Players realize fans are angry and becoming apathetic due to the NHL's third lockout in 18 years.

They are concerned about losing fans due to this labor strife.

"I just hope they don't vilify us," Detroit Red Wings forward Danny Cleary said. "Everyone loves the game, we all love it the same."

Players were encouraged by the turnout Saturday night at the WFCU Centre and the reception they received, when an estimated crowd of 4,500 attended "Rock Out The Lockout," an NHLPA charity game that included 11 Red Wings.

The White team, led by four goals from Kevin Westgarth of the Los Angeles Kings, defeated the Black team 17-11.

The event was organized by Cleary, Buffalo's Steve Ott and Edmonton's Shawn Horcoff. Before the game, they presented a \$10,000 check from the NHL Players Association to SPARKLES From Above, which supports childhood cancer patients and their journey through treatment. Cleary said that charity and others will receive more money from the game's proceeds and apparel sales.

After the game, players gathered at center ice and saluted the fans, many of them wearing Red Wings jerseys, who gave them a standing ovation.

"We're very fortunate, we got some pretty outstanding fans," Detroit forward Todd Bertuzzi said. "It's a 10-minute jump over the river. We're fortunate they're out here in full support. Everyone wants to see hockey. Whatever it is right now, they'll take."

As is the case in these events, there was little defense and no contact, except for when Niklas Kronwall hit Bertuzzi, his Red Wings teammate.

"He's coming from my blindside," Kronwall said. "None of us anticipated that. It just happened to be that way."

Said Bertuzzi: "I got Kronwalled, but I feel OK."

"It's fun. Anytime you can come out and see guys you haven't seen in a while and do something for the community it's worthwhile."

Of course, they would rather be playing real games. They were highly optimistic earlier in the week that the lockout, which began on Sept. 16, was coming to an end, only to be disappointed Thursday when labor talks in New York ended in a bad way.

Still, most players believe the sides made a lot of progress toward a collective bargaining agreement. And they believe the season will be salvaged.

"I'm still confident we're going to get a deal," Horcoff said. "We are closer to a deal."

Said Ott: "I continue to hope that a season will start next week, or the week after. It's disappointing and disheartening when the talks break off and supposedly, (NHL commissioner) Gary (Bettman) says they've taken everything off the table. Hopefully, over the next while, they find some common ground and want to be back playing."

Red Wings Justin Abdelkader, Jonathan Ericsson, Johan Franzen and Kronwall scored for the White team, which also got goals from Jordan Leopold, Kyle Wellwood, David Legwand, Drew Stafford, James Wisniewski, Jamal Mayers, David Clarkson, Thomas Vanek and Nick Schultz.

Matt Martin and Adam Burish each scored twice for the Black team, which also got goals from Detroit's Cory Emmerton and Cleary, as well as Matt Ellis, John-Michael Liles, Sergei Samsonov, James Neal and Brenden Morrow.

Predictably, it was a tough night for goalies Jimmy Howard, Jonas Gustavsson and Michael Leighton.

"It's tough for a goalie," Cleary said. "For (skaters), you can get away with being sloppy a little bit, but for a goalie you got to be sharp."

Howard couldn't complain.

"It's just a lot of fun," Howard said. "We're all doing it for a good cause."

"Tonight is about going out there and raising money for SPARKLE and just having fun."

Cleary called the game a huge success. Many of the players hadn't played in front of a crowd since April or May.

"If we're not playing, we might as well do something good with our time, try to give back to the fans, to charities," Cleary said. "I'm real proud of the guys for coming."

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.09.2012

646086 Detroit Red Wings

NHL players, including many Red Wings, ready for 'Rock Out The Lockout' Windsor charity game

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

Dan Cleary Red Wings forward Danny Cleary displays a "Rockout The Lockout" hoodoo promoting the NHLPA charity game in Windsor. Ansar Khan/MLive

Many Detroit Red Wings who opted not to go to Europe during the lockout haven't played a game of any kind in close to eight months.

They're anxious to get back on the ice in somewhat of a competitive environment, even if it's just an NHLPA exhibition game for charity.

Forty NHL players, including 11 Red Wings, will participate in "Rock Out The Lockout," Saturday at 6:30 p.m. at the WFCU Centre in Windsor. One of the charities that will benefit is SPARKLES From Above, which supports childhood cancer patients and their journey through treatment.

"It's been such a long time, guys can't wait to get out there," Detroit defenseman Niklas Kronwall said. "It's for a great cause. It's going to be so much fun to get out there and feel the crowd, be on the ice, playing an actual game. Obviously, we would have liked it to be the first game of the season. That's not happening, so we try to make the most of it. Should be a great night."

Tickets are \$41.75 each or a four-pack for \$137. They can be purchased through the WFCU Box Office, by calling (866) 969-9328 or online at WFCU-centre.com.

"We're doing this for charity, getting 40 NHL players together, trying to put a bright light on a dark situation," said Red Wings forward Danny Cleary, who helped organize the event along with Buffalo's Steve Ott and Edmonton's Shawn Horcoff. "We're doing this for kids with cancer, it's around Christmas time. Good mix of teams represented. It's going to be a fun game."

Players will sign autographs in a designated area on the concourse from 4:45-5:30 p.m.

After each period, there will be a shootout. Goals scored during the shootout will count toward the final score of the game.

"It'll be a good pace, guys are always a bit competitive, they're going to want to score some goals and make some nice moves," Detroit defenseman Ian White said. "Guys got a lot of energy."

"Hopefully, it's a warmup game for the season."

Here is a breakdown of the teams:

Team Red

Goaltenders: Jonas Gustavsson, Detroit Red Wings; Michael Leighton, Philadelphia Flyers.

Defensemen: Jonathan Ericsson, Detroit Red Wings; Niklas Kronwall, Detroit Red Wings; Jordan Leopold, Buffalo Sabres; Nick Schultz, Edmonton Oilers; James Wisniewski, Columbus Blue Jackets.

Forwards: Justin Abdelkader, Detroit Red Wings; David Clarkson, New Jersey Devils; Johan Franzen, Detroit Red Wings; David Legwand, Nashville Predators; Jamal Mayers, Chicago Blackhawks; Steve Ott, Buffalo Sabres; Mikael Samuelsson, Detroit Red Wings; Drew Stafford, Buffalo Sabres; Thomas Vanek, Buffalo Sabres; Kyle Wellwood, Winnipeg Jets; Kevin Westgarth, Los Angeles Kings.

Coaches: Bob Boughner/ David Matsos, Windsor Spitfires.

Team Black

Goaltender: Jimmy Howard, Detroit Red Wings.

Defensemen: Trevor Daley, Dallas Stars; Mike Komisarek, Toronto Maple Leafs; John-Michael Liles, Toronto Maple Leafs; Jeff Petry, Edmonton Oilers; Ian White, Detroit Red Wings; Ryan Wilson, Colorado Avalanche.

Forwards: Todd Bertuzzi, Detroit Red Wings; Adam Burish, San Jose Sharks; Danny Cleary, Detroit Red Wings; Matt Ellis, Buffalo Sabres; Cory Emmerton, Detroit Red Wings; Darren Helm, Detroit Red Wings; Shawn Horcoff, Edmonton Oilers; Matt Martin, New York Islanders; Brenden Morrow, Dallas Stars; James Neal, Pittsburgh Penguins; Sergei Samsonov, free agent.

Coach: Bob Jones, Windsor Spitfires.

Michigan Live LOADED: 12.09.2012

646087 Edmonton Oilers

Oiler's Ryan Nugent-Hopkins believed his chance to play in the World Juniors had passed

By Derek Van Diest ,Edmonton Sun

EDMONTON - Ryan Nugent-Hopkins believed his chance to play at the World Junior Championships had passed.

Cut at the selection camp as 17-year-old, then making the jump to the NHL the following year, it appeared the Edmonton Oilers centre had graduated beyond the tournament. Particularly since he went on to play in the World Championships last spring.

"I thought I probably would have had the chance to play last year at 18," said Nugent-Hopkins. "But I didn't think I would have had a chance this year. It's funny how things like that work. But I'm glad I got the opportunity to do this."

The NHL lockout presented Nugent-Hopkins with another shot. And after getting his shoulder checked out this week in Edmonton, the former first overall pick will be heading to Calgary to participate in this year's selection camp.

"Definitely the biggest factor was making sure my shoulder was good to go and once we got that all settled, it was a pretty easy decision," Nugent-Hopkins said. "I thought about all my options, and at the end of the day, I thought this would be a good opportunity for me."

"Growing up, as a kid, you always want to get the chance to play for your country, so I'm really excited about it."

While Nugent-Hopkins has accepted Hockey Canada's invitation to attend the selection camp, commencing Tuesday in Calgary, there is no guarantee

he'll actually still be with the team by the time the tournament begins Boxing Day in Ufa, Russia.

If the NHL lockout comes to an end before the start of the tournament, Nugent-Hopkins expects to be back with the Oilers.

"I'm not too sure on how that works yet," he said. "If that does happen, we'll have to cross that bridge when it comes.

"As far as I understand, if the lockout does come to an end, then I'll be flying back here."

However, if the impasse continues between the NHL and their players association, Nugent-Hopkins will be a key piece of the puzzle to an already strong Team Canada lineup.

"I'm excited about it," he said. "It's going to be a different experience for me. I'm going to try and take on the roll of a leader out there and I'm excited about that challenge and it's going to be fun.

"I've talked to quite a few guys who've played in the World Juniors. They've all said it was a great experience so that definitely helped make my decision."

Nugent-Hopkins has been waiting out the lockout with the Oilers AHL affiliate in Oklahoma City along with Jordan Eberle, Taylor Hall and Justin Schultz.

In 19 games with the Barons, Nugent-Hopkins has eight goals and 12 assists, third in team scoring behind Schultz and Eberle.

Prior to making a commitment to Team Canada this year, Nugent-Hopkins and the Oilers wanted to make sure his left shoulder was completely healthy. A weeklong break in the Barons' schedule afforded Nugent-Hopkins an opportunity to have it evaluated.

"It's been feeling good all year," Nugent-Hopkins said. "It's kind of something we wanted to take care of, strengthen and make sure that there was no chance of me getting hurt."

Awaiting a possible end to the lockout last week was also a factor in delaying Nugent-Hopkins decision to join team Canada.

If he does make it to the tournament, Nugent-Hopkins could end up facing last year's first overall pick and future teammate Nail Yakupov, who will captain the Russian entry.

"I haven't got the chance to talk to him about that yet, but it'll be good to get the opportunity to play against them," Nugent-Hopkins said. "I think we're going to have a really good team, so I'm excited about jumping in."

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 12.09.2012

646088 Los Angeles Kings

Kings' Kevin Westgarth rides emotional waves in NHL labor talks

The team's enforcer takes part in the roller-coaster discussions this week between players and owners.

By Helene Elliott

7:00 PM PST, December 8, 2012

Kings enforcer Kevin Westgarth went through the same emotional extremes felt by everyone else who had an interest in the labor talks held last week in New York between the NHL and the players' association.

But Westgarth was a member of the players' delegation that met with owners and had a first-hand experience of all that went on, including the euphoria that blossomed on Tuesday when it seemed the sides were moving closer and the deflation on Thursday after the league broke off talks.

"I'm still riding the roller-coaster," Westgarth said by phone on Saturday. "I let myself get very excited and then I was very disappointed. My wife [Meagan] is in same boat.

"It's a lot easier to see what the reality is, being involved more. It's pretty crazy."

Westgarth, who has a degree in psychology from Princeton, saw owners attempt to use some psychology against the players during the talks.

At the invitation of NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman, players and owners had met Tuesday and Wednesday without Bettman and NHLPA Executive Director Donald Fehr, and those sessions resulted in movement on both sides. However, owners told players on Thursday that bringing Fehr back into the room would make it impossible to complete a new collective bargaining agreement, a notion players rejected.

"They said it would be a deal-breaker somehow to bring the PA leadership, and that halts the negotiations," Westgarth said. "I don't feel comfortable, and I don't think 750 hockey players feel comfortable, with me making the deal when we have professional negotiators working for us.

"Maybe it was our fault and we shouldn't have taken the meeting without our leadership. Basically, before, we were acquiescing to their unilateral condition that they didn't want him in the room. I can't imagine teachers, auto workers, newspaper writers, or anyone else making a deal without their leadership in the room."

Westgarth, who played in a charity game Saturday night in Windsor, Canada, said he has been busy with phone calls to members of the union's executive and negotiating committees and in keeping his Kings teammates up to date on the negotiations. One player texted him at mid-week to say he had heard there had been a settlement, Westgarth said, emphasizing the importance of accurately relaying information.

He also said he remains hopeful a new collective bargaining agreement can be reached, even though the NHL said it was looking for a yes-or-no reply to its last proposal and not the counter-offer that the union presented. The key remaining differences are these:

--The NHL wants a 10-year labor deal with a mutual opt-out clause after eight years, while the NHLPA has proposed an eight-year term with a six-year opt-out option for players.

--The NHL wants the maximum length of players' contracts to be five years but will permit seven-year deals when teams re-sign their own free agents, while the NHLPA has proposed an eight-year maximum. The five-year cap, NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said, "is the hill we will die on."

--The NHL, seeking to eliminate front-loaded contracts, proposed a maximum variance of 5% from year to year in the value of players' contracts. The NHLPA proposed that in contracts of seven or eight years the lowest year must be at least 25% of the value of the highest year of the contract.

Bettman said on Thursday that the league had pulled its offer off the table -- including its increased "make-whole" payment, but that might have been a negotiating ploy. The sides also differ on buyouts (the league says no, the NHLPA says yes) and on limiting escrow (again, the league says no and the NHLPA says yes).

"Our proposal was reasonable," Westgarth said. "We understand that they have important issues. We hope they understand that we have important issues and if we're ever going to play hockey again there has to be negotiating and some compromise."

He said limiting contracts to five years would raise the salary cap hits of star players and leave less room on the payroll for second-tier players.

"You look at the NBA and you can win a championship with three solid players. In hockey, the game and teams do not work that way. It takes 20 if not 24 players to win in our league," he said.

"Looking forward I don't know if their goal is to create a two-tier system where it would be easier to break the union again. I don't know if that's their long-term game plan but to me, that seems to be the direction they're going."

Daly told The Times via email on Saturday that the league and the union hadn't conducted any negotiations since Thursday and hadn't planned additional talks.

Fehr, who spoke at a meeting of the Canadian Auto Workers Council on Saturday in Toronto, maintained the sides had been close -- which the NHL vehemently disputed -- and said he hopes talks resume soon. "You can't make agreements if you're not talking about it," he said.

He also said it's up to the league to take the initiative now because "they're the ones who called a halt to the process."

LA Times: LOADED: 12.09.2012

646089 Los Angeles Kings

Locked-out NHL players Setoguchi, Clifford keep in game shape by spending time with the ECHL's Reign

By J.P. Hoonstra Staff Writer

## ONTARIO

When he was 18 years old, Devin Setoguchi's slapshot was clocked at 96 mph at an event for NHL scouts. A few months later, he became the eighth player picked in the 2005 entry draft.

Several onlookers were marvelling at Setoguchi's scorching slapshot again Friday. This time, instead of scouts, it was his teammates at the Reign's morning skate.

Was there a feeling in the air that Setoguchi's time in Ontario was running out?

At one point Thursday, the marathon collective bargaining agreement talks in New York seemed destined to end the NHL lockout. Ultimately, no deal was reached.

The NHL Players Association made a proposal, the NHL roundly rejected it, and Setoguchi, a Minnesota Wild player, and Kings forward Kyle Clifford went back to work in Ontario, honing their superior skills on an ECHL rink.

"It definitely makes it easier that I'm here, I'm working out, I'm skating, I'm playing," Setoguchi said, "but at the end of the day, it's still frustrating to not be practicing and playing with the team, with the league I've been playing in for seven years. It definitely makes it easier to be here, to be playing, winning and having fun playing hockey."

After NHL commissioner Gary Bettman pulled the league's last offer from the table, rumors of player dissension circulated in the media. Clifford said that's not the case, offering strong but measured responses to the latest round of give-and-take.

"If

it was easy it'd be resolved by now," Clifford said. "At the same time you want it to be all over, but you want to do what's right, too. We can't just bend over and let them do whatever they want. We want to get a fair deal, what's right for us long-term. I mean, it's a lot of money we're arguing over here."

Setoguchi was less measured, saying he was "really fired up" one day after talks broke down.

"We know there's a couple of things in place, but obviously Gary blatantly said that everything that was proposed is off the table now," he said. "We start all over again and get back in the meeting room. I can see things getting done because there's a couple things we agreed on this past week. That's always a bonus."

The league and the players' union had not scheduled a formal meeting Saturday. How long the new CBA should last, and whether individual player contracts should be capped at five years, are the main issues separating the sides.

Reign coach Jason Christie reiterated that he isn't worried about the impact on his team if the lockout ends. He's had several regulars take turns as healthy scratches - including Setoguchi last week and Clifford on Friday - to keep all his healthy players fresh.

Both Clifford and Setoguchi are averaging at least a point per game, but so are C.J. Stretch and Dan DaSilva, both of whom are on ECHL contracts.

The Reign rank third in the 23-team league in goals per game at just less than 4.0

"We've got players who play the game," Christie said. "We've shown it this year, we've shown it last year."

If the lockout ends, the Reign can probably count on losing some players to the American Hockey League, too. Their AHL affiliate, the Manchester Monarchs, are using four players who helped the Kings win the Stanley Cup last year. DaSilva is himself a veteran of six AHL seasons, though he hasn't been given any assurances that he'll get called up once the lockout lifts.

"If the NHL breaks open and we have a season, it should be interesting to see what happens and where guys go," he said. "You just hope for the best."

LA Daily News: LOADED: 12.09.2012

646090 Minnesota Wild

## Faces of the NHL lockout

The NHL lockout enters its 13th week Sunday. Negotiations between the NHL and NHL Players' Association have led everyone caught in the crossfire down a bumpy, emotional roller coaster since Sept. 15.

As owners and players fight over millions, the lockout is wounding those who might be forgotten in the rhetoric.

There are \$9-an-hour concession workers at Xcel Energy Center not being paid; vendors selling less food and alcohol at restaurants; bus companies and hotels seeing less business; police officers not getting overtime for directing traffic at the arena.

NHL on- and off-ice officials aren't being paid, local businesses are hurting and disenchanting fans might not return.

"To snap their fingers and say, 'Doors are open, [please] come back' ... I don't think it'll happen," said Wild fan Bryan Reynolds.

Meg Hyland, a 39-year-old mother of three and employee at St. Paul's Eagle Street Grille, has seen her hours slashed.

"The prospect is scary as to what is going to happen if the season is canceled," she said.

Staff writer Michael Russo

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.09.2012

646091 Minnesota Wild

Faces of the NHL lockout: Whistle blow would be sweet music for league refs

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO

Chris Lee and Brian Mach spend 21 days a month on the road.

They jet across the continent, live out of suitcases and feel privileged to be two of 66 NHL officials who keep nightly order in games, often to the dismay of partisan fans.

"My son's my biggest critic, and tells me things I did wrong," Lee said.

Lee, a referee who lives in Lakeville, has worked 703 games since 1999. Mach, a linesman from Little Falls who lives in Chanhassen, has worked 791 since 2000.

"I have only 'X' amount of years to do my business and to make money. This is now the second [lockout] in my career. It hurts," Lee said.

Lee has two children, ages 11 and 4, and for now is a stay-at-home dad who loves watching his son, Joshua, play hockey. Mach has three children: 9, 7 and 5. He coaches his two boys, Brandon and Nathan, and "gives back" to Minnesota Hockey and USA Hockey by teaching and supervising aspiring young Minnesota officials.

Lee and Mach aren't being paid, although the NHL will loan officials \$5,000 a month, if needed, out of future earnings.

During the last lockout, Mach worked as a carpenter, doing basements, trim work and remodeling. If the lockout continues, he will look for a job again because, right now, dinners out and non-necessities take a back seat.

Lee is from Saint John, New Brunswick, and his work visa only allows him to officiate. That means he cannot work. Nor can his wife, Cara.

"We're not locked out, but we're a casualty of the lockout," Lee said.

They work out daily to stay in game shape and have weekly rules tests and video refreshers "to stay sharp," Lee said. "We're all pros. We'll be ready when the season starts."

The silver lining is Mach and Lee get to spend valuable time with their families.

"I'm seeing things I haven't seen in 12 years," Mach said.

Added Lee, "We do homework together, stuff I'd normally do over the phone from a hotel somewhere."

Asked recently by his 9-year-old when he's going back to work, Mach tried to delicately explain the lockout. Brandon said, "It's just a game isn't it?" ... He just wants everybody to go back and play hockey. So do I."

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.09.2012

646092 Minnesota Wild

Faces of the NHL lockout: No game-day rushes at restaurants, just layoffs

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO

Joe Kasel, who owns Eagle Street Grille with business partner Kevin Geisen, wrote a letter to NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman on Nov. 28 that was copied to NHL Players' Association Executive Director Don Fehr.

"I had to look 32 of 48 employees in the eyes" and lay them off, Kasel wrote. Wild games account for 50 percent of Eagle Street's gross revenue, Kasel says.

"They don't understand, you're not just affecting your bottom line," Kasel said. "The trickle-down effect of the hundreds of thousands of people that are being killed by this, financially, is astronomical."

Added Geisen: "The highest levels of government should get involved because they're impacting the national economy. It goes so deep."

Eagle Street Grille sits kitty-corner to Xcel Energy Center. Kasel, 40, and Geisen, 39, opened the restaurant 10 years ago. It has grown from 1,400 square feet to 6,000 with front and backyard patios. This is their second lockout: last time, they laid off 12 of 16 employees.

"One of the hardest things you have to do is call somebody that is doing a great job and let them down," Geisen said.

Meg Hyland, 39, has survived the layoffs but has seen her hours, and thus her income, cut in half. Two of her three kids play hockey, and after having trouble affording one league, Hyland has moved them into a recreational league that's half the price.

"Hockey is a luxury, but my big concern is food, rent, bills, being able to get to work," Hyland said. "This makes a big difference in what I can and can't do [for my kids], especially around the holidays. Certainly there are no vacations that are going to happen this next spring."

The day shift at Eagle Street typically now consists of Kasel and Geisen, who bartend, wait and bus tables, even cook.

Kasel reads every lockout update. Geisen ignores them, saying, "My feelings aren't going to impact the results, so what I try to do is keep my head down and work through it."

Both are Wild corporate sponsors and season-ticket holders. They are fed up.

"I just want the thing done," Kasel said. "They're absolutely destroying the sport of hockey, which I love to death. I mean three lockouts in 18 years? Come on, figure it out."

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.09.2012

646093 Minnesota Wild

Faces of the NHL lockout: Suddenly, fans can't stand the sight of ice

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO

Bryan Reynolds is a diehard hockey fan. He's a passionate contributor to SB Nation's Hockey Wilderness, a popular Wild blog. He does public relations for the hockey charity Defending the Blue Line.

The lockout has him disgusted.

"My whole life I grew up playing hockey, watching hockey, living hockey, breathing hockey," the 33-year-old Blaine native said. "I always prided myself on the fact I was a hockey fan, not [just] an NHL fan, but with this, it sucked the will to watch any hockey. I didn't watch the Aeros' game [Nov. 18 in St. Paul]. I didn't go to it, I didn't want any part of it. I can't watch the Gophers."

Reynolds, credentialed by the Wild, has seen his blog go from more than 150,000 page views a month to 50,000. His writing has suffered: "I've found myself trying to force things. You get halfway through it, and you delete the whole thing."

Money has dried up for Defending the Blue Line, which provides equipment for military kids: "We have more gear than we'd ever know what to do with, and we don't have money to ship it."

Reynolds is largely turned off by the rhetoric from NHL and NHLPA leadership.

"It's useless. Fans aren't buying it," he said. "I don't know who they're trying to convince. Even if you could convince the fans, what's the point? You haven't convinced the other side. I mean, even if you convince me you're right, what am I going to do?"

"Who cares? Shut your mouth, get it done."

The lockout hasn't been all bad. Reynolds is spending more time with his wife, Bridget, and two daughters.

"You start to realize there are other things in life than hockey," Reynolds said.

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.09.2012

646094 Minnesota Wild

Faces of the NHL lockout: Without crowd buzz it's just another office

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO

Bryan Bellows (no, not former Minnesota North Star Brian Bellows) misses the buzz he and his colleagues get from a big Wild victory. It's motivation for the next day of work.

But Bellows, 34, a senior account executive in the Wild's corporate sponsorship department, says the lockout hasn't dampened his enthusiasm.

"Every time I think, 'We should be playing hockey,' I get stoked because we had a great summer and I can't think of another team with more to be excited about once this ends," said Bellows, referring to the Wild signing free agents Zach Parise and Ryan Suter.

"This market is thirsty for hockey all the time. As employees, we're fans, too. We want this to be resolved as much as anybody does, and we're ready to hit the ground running. We're trying to stay positive, and we have a lot to be positive about."

Almost 200 full-time Wild employees have taken at least 20 percent pay cuts. Some employees, such as Bellows, are hit harder because of lost commissions.

"I'm not out selling right now. [The lockout affects] a lot of people," he said.

That includes a game-night staff of 500 concession workers, ushers, security personnel and concierges who miss checks every time a game is canceled.

Star Tribune LOADED: 12.09.2012

646095 New Jersey Devils

N.H.L. Void Has Networks Scrambling

By MICHELINE MAYNARD

Published: December 8, 2012

DETROIT — Usually at this time of year, hockey fans would plant themselves in front of their televisions and watch players like Sidney Crosby, Alexander Ovechkin and Marian Hossa command the ice.

Instead, they have been reminded that Ken Dryden was tall, Guy Lafleur had a side part, and the boards in arenas once bore only team logos.

For more than two months, as the lockout dragged on, sports channels that usually show N.H.L. games have had to scramble to fill their lineups. Sports network officials say audiences are a fraction of what they would typically expect, although die-hard fans are sticking around for the substitutes.

"It's frustrating," said Greg Hammaren, the senior vice president and general manager of FoxSports Detroit, the television home of the Red Wings.

In Michigan, the average Red Wings game is viewed in more than 100,000 households. Hammaren said about 65,000 of them are in the metropolitan Detroit area, which has earned the nickname Hockeytown.

To fill the vacancies left by canceled games, FoxSports Detroit has shifted telecasts of the Pistons from its high-definition channel to the main FoxSports channel.

It is also planning to run more college hockey games, and it is talking with the Red Wings about showing games played by the Grand Rapids Griffins, the American Hockey League team owned by the N.H.L. club.

"People want live hockey again," Hammaren said.

FoxSports is leaning on its video library of past Red Wings games and those played by the Detroit Tigers. During the summer, Tigers telecasts are the highest-rated in Major League Baseball, according to FoxSports Detroit, often drawing the most viewers of any program on local TV. Hammaren said the video archive offered endless possibilities.

"If you're an anti-Yankees fan, an anti-Red Sox fan, we can show those," he said, referring to games in which the Tigers beat them. Of Justin Verlander, the Tigers' pitching ace, Hammaren said, "If you want to see all the Verlander games, I can program a month of those."

Another market that is showing classic games is Chicago. Broadcasts of previous Blackhawks games have generated e-mails from some grateful fans, said Phil Bedella, the vice president and general manager of Comcast SportsNet Chicago.

"A lot of people send us messages saying: 'Thank you. I've been telling my kids what Bobby Hull was like, what Stan Mikita was like, and now they can see them,'" Bedella said.

But, he added, "I'd like to be doing classic games as well as Blackhawks games."

The situation is especially frustrating because the hockey audience swelled the last two years, since the Blackhawks won the 2010 Stanley Cup.

Comcast SportsNet Chicago, which reaches Iowa, southern Wisconsin, most of Indiana and nearly all of Illinois, brings in 110,000 households in Chicago for each game and 135,000 over all, according to the network's statistics.

The network plans to show the Hockey City Classic, a four-team college tournament in February at Soldier Field. But in Chicago, college hockey cannot compete with the Blackhawks, who have official bars across the city, a lively social media effort and extensive fan-related events.

"We just really want them back," Bedella said, adding that hockey to Blackhawks fans was like a religion.

He has a multitude of options in the future, however, because the network carries the Bulls, the White Sox and the Cubs as well as the Blackhawks. One plan, should the N.H.L. cancel the season, is to run "a more robust spring training schedule," he said.

Currently, Comcast SportsNet Chicago plans to show five White Sox preseason games and three Cub games, but those numbers could easily be increased.

So far, Bedella said, the Blackhawks' major advertisers have kept with the amended schedule, and he expects they will return when play resumes, whether this winter or next fall.

But he lost advertisers who place one-time spots throughout the season, according to their needs. He cannot blame them for leaving.

"It's the holidays, and the ads have to run," Bedella said.

The audience numbers in Detroit and Chicago pale in comparison with those in Canada, where Saturday night broadcasts are a national tradition.

"Hockey Night in Canada" typically attracts two million viewers for telecasts in eastern Canada and a million for games in western Canada, said Chuck Thompson, a spokesman for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Like American stations, the CBC has shown vintage telecasts. Until last weekend, it ran a contest called Your Pick, in which fans voted for the classic games they wanted to view.

But instead of a Saturday night game, the network showed the animated movie "Up," which kicked off the CBC's holiday programming.

Thompson said nonhockey programming would be shown until it was clear whether a settlement would be reached. The CBC has contingency plans for 2013, and was pleased with the Your Pick contest, which attracted about 250,000 to 300,000 viewers a game. "It was modest, but it was where we expected them to come in," Thompson said. ("Up" drew nearly 600,000 viewers.)

If only some of those viewers would drop into the Souper Bowl in Pittsburgh. The bar sits opposite Consol Energy Center, the home of the Penguins. Its motto is "The Place to Be for Happy Hour and Pens Games," and its mascot is a penguin chugging a beer.

"We're struggling quite a bit," said Jess Satavy, a bar manager.

Before a game, 500 people would pack the two-story bar, making it tough to get a seat, and others stuck around to watch broadcasts. The bar would be open until 2 a.m. for postgame stragglers.

Now, unless there is an event across the street, "we close up when the happy hour crowd leaves," Satavy said. The doors are usually shut by 9 p.m. The bar counts on revenue from hockey season to carry it through the summer, meaning 2013 will be tough unless games return. Satavy said she was not expecting a hockey season.

"We've gotten our hopes up so many times that at this point, we're pessimistic," Satavy said. "We don't want to be disappointed again."

New York Times LOADED: 12.09.2012

646096 New Jersey Devils

NHL owners say Donald Fehr, executive director of the NHL players' association, strikes out in negotiations

There are no more meetings scheduled, and the league is expected to cancel the rest of its December schedule as early as Monday.

By Pat Leonard / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

NHL Players' Association executive director Donald Fehr is the man holding back the NHL from getting this season underway, owners say.

The NHL's owners and players are close to compromising on the issues but still miles away from a new collective bargaining agreement, and that's because this lockout is not about the issues.

It's about the owners' resentment toward Don Fehr, executive director of the NHL players' association, and their belief that he is responsible for this

week's blowup in negotiations. Their resulting reluctance to re-engage means the players may have lost — for good — the owners most crucial to jump-starting the talks in Manhattan last Tuesday.

There are no more meetings scheduled, and the league is expected to cancel the rest of its December schedule as early as Monday.

"Maybe the union's theory was that the owners didn't have the resolve," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said Thursday night. "That would be inconsistent with the history of this ownership group."

That's how far these negotiations have deteriorated. Bettman, who in one breath denied any loss of trust between the league and players' union, was speculating about Fehr's agenda in another. He was threatening with a reminder that these owners have already canceled one season in 2004-05 and could do so again.

Then there was this uppercut from the commissioner: "With the players, the owners, the people who work for the league and the clubs, you have people who love this game and want to get it back on the ice as soon as possible." Notice the only person Bettman did not mention in his list of people who love hockey? That's right. Don Fehr.

The NHL views Fehr as an outsider, a bully from the baseball labor circle who they believe is, literally, out of his league. Winnipeg Jets player rep Ron Hainsey said the owners sought to keep Fehr an outsider on Wednesday night when the players tried to bring leadership back into the previously player-owner-only meetings to close on a few items.

"I was told that if you're going to do that, it's possibly a deal-breaker," Hainsey said. But NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly contended that the union said bringing leadership back into the room was "non-negotiable" and repeated the comment two or three times, enraging owners who already felt insulted by the union's lack of response to an earlier NHL proposal. Daly told the Daily News in an email on Friday that they discussed only whether to "expand" their negotiating teams, but Fehr was not mentioned by name, and that Fehr's presence wasn't the reason the owners left New York City in a huff — it was because they had asked the union for a yes-or-no answer on three bargaining chips they "had to have."

"The answer wasn't yes," Bettman said.

The answer wasn't no, either. It was a new union proposal that ignored the owners' specific request. This, and Fehr's press conference to inform the media that the parties were close to an agreement, drove the billionaires up a wall. But overlooked amid the fury was that the union and the NHL were closer than ever on two of the issues the league "had to have:" reducing player contract term limits from unlimited to a five-year maximum (the union proposed an eight-year limit) and signing a 10-year, long-term collective bargaining agreement (the union proposed an eight-year pact). The NHL contended its offer was a "package deal" — not items to be bargained individually — but if the league had not been blinded by its tug-of-war with Fehr, it may have actually recognized the progress achieved.

In an email on Friday, Daly was asked whether the league was willing to meet with the union again with Fehr in the room: "Of course we are," Daly said. "We've been doing that all summer, fall and now winter."

All hockey fans should hope that is true, given one player's comment on Fehr from a Friday phone conversation: "Let's be serious. Everything we have done and every decision we have made has gone through (Fehr)," the player said. "Whether it was informal talks or not, there's nothing that can actually get done without us making sure we have his approval. That's what we pay him for. That's his job. We trusted him when he came in, and we still do."

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.09.2012

646097 New Jersey Devils

Fehr factor to NHL tactic

By LARRY BROOKS

SLAP SHOTS

Do NOT mistake this recess in bargaining orchestrated by the NHL after the league's third outright walkaway from talks in the last two months as

anything other than what it is intended by the owners and the suits on Sixth Avenue.

For this is not a "cooling off" period. Anything but. This, rather, is a scripted gap meant to whip up dissent within the NHLPA rank-and-file and turn up the heat on Don Fehr. This is a stretch in which ownership and management mean to scare the players into a stampede to either overthrow or sidestep their elected leader.

The league has become fixated on Fehr as its target just as it was fixated on Bob Goodenow eight years ago. It was hysterical on Thursday to hear Canceled-in-Chief Gary Bettman bemoan that he hadn't had time to develop a working relationship with the current union leader when the NHL itself had fomented the treachery within the PA that led directly to the end of Goodenow's reign and indirectly to the chaos and instability that followed.

A week ago we reported and exposed the fib that had been circulating throughout the Board of Governors that Fehr would receive an \$8 million payout if the union ratified a CBA against his recommendation.

Now, we can report and expose another canard that reflects the league's paranoia about sitting down at the table with Fehr:

Owners and management representatives have been told that Fehr never actually negotiated a CBA with Major League Baseball and that the players pushed him aside in order to complete deals in 2002 and 2006.

This is utter nonsense. But a slur such as this fuels belief around the league that Fehr, like Goodenow before him, simply cannot be dealt with. It deflects criticism from Bettman and ownership to deliver a product to its customers.

When Bettman and sidekick Bill "The Hill" Daly mounted the stage of a Midtown hotel conference room on Thursday night, it was truly Theatre of the Absurd. Within an hour of Fehr having stood in the same spot with the audacity to express hope that a deal should be near, the tandem from Sixth Avenue threw a tantrum in which they basically shouted: "Who are you going to believe, us or your lying eyes?"

Because anyone and everyone who can read can indeed see for themselves: The sides are thread-the-needle close to a deal. The league wants a 10-year CBA with an eight-year out clause. The union wants an eight-year CBA with a six-year out clause. The league wants five-year contract limits with seven-year limits for teams to sign their own players. The union wants eight-year limits to apply across the board.

That's about it. A couple of split-the-difference items plus the issue of amnesty buyouts that arises because of what will be a steep drop in the cap for 2013-14 and because absent such a transition, there will be nearly 10 teams without the means to create cap space to complete their rosters.

This is what the league angrily stalked away from? Yes, this is what the league angrily stalked away from, on cue, as choreographed.

The owners and Bettman walked away from the deal because they do not want to complete a deal with Fehr. They want him removed from the equation. That has become their primary mission, a priority greater than negotiating a CBA and saving the 2012-13 season.

There is no other conclusion to draw after Calgary owner Murray Edwards' declaration to Winnipeg defenseman Ron Hainsey on Wednesday that if Fehr were to rejoin the talks, "It could be a deal-breaker."

There is no doubt there are a number of players who would accept the league's last offer. The folks on Sixth Avenue knew that Thursday morning and they know that now. That's why they staged the walkaway, that's why Abbott and Costello — uh, Bettman and Daly — railed about withdrawing everything from the table.

The league is attempting to run out the clock on Fehr. It is doing everything possible within the confines of U.S. labor law to encourage an uprising within the union.

The players, of course, are free to choose their path. But as much as they want to play, as much as they want to resume their careers — as much as they all want that — they should recognize overthrowing or sidestepping Fehr essentially ends the concept of a Players' Association.

You can't do that twice in two consecutive collective bargaining sessions and expect to attract any credible individual to lead or work for the union in the future. The NHLPA — or whatever it becomes — will be on its own.

On Oct. 24, 2006, baseball commissioner Bud Selig announced the adoption of a five-year CBA two months before expiration of the existing agreement.

"This is a golden era in every way," said Selig, who shared the dais with the executive director of the MLBPA with whom he had negotiated the deal, a man named Donald Fehr.

New York Post LOADED: 12.09.2012

646098 New York Rangers

Former NY Rangers agitator Sean Avery the unlikely leader in the fight for gay rights in sports

More than 20 straight athletes and ex-athletes now have spoken up to support Athlete Ally, not all of them known as politically correct in the past. Charles Barkley, Michael Strahan, Michael Irvin and Cristiano Ronaldo are among the backers.

## NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Sean Avery figures there is one matter that hasn't been addressed at the NHL labor negotiations: gay slurs by players.

"He's the worst," Avery said of Gary Bettman, on this issue. "My belief is the responsibility lies with the leagues, the way they discipline players, the position they take and use it in every-day incidents. One guy'll get slapped with a fine, the next day nothing will happen. There needs to be consistency."

Avery can attest firsthand to the erratic standards employed by the NHL. In 2010, James Wisniewski was suspended for his use of a lewd, anti-gay gesture toward Avery. But a year later, Bettman did not punish Wayne Simmonds after Avery reported to the league that Simmonds had dropped the homophobic "F" bomb.

"They said there wasn't sufficient evidence, but it's on YouTube as clear as day," Avery said.

Avery has been an unexpected advocate for gay rights in recent years, a board member of Athlete Ally, a group of straight athletes devoted to eradicating homophobia in sports. While the former Ranger player was once suspended himself for using derogatory language toward a woman, nobody can now question his dedication to this issue. Avery has lent his backing to the musical, "Bare," playing at New World Stages, which features the story of a gay jock in a bullying society. Avery even traveled to Albany to lobby Republican state officials on gay marriage rights.

"Maybe it's because when I was such a bully when I had my uniform on, that when I took it off I felt the need to stand up against the bully," Avery said.

The hockey player appeared at a Bank of America-sponsored panel this week about bullying and sports, that included Hudson Taylor, a Columbia wrestling coach and the founder of Athlete Ally; and the parents of Tyler Clementi, the Rutgers student who committed suicide after his roommate used a webcam to record Clementi kissing another man.

More than 20 straight athletes and ex-athletes now have spoken up to support Athlete Ally, not all of them known as politically correct in the past. Charles Barkley, Michael Strahan, Michael Irvin and Cristiano Ronaldo are among the backers. Organizers are convinced that when high-profile athletes speak out, they change the culture and make it easier for gays to find open acceptance.

Avery also expressed concern about the heckling and bullying in cyberspace.

"I get called a f-- every day on the internet," he said. "You have to police it somehow."

It's clear the mainstream media doesn't always take the issue seriously. When Wisniewski was suspended two games for his lewd gesture toward Avery, Yahoo.com ran the headline, "Wisniewski swallows 2-game suspension..."

Brian Ellner, a senior strategist for the Human Rights Campaign in New York, said he would like to see the culture changed at arenas and ballparks, with open marketing to gay fans.

"I grew up a Met fan, and I've seen them hold Italian nights and Mexican nights," Ellner said. "But has there ever been an LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Night at Shea or anywhere else?"

The times may be changing, but our professional sports leagues are always the last to catch up, or take such a risk.

Read more: <http://www.nydailynews.com/sports/score-gay-rights-fight-sports-article-1.1216126#ixzz2EY97Bj52>

New York Daily News LOADED: 12.09.2012

646099 Philadelphia Flyers

Inside the Flyers: NHL, union could be nearing deal, despite appearances  
Staff Report

Forget, for the moment, the bizarre circumstances that surrounded last week's negotiations between NHL players, who just want their salaries guaranteed, and owners - wealthy men who have bent on several issues and feel they have reached their limit.

Forget how an NHL podium became a Twitter sensation, how a voice mail between negotiators became an Internet parody, how the owners' leader fired verbal blasts at Donald Fehr's integrity and angrily took the league's last offer off the bargaining table Thursday.

Forget all of that and, if you can find it in your heart to still care about these two sides, remember this: Since the lockout started in mid-September, the NHL and the players' union have never been closer to a labor agreement.

Honest.

Oh, there's still work to be done, but if you cut through the rhetoric, the sides are not far away, money-wise, on the main issues. And it wouldn't take much for a 48-game season to be saved, with teams starting play in early January.

Games have been canceled through Friday, and the entire month of December figures to soon be erased, perhaps as early as Monday.

That said, if you look past Thursday's unintended comedy show - Fehr, the union's boss, was telling reporters a deal seemed imminent at the same time the NHL left the union a voice mail, soundly rejecting the players' counterproposal - you will see the numbers are starting to come into focus, that the framework for a deal is there.

Gary Bettman, the diminutive NHL commissioner with a mammoth salary despite a history of presiding over labor unrest, ripped into Fehr the other night, saying it was "almost incomprehensible" that the union leader said the sides were close to a deal and that it was "not the first time" he had lied.

Fehr, whose disregard for hockey and its past has become abundantly clear, said the sides had a "complete agreement on dollars."

Problem is, Fehr's "dollars" were based on the NHL's accepting the union's latest terms on the length of the collective-bargaining agreement (eight years, with an "escape" clause after six years) and on the length of individual contracts (eight years, with an "out" after six years).

If those terms were accepted by the NHL, the union would be happy to accept the league's \$300 million "make whole" proposal - the money would go toward guaranteeing contracts - and iron out a few other . . . ahem . . . minor issues (including amnesty buyouts) and drop the puck.

The NHL wants a 10-year CBA and a five-year limit on individual contracts (seven years if teams re-sign their own player). In effect, the league wants the five-year limit in place so the owners can control themselves from offering long-term deals (see Rick DiPietro and Ilya Bryzgalov, among countless others) that come back to haunt them.

The league also wants a maximum 5 percent salary increase per year, while the players want a 25 percent variance.

Bill Daly, the deputy commissioner, said the league was only able to boost its "make whole" proposal from \$211 million to \$300 million because it extended the CBA to 10 years and put a five-year contract limit on the table.

Perhaps. But when you consider the league, by its own estimate, is losing \$18 million to \$20 million in revenue per day, you would think another compromise would be in its best interest. The same goes for the players, who are reportedly losing \$8 million to \$10 million per day.

You're making it much too difficult, guys, and your fans may be slow to return.

Before you lose more fans, use some simple math and compromise.

The NHL wants a 10-year CBA and the players want an eight-year pact. Hmm. There seems to be a number in the middle.

The NHL wants a five-year limit on contracts, while the players are seeking an eight-year maximum. The players should cave a bit and compromise at six years. I realize the middle-of-the-road players' dilemma. They believe that since players' cap hits can't be spread out over a longer period, the stars' hefty contracts won't leave as much of the pie for the lesser players.

The truth is that stars like Sidney Crosby, Alex Ovechkin, Claude Giroux, and Zdeno Chara attract the fans, and even secondary players still figure to draw salaries in the \$1 million to \$2 million range.

In short, compromise for the good of the game while there are some fans who actually care. And there are plenty of them. Want proof? A podium with an NHL logo was set up in a New York City hotel press room late Wednesday night, starting rumblings that the sides were maybe, just maybe, going to announce a settlement. Some good-natured fan, in anticipation of the news conference, quickly set up an @NHLPodium Twitter account, and it gained a thousand followers in a minute and, heading into the weekend, had close to 16,000 followers.

Yes, despite their growing anger and frustration with the NHL, folks miss their sport.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.09.2012

646100 Philadelphia Flyers

Fehr says NHL, union were 'very close' to deal

Donald Fehr delivered a speech to Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) in Toronto on Saturday afternoon, yet it was clear its message was intended for the ears of the NHL owners.

Trust your membership. Stay focused and patient. Keep the lines of communication open to all.

And most importantly, understand what rights you won as hockey players because of athletes similar to yourself taking on Major League Baseball decades ago.

It was the executive director of the NHLPA's way of telling NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman and the 30 owners that his group wasn't intimidated by Thursday's colossal fiasco in New York City when CBA talks broke down.

And that it won't be pressured into making a deal its membership isn't comfortable with.

Fehr pointed out what is different about hockey players' jobs versus auto workers': They can't be outsourced.

"We can't move the plant to Bangladesh," Fehr said, reiterating that's why you have to be prepared for a long process of negotiating at home.

What was fascinating about the speech, which lasted less than 25 minutes, was how Fehr weaved his own career up the ladder in sports union representation from baseball to hockey and what he learned from athletes in the process.

He spoke glowingly of his mentor, Marvin Miller, and placed into larger context how baseball players' plight in battling restrictive work laws and a lack of free agency successfully laid the ground work for all professional athletes to follow.

And how those same issues were present during the 84-day NHL lockout.

"What I am witnessing again, this time around, is that whatever else the professional athletes do, they can be and are a reminder to everyone else of what it takes in a difficult struggle," Fehr said.

"If indeed the 750 or so players that I have the privilege to represent can help remind everybody of that, then that will be an important side benefit to what is otherwise a very difficult and unpleasant period."

Several players, most notably Ron Hainsey, came out of the New York meetings saying the league urged them to strike a deal without Fehr present in the talks, a divide-and-conquer tactic the players say has been present throughout to undermine Fehr.

Hainsey, Sidney Crosby and others said that whatever deal is finalized, Fehr will be the one sitting at the table.

"I learned a long, long time ago, again from Marvin Miller, that in the end, if you really don't have any idea what to recommend, or none of the choices are good or none of the options appear tremendously better than the others, what you do is you trust your membership," Fehr said.

"Because they'll do what the right thing to do is. All you have to do is make sure they know what the issues are and involve them enough so they understand the context."

He jokingly asked the CAW for help.

"If anyone has a brilliant idea on how to solve the lockout, don't keep it to yourself," Fehr quipped.

In a separate media scrum following his speech, Fehr said that contrary to Bettman's assertion, he feels the two sides "are very close" on a deal. He also emphasized that it was the league which has issued threats, walked out of talks, or simply ended discussions -- not the players.

Asked what is the next step since the NHL pulled its offer from the table, Fehr calmly replied, "You keep negotiating."

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Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.09.2012

646101 Pittsburgh Penguins

An inside look at how Lemieux, Pens tried to save NHL season

By Rob Rossi

Updated 5 hours ago

Where was Mario?

Until the past week, hockey fans in Pittsburgh and worldwide had wondered why Mario Lemieux hadn't been involved in an NHL labor war that shut down the franchise he owns, that sent one of the Penguins' stars to Russia, that kept the other from playing at all, and that was doing untold damage to the local economy.

There were reasons, and the biggest was the time to strike had to be perfect.

"Mario does not just do things; he considers everything," said NHL agent Pat Brisson, a Lemieux friend dating to their days as competitors in the Quebec Major Junior league in the early 1980s.

"We have been talking for a long time about what we can do to get the league back. Mario, myself, we could not sit back and watch without trying something. The timing had to be on our side."

The NHL and its Players' Association do not have a new labor contract. An owners' lockout of players is in its 85th day. It cannot be argued that a Penguins-led power play of moderate owners and players over three days in New York this week went perfectly.

The moderates' did not fail, either, despite the expected rhetoric from NHL and NHLPA executives when talks broke Thursday night.

There are many reasons to believe an NHL season will happen. If so, history may view Lemieux's timing was perfect after all.

Big Apple movement

Frustrated fans and sponsors should not pay much attention to anything said by Players' Association executive director Donald Fehr, then NHL commissioner Gary Bettman after talks broke Thursday. Those men would have the hockey world believe hope, if not lost, is fading fast.

Hope is alive, to the degree that the NHL has yet to cancel games past Dec. 14.

That is because with neither Fehr nor Bettman in the room, owners and players pretty much figured out an end to this labor war on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Word that a deal was near spread fast after Day 2 of meetings. Evgeni Malkin, in Russia, was advised to be ready for an NHL training camp around Dec. 15. NHL referee Steve Walkom, in Pittsburgh, was told to prepare for a Dec. 21 opening night.

Math is no longer a big issue between the NHL and NHLPA - and math had been the issue. Future revenue will be split 50/50, and players will get at least \$300 million to honor current contracts. Players may get more than that \$300 million, too - if they are willing to agree on a 10-year labor contract that gives owners the option of opting out.

The big-buzz sticking point is contract term limits. Owners crave restrictions that will prevent them from massively overspending to keep their own players or sign free agents. Players, understandably, do not favor rules that impose limitations for what owners can spend.

If a second NHL season is lost in eight years because of contract limits, then the Sports & Exhibition Authority should start looking for a new main tenant at Consol Energy Center, because the league the Penguins play in will not be seen again.

But the NHL is poised to survive this latest ugly labor war, and mostly because of momentum generated this past week by the NHL and NHLPA moderates.

#### Lemieux strategy

Lemieux was stung eight years ago when he and fellow NHL icon Wayne Gretzky tried at the last minute to save the 2004-05 season. He thought their reputations, and unique positions as players-turned-owners, could help the NHL better reach union players.

That move blew up in his face, perhaps because Lemieux and Gretzky made it only after Bettman had canceled the 2004-05 season and because NHLPA leadership masterfully painted the two former players as one of them.

Lemieux made two calculated decisions before this lockout began Sept. 15:

He would not wait until it was too late to get involved. Also, he would build a coalition so that he would not become the story, or ammunition for NHLPA leadership.

There was always a perception among players that the lockout would end by Thanksgiving, certainly in time for games to begin Dec. 1. When it became clear by mid-November that was not going to happen, and that another season may be lost, agents began hearing concerns from clients.

Agents have skin in this dispute because their clients are not getting paid.

Brisson, who represents many NHL stars, including Penguins captain Sidney Crosby, made a suggestion to Lemieux around Thanksgiving.

"We talked, and we agreed that maybe now we should try something," he said. "What was our choice, to sit back and watch the season die?"

Lemieux was in, but on the condition that he not be front and center.

#### French Canadian connections

Lemieux began working the phones, starting with Ron Burkle, his Penguins majority co-owner and a multi-billionaire with shelves full of awards from various labor organizations.

There was a joint effort by Lemieux and Brisson to get other NHL franchises, ones not identified as hard-line supporters such as Boston's Jeremy Jacobs and Minnesota's Craig Leipold, on board. The Penguins called on support from Tampa Bay owner Jeff Vinik, whose NHL world view in a non-traditional market with a young franchise star (Steven Stamkos) is similar to that of the Lemieux-Burkle ownership group.

The defending Stanley Cup champion Los Angeles Kings, with Luc Robitaille as president of business operations, and the huge-revenue

Montreal Canadiens, with Marc Bergevin as the general manager, each were instant allies. Their owners wanted to play before guaranteed packed arenas, and Robitaille and Bergevin were friends of Lemieux and Brisson dating three decades.

This French Canadian Connection of Lemieux, Brisson, Robitaille and Bergevin gathered speed, and helped sweep aboard ownership groups in Toronto and Winnipeg, the NHL's biggest and smallest Canadian markets.

There is no coincidence that the Penguins, Lightning, Maple Leafs and Jets were the four new franchises the NHL sent into a room with players this week in New York.

Federally mediated talks between the NHL and NHLPA broke on Nov. 29. Bettman suggested a meeting between owners and players that would not include either he or Fehr - each man a lightning rod for resentment and distrust at that point in the process.

Before those federally mediated talks stalled, Bettman already had been informed by Burkle that the Penguins wanted a position at the bargaining table; that he, not Lemieux, would take the seat; and that other moderate voices wanted to be heard.

Lemieux and Brisson had provided Burkle with a list of names if Bettman asked.

#### Crosby goes to work

Brisson started leaning his highest profile NHL players, including vocal anti-owner Chicago captain Jonathan Toews. Brisson looked for signals as to who he could count upon.

Crosby did not need convincing. Frustrated by having played in just 28 games over 22 months because of concussion symptoms, he wanted to play - and play in the NHL.

"I don't see how anybody would have a reason to be mad," Crosby said. "We're talking about saving the season. It's worth it to try."

Crosby banked on commanding respect from more reasonable players because of his public and behind-the-scenes involvement with the NHLPA since the summer. He believed he was not viewed by most as the usual big-money player who avoided messy labor dealings.

He made phone calls. Convinced there were players eager to hear from other owners, he traveled on the week after Thanksgiving to speak in person with a large group of players training in Arizona.

His objective was to get players to New York for a meeting with owners, and to have them keep an open mind if new owners were allowed in the room. He did not promise a deal would be made if players, without Fehr, met owners, without Bettman. Never make that promise, Brisson advised.

This was a risky move for Crosby, who was told by some players that veterans of past lockouts might question his close ties to Lemieux, with whom he lived for the early part of his seven-year career.

Shane Doan, the respected veteran captain with Phoenix, told Crosby on that Arizona trip that he would back any effort that could spark talks. Again, it was about trying to save the season - and maybe the NHL, Doan said.

"Sid's just the face of the whole NHL," Doan said. "He makes our case by just doing such a good representing the league. And the league is not just the players; it's the owners, it's everybody."

Crosby and Brisson met last weekend in Los Angeles. On Monday, they flew with Burkle to New York, where they met Lemieux, Penguins general manager Ray Shero, CEO David Morehouse and COO Travis Williams.

Crosby split soon upon arriving to meet with players, including Doan and Toews.

Lemieux and Brisson caught up with Robitaille and Bergevin, and Burkle strategized with Vinik.

The time to strike was approaching.

The chance to save the NHL season was the only thing at stake.

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.09.2012

646102 Pittsburgh Penguins

Crosby devastated by failure to yield deal

By Josh Yohe

Updated: Friday, December 7, 2012

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."

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.09.2012

Talented Bennett is work in progress for Penguins

By Jonathan Bombulie

If there's one thing in hockey that has dragged on longer than the NHL's current labor dispute, it's the Penguins' never-ending quest to develop a homegrown top-six winger to play with Sidney Crosby or Evgeni Malkin.

Could 2010 first-round draft pick Beau Bennett be the man to break the drought?

Frankly, the odds are against him.

There were 70 wingers who scored at least 20 goals in the NHL last season. Twenty-nine of them were stars who skipped the AHL entirely or had only a cup of coffee in the minors. That leaves just 41 NHL players who could be accurately described as AHL-developed top-six wingers.

But there are signs Bennett could buck the trend.

The 21-year-old rookie is the most creative offensive player to come through Wilkes-Barre in years. He has great vision and hands and plays the game with a flair that has its roots on the roller hockey rinks of his native Southern California.

"A lot of the best offensive players, they're one step ahead," Baby Pens coach John Hynes said. "They feel pressure as it comes, and they know how to make the quick-release plays. That's what he can do."

So far, he's done it more than any other player on the Baby Pens roster, leading the team in scoring with 16 points in 20 games going into this weekend.

So settle the lockout, stick the right-handed Bennett on the left side of a line with Malkin and James Neal and drop the puck, right?

It's not that simple.

"It's tough to put a timetable on," Hynes said. "From what we've seen so far in his development curve, he's elevated his game at the American Hockey League level to be able to execute his skill set. Whether that can translate directly into the National Hockey League this year, the way he's developing, it looks like he's on track to be able to do that, but the proof would be when he actually gets in those situations."

For now, the Penguins are focused on shoring up the weak points in Bennett's game so that he'll have the best chance to succeed once he gets to the NHL.

He needs to add strength to his 6-foot-1, 195-pound frame, work on his acceleration and deceptiveness with the puck and develop consistency in his own end.

That last part presents an interesting developmental dilemma. The Penguins need to help Bennett become more responsible while not breaking his offensive spirit and turning him into a third-line grinder.

"When a player is in offensive situations and he has the puck, then there's some freedom, some creativity, some experimentation. You've got to let the horse run a little bit," Hynes said. "But there's also the part when they don't have the puck. They have to realize the harder I check, the more responsible I am when I don't have the puck, the more I'm going to have it."

Tribune Review LOADED: 12.09.2012

646104 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: NHLPA's Donald Fehr says deal can still be done

Bob Mitchell

As Donald Fehr ended his speech to CAW delegates on Saturday, the executive director of the NHL Players' Association asked the packed room for their "brilliant" ideas for ending the lockout.

"Send in the fighters," yelled a delegate.

Fehr just smiled. He looked as if he might consider the idea if it would end the impasse.

The lockout entered its 84th day on Sunday with no talks scheduled after the league suddenly ended negotiations last Thursday.

Players and Fehr were surprised and disappointed by the dramatic turn of events after a day of renewed optimism in New York when a group of players met behind closed doors with a group of owners.

"It seemed to me that we ought to have been able to move forward and finish it off but so far they have not indicated they are willing to continue discussions." Fehr told the media after giving his speech to the Canadian Auto Workers Council at Toronto's Sheraton Hotel. He had already been invited to speak to the CAW before the NHL labour dispute started.

"There had been some movement. We responded with some movement." Fehr said. "We think we're done on the dollars or very close to it with the exception of one issue, transition, which we haven't even discussed yet."

Fehr said the players have already agreed to "massive" losses even if the league accepts what had been proposed by the union.

"The way this negotiation sits, the percentage that players get out of industry revenue, assuming that the current proposals on the table hold, would result in massive concessions to the owners," Fehr said. "When they say they're negotiating against themselves, what exactly is it?"

"What has moved in the players' direction? It's not salaries. It's not the length of contract."

Fehr revealed a tentative agreement had been reached on pensions but it's almost completely paid for by the players out of their share.

Despite no talks scheduled between the NHL and the locked-out players, Fehr remains confident a deal can still be reached to save the season.

"So far there has been no indication from the other side that there is any drop-dead date. All I can tell you is that when you're in a negotiation, you keep at it and find a way to reach an agreement," Fehr said.

"What's the next step? One would hope that sooner or later negotiations will resume and we figure out a way through this."

Even with the league's current stance, Fehr said he remains more confident than ever that a settlement will be reached.

Although Fehr and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman haven't spoken directly with each other since last Thursday, representatives have and Fehr said he's willing to resume bargaining as soon as the league agrees.

"The one thing we know for certain is that you can't make agreements if people aren't talking," Fehr said.

"Throughout this process the players have never made threats. They've never threatened to walk out. We've had any number of instances of that from the management side. We'll see, tomorrow's another day."

Montreal Canadiens defenceman Chris Campoli, a member of the players' negotiating team, also attended Saturday's CAW event with Fehr.

Afterwards, he said players were frustrated with how talks suddenly ended in New York.

"To have talks come to a halt and take things off the table is disappointing," Campoli said. "When you feel you're doing things to genuinely come to an agreement and then have it thrown back into your face, it's frustrating."

Campoli said the membership remains solidly behind Fehr.

"There isn't going to be a deal without Don being there," Campoli said.

"The players' meeting with the owners served its purpose but it didn't result in a deal."

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.09.2012

646105 Toronto Maple Leafs

How the decline of NHL hockey created a new NFL fan

Noah Richler

My finally being irreversibly fed up with Canada's great game has been a long time coming.

This from a fella who has hockey memories to compete with anybody's, one of those kids in class who had the single earpiece of his transistor radio hidden under his hair, longer and thicker then, when in 1972 Paul Henderson scored his winning goal and the whole of my hometown of Montreal seemed to erupt in a united cheer, the teacher helpless to do anything about it. A teen who watched Habs hockey games from up in the blues and spotting the (never more than a) couple of empty reds that we'd take from the second period, claiming we'd thrown our ticket stubs onto the ice during the action. Someone who brought, somewhat nervously, a girlfriend from England to a game, wondering if she'd be able to follow, and then her jumping and yelling with the rest of the 20,000 when, inevitably, the Canadiens won again. Hell, I even played in a televised European university game that was billed as "England vs. France," a bit of comedy to rival anything in Slap Shot, I promise you. And winter wasn't winter if I hadn't played on a frozen Canadian lake but the lake I did play on doesn't freeze anymore, even the climate conspiring against my old affections.

But I haven't recognized the game that was a pillar of Canadian lore for ages. I long ago swore off attending any Leafs game before March, when there was at least the slight chance of one of 34 players breaking a sweat, though not much. I have not leapt out of my seat because of any on-ice action at a Leafs game, ever. And now the playoffs are more likely just to annoy me. The Vancouver-Boston series that led to the stupid riots of a couple of years ago was the worst, most anticlimactic, dull final I can ever remember having seen — the consequence, not least, of too many games and too many playoff contenders and the likelihood that the better series will now be played sometime earlier during the endless, tedious contest of elimination that takes hockey into summer and (this, in losing Toronto, the phenomenon of a long time ago) makes fans walking city streets with painted faces look even more foolish.

As foolish, possibly, as the orangutan hockey players still on the ice, sticking by the not so venerable tradition of not shaving during the playoffs, no one of the 320 players dressed at the start of the elimination marathon able to do the math and figure that the odds of them lifting the cup because they did not put a razor to their faces are 16 to one against them. What's with the hirsute fixation, anyway? Jeez, if Jacques Martin had made Daniel Alfredsson cut his hair back in the 2003 playoffs and actually pay attention to the action obscured by his goldilocks, the Sens might have come through that year but, no, the hair won out and Ottawa lost again.

And now we are at the risk of a second cancelled season in a decade though, in truth, do I miss hockey at all? No, not one bit. What's to miss? Being fleeced at the ACC? Sixty games without significance? Evenings of crass marketing, rather than the truly "beautiful game"? Talent stretched so thinly that even the best teams only have one decent line? Head injuries that owners couldn't be bothered to do anything about? Players finding repeated ways to show just how spoiled they are?

This happened again, of course, in Toronto last week when NHL players skipped their annual visits to hospitals for sick children, such charity apparently disallowed by the lockout, which is patent nonsense.

So now, as I have done for a few years, I find myself watching NFL games instead, cheering the New England Patriots and not the Habs or the Leafs, and revelling in the strategy and discipline of a marvellous game that has not diluted its appeal by expanding its franchises beyond what the talent pool can support, its 16 regular season games and six of 32 (and not 16 of 30) teams eligible to make the post-season ensuring a game that is much as it always was. One that offers quality and dramatic games and not disinterested owners and wildly overpaid players putting their selfishness, not skills, on display.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.09.2012

646106 Toronto Maple Leafs

World junior hockey championship: Top 10 players to watch

Kevin McGran  
Sports Reporter

Injuries and a potential end to the NHL lockout might change a few things, but the depth and talent level of players invited to their national training camps for the world junior hockey championship is breathtaking.

Here's a look at some of the most intriguing players expected to star in Ufa, Russia, when the tournament begins Dec. 26.

1. Nail Yakupov, Russia. The No. 1 overall pick of the 2012 draft (to Edmonton) gets a chance to shine on the international stage after starring for his hometown team — Neftekhimik Nizhnekamsk — of the KHL. Through 19 games this season, Yakupov has 10 goals and eight assists. Yakupov had two goals and two assists in six games as Russia beat a series of CHL all-stars 3-2-1 in a six-game series in November.
2. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Canada. If a shoulder injury and the NHL don't get in the way, the No. 1 overall pick of the 2011 draft (to Edmonton) will get a taste of playing against a future teammate. The missing link in his impressive hockey resumé is an appearance at this tournament. By all rights, Nugent-Hopkins should be in the NHL — he played there last year as an 18-year-old.
3. Nathan MacKinnon, Canada. What's this? A product of Cole Harbour, N.S., has a chance to go No. 1 in the draft next? MacKinnon won't play centre — his natural position — but he will get a chance to show scouts his versatility by playing wing. He had five goals and six assists playing within his age group at the Ivan Hlinka tournament in the summer.
4. Seth Jones, United States. The Portland Winterhawks blueliner is another potential first overall pick in the next NHL draft and will go head-to-head for scouts' attention playing against MacKinnon and Team Canada in the same side of the draw. He's the son of former NBA player Popeye Jones.
5. Aleksander Barkov Jr., Finland. If there's a European out there who could challenge MacKinnon and Jones for the top spot in the draft, it's Barkov, the son of a former Russian hockey player. Barkov returns to Team Finland as the leading scorer for Tappara Tampere of the Finnish top division. At 16 years four months last year, he became the second-youngest player ever to score at the world juniors.
6. Morgan Rielly, Canada. The Maple Leafs blueline prospect (No. 5 in the 2012 draft) wears No. 4 in Moose Jaw and plays a bit like that other famous No. 4. That is to say, he plays all over the ice. At this tournament, his strength will be his skating, and he's got to rein in his free spirit. He is the logical candidate to take the major minutes that would have gone to Ryan Murray, who's out with a season-ending shoulder injury.
7. Jakub Vrana, Czech Republic. Vrana is the youngest player in the tournament. He was recently promoted to the senior team of his Swedish club Linköping. He is eligible for the NHL draft in 2014.
8. Mikhail Grigorenko, Russia. The Buffalo Sabres prospect (12th overall in 2012) left for Russia's camp in second place in goal scoring in the QMJHL with the Quebec Remparts. He was a force for Russia in its six-game series against CHL all-stars in November.
9. Tyler Biggs, United States. The power forward has 15 goals and 16 assists in 30 games with the Oshawa Generals, proving he's comfortable at the junior hockey level after leaving NCAA Miami University of Ohio after one year. The Leafs' first-rounder from 2011
10. Olli Maatta, Finland. The London Knights defenceman missed a good chunk of last season due to a concussion suffered in the first game of the world junior tournament. Still, he played 58 games with a plus-25 rating for the OHL champion Knights. He has 24 points in 30 games this year.

Toronto Star LOADED: 12.09.2012

646107 Toronto Maple Leafs

Marlies win, but lose Gardiner in process

By Lance Hornby , Toronto Sun

TORONTO - Since crack shot Bryan McCabe departed the Maple Leafs, the Toronto power play has lacked a blueline presence.

Surviving partner Tomas Kaberle was rendered less effective until he, too, was traded and though Dion Phaneuf had seven goals with the extra man last season, it's too early to declare "problem solved" in an area where the Leafs have been cursed by inconsistency. That's the reason there was so much concern Saturday night when Jake Gardiner was taken out of the game after his second power play goal of the night against Rochester.

Gardiner had scored after Kevin Porter's charging penalty, when the Americans forward caught Gardiner looking the wrong way after a clearing pass. Gardiner came back and scored the eventual game winner in a 4-3 decision, giving the sophomore pro seven goals on the power play and the American Hockey League lead for defencemen pending all game results. But he was pulled shortly after.

"He wasn't in a concussion state, just not feeling quite right," coach Dallas Eakins said. With all of our players, we err on the side of caution. We'll re-evaluate him later tonight and tomorrow."

Gardiner has the big shot, but the Minnesotan also showed Saturday he can use those graceful skating strides to sweep around the net and find wrist-shot goals from sharp angles. Overall, he and Ryan Hamilton are tied with eight goals for the team lead.

"We hope to see Jake develop this at the NHL level," Eakins said. "He's taken on the power-play role here and is getting rewarded. I know (assistant coach) Derek King has worked on the unit a lot. Derek sees the game from an offensive side and Jake is feeding off that.

"Jake can pass it accurately and hard and has that great no-look pass going. It looks like he's going to throw a bomb and it goes off to the side. Sometimes it catches our own forwards off-guard."

Ben burns Amerks

What did Rochester ever do to get Ben Scrivens so worked up for games against the Americans?

In addition to dominating last year's season series, Scrivens was a huge part of the three-game playoff sweep and it has been much the same story in 2012-13. With Saturday's 32-save performance, Scrivens has allowed just seven goals in 119 shots through four games. Rochester has accounted for four of Scrivens' eight wins and 13 overall for the team.

"You can never get comfortable against a team in this league," Scrivens cautioned. "As soon as you say something it goes the other way and suddenly you're asking me why you can't beat Rochester."

Saturday marked the first time this season Scrivens has put together back-to-back 30-plus save victories. Californian Jon Parker and Luke Adam made it interesting with two third-period goals, while T.J. Brennan shot wide at the buzzer.

"Goes to show that it's not a cliché to say you have to play all 60 minutes," Scrivens said. "We had some bad luck, a goal off (teammate) Spencer Abbott's stick, one off the staunchion, but we hung on. Endings like that, we have to learn from."

Record watch

With two assists on Saturday, Keith Aucoin has tied junior Marlie and ex-Leaf Bruce Boudreau for 12th place in AHL history with 799 points ... Hamilton's goal was his 72nd for the Marlies, putting him two back of Jeremy Williams for the most in the Ricoh era, post-2005.

Injury updates

Veteran centre Mike Zigomanis was kept out of the lineup for precautionary reasons with an injury. That allowed Joe Colborne to come in, another attempt to kick-start his offensive game. Zigomanis will be back Sunday afternoon against Abbotsford ... Jussi Rynnäs continues a slower than anticipated recovery from a groin injury ... Defenceman Jesse Blacker is still feeling the effects of a facial injury that has made him don a full cage. He was scratched on Saturday after Mark Fraser returned to the lineup from a shoulder strain, but could play Sunday, especially if Gardiner sits.

Marlies Minutiae

Nazem Kadri scored and had a three-point game ... Defenceman Korbinian Holzer sent Brayden McNabb flying in the best unpenalized hit of Saturday night ... Toronto improved its Ricoh record to 7-1-0-1 ... Attendance was

7,137, almost 1,000 more than Marlies' already improved average of 6,199 (11th in AHL) ... Connor Knapp, a sixth-round pick of the Buffalo Sabres and a New York State native, didn't have much time to celebrate his first professional win on Friday night. He stopped 41 Adirondack shots, but was beaten twice early by the Marlies ... It was a year ago Saturday that news broke of the Leafs, Marlies and all MLSE holdings changing hands when the Ontario Teachers Pension Plan sold majority shares to Rogers and Bell.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 12.09.2012

646108 Toronto Maple Leafs

What The #!%\*?: Figuring out the future of the NHL lockout

Sean Fitz-Gerald | Dec 8, 2012 8:30 AM ET | Last Updated: Dec 8, 2012 8:31 AM ET

In this occasional feature, the National Post tells you everything you need to know about a complicated issue. With the National Hockey League and the National Hockey League Players' Association having broken off collective bargaining negotiations with duelling news conferences on Thursday, there are questions about the process, and where it might lead next. Sean Fitz-Gerald assesses the present and surveys experts to see how the future might look if it lands in a courtroom:

So where are we?

It depends. Some have suggested the venom NHL commissioner Gary Bettman sprayed from his lectern Thursday night — he really did seem to spit "incomprehensible" as he described the optimism NHLPA counterpart Donald Fehr had offered — is just part of an elaborate negotiating dance. Others, such as Don Cherry, have accepted the display at face value, and as not a very promising sign for a season.

George Smith, a Queen's University professor who has negotiated labour deals for companies such as Air Canada and the CBC, was taken aback by the way both sides handled the breakdown in negotiations.

Don Cherry weighs in on NHL lockout: 'I've never seen Gary Bettman so livid'

"The thing should have very quickly been, 'We've been unable to make a deal, the talks have broken off and we're trying to find a way to get back together,'" Smith said. "Then get out of there, shut up and go back to the bargaining table."

Where is the disconnect?

What the NHL wants: A 10-year collective agreement (with an option after year No. 8), a five-year cap on player contracts (an exception of seven years made for teams to re-sign their own players), and no compliance buyouts of current contracts or caps on escrow clawbacks when league revenue falls short of expectations. On Thursday, Bill Daly, the NHL deputy commissioner, described the cap on contracts as "the hill we will die on."

The NHLPA, as has been reported, proposed an eight-year cap on contracts. They offered an eight-year term on the new collective agreement (with an opt-out after six). Players had also accepted a reduction in their share of hockey-related revenue, and a package of US\$300-million offered by the owners to ease the transition for players already under contract, as that percentage drops.

After Thursday?

"Anything that we put on the table this week is off the table," Bettman said.

Why do we keep hearing about decertification?

It is one of the arrows left in the union's quiver, albeit an arrow drenched in kerosene and swathed in plutonium. Decertifying the union would require players to vote — filling out cards, or signing a petition to dissolve the union — and would leave players in a position to challenge the NHL with antitrust suits in the United States.

"I think it's more just kind of a way to get leverage for the players," said Nathaniel Grow, an assistant professor at the Terry College of Business at the University of Georgia who has a paper, Decertifying Players' Unions: Lessons From the NFL and NBA Lockouts of 2011, that will be published

early next year. "If they're being locked out, they don't have a lot of pressure points to apply to the owners."

And what is a disclaimer of interest?

That is the more likely scenario. In the U.S., a decertified union has to wait a year before it can recertify. A disclaimer of interest is a much more informal process — as simple as writing a letter saying the union no longer represents the players — and the union could be reassembled in relatively little time. Keith Burkhardt, a labour lawyer with Toronto-based Sherrard Kuzz LLP, said that, in Canada, the disclaimer would be known more as abandonment of bargaining rights. Either way, the union, as it now stands, would be out of the picture. And Fehr unlikely to be allowed to stand at the forefront.

What could players gain from that?

Under U.S. law, Grow said, if you are found to be in violation of federal anti-competition law, you are liable for treble damages. So if players are suffering US\$10-million in losses a day during the lockout, that award total would shoot up to US\$30-million: "That totally changes the financial calculus for the owners," Grow said.

The other benefit in the U.S., is that a court could declare the lockout is illegal.

NFL players filed for an injunction to end the NFL lockout last year, but ultimately lost on appeal: "But they lost it on jurisdiction," said Mort Mitchnick, a labour lawyer with the Toronto-based firm Borden Ladner Gervais LLP. "So no one's clear yet, as to what the real answer is, in terms of whether you can actually [end] the lockout."

During the NBA lockout, NBA players opted against filing that injunction, and instead filed for the treble damages: "And two weeks later, they had a deal," Mitchnick said. "Often times, it's the threat and the uncertainty of what's hanging over your head that causes things to change."

The downside?

There is an uncertainty in how the owners would react. Bettman said the board of governors had been briefed on the possibility of a disclaimer: "We don't view it in the same way, in terms of its impact, as apparently the union may," he said.

"It's possible the owners, especially given how contentious this seems to be, will just dig in their heels and say, 'Well, screw them, we're not going to budge — if they want to fight it out in court, we'll fight it out,'" Grow said.

How would it play out?

Nobody can say for certain. In sports, the process has never gone the full distance down the legal route. Burkhardt said he spent a half-hour discussing the possible outcomes with an arbitrator on Thursday night.

"If all of this played out in law, we may not have hockey for the next three years — at the same time, we would have some really great legal analysis, legal decisions and legal precedents," he said with a chuckle. "And aside from the two of us, no one else would care about it ... everyone would think this was terrible and awful. But man, that would be neat."

National Post LOADED: 12.09.2012

646109 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Both sides' posturing all part of the process

Michael Traikos | Dec 8, 2012 8:00 AM ET

Cue the conspiracy theories after latest NHL lockout disagreement

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.

That is the question on everyone's mind as we pick through the shrapnel following Thursday's blow-up between the NHL and the Players' Association. It was a strange and surreal three days. On Tuesday, a 56-game schedule was being debated and coaches were reportedly telling players to be ready to start training camp as early as next week. Less than 48 hours later, it all went kablooney.

With no immediate plans for the two sides to start talking again and more games set for the chopping block on Monday, is the season now in danger of being cancelled? If so, is it finally time for the union to load its gun and start the process of decertification or disclaimer of trust?

Not so fast. According to at least one sports labour expert, this week's emotional rollercoaster is all part of the process.

"I've seen it many times where final agreements are reached shortly after the negotiations blow up in smoke and people are extremely angry and make horrible public statements about each other," said Gary R. Roberts, dean and professor of law at Indiana University, who has served as the president of the Sports Lawyers Association.

"It's all part of the posturing and emotional ups and downs of the process. I don't think you can draw much conclusion from what happened the day before. Neither side wants to leave anything on the table, so they're going to play every trick they have up their sleeve before they reach a final agreement."

So was Thursday's drama-filled day of contradictory news conferences, voicemail messages and overall disillusionment all for show? Perhaps.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and players association executive director Donald Fehr may have been playing their carefully calculated roles, but the anger and disillusionment coming from the so-called moderate owners who took part in this week's talks — Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle, Tampa Bay's Jeffrey Vinik, Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum and Winnipeg's Mark Chipman — was likely real.

Those owners had invested themselves in the process and were bewildered by the union's moves after they thought real progress had been made and a deal was imminent.

And so, instead of players gearing up for training camp, Colorado Avalanche forward Ryan O'Reilly signed a two-year contract to play in the KHL on Friday. He has an out clause in case the lockout ends, but that extra year is telling.

It's a bullet you can play as a tactic

If the union does go down the path towards decertification or disclaimer of trust — pressure tactics that could eventually lead to an anti-trust lawsuit — two scenarios are likely: the NHL owners would be forced to their knees or, as some fear, it would cause this season to be cancelled and put games in the 2013-14 season in jeopardy as well.

"It's a bullet you can play as a tactic," said Jeffrey Citron, who drafted the 1995 CBA as the lead counsel for the NHLPA. "In football and basketball, it prompted settlement, so there might be some utility in the union using that."

"I don't actually think the players believe that's the best option," said sports labour expert Dan Oldfield, the lead negotiator for the Canadian Media Guild. "I could see it being rolled out if all the doors are shut and the only way you're going to make any movement is to go in that direction."

Something will have to happen, or else the direction the NHL is heading towards is the same place it went seven years ago.

National Post LOADED: 12.09.2012

646110 Vancouver Canucks

Feisty goalie Barry Brust ready to take the next step after Abbotsford Heat renaissance

By Ben Kuzma, The Province December 7, 2012

Barry Brust has more than a passing interest as the bitter NHL lockout drags on.

As an unrestricted free agent goaltender who has emerged from the shadows to command the AHL spotlight with a record-setting shutout string, the Abbotsford Heat stopper is having a renaissance. And as much as a rotating three-goalie system should grate on any crease crusader, battling Brust has embraced the awkward challenge to such a degree that NHL teams in need have noticed.

At 29, Brust is suited for a backup role on a short contract to gain lasting trust, because his head is now as good as his game. That should interest the Vancouver Canucks on some level, if a shortened season is salvaged. They have promoted Cory Schneider to starter, need to deal Roberto Luongo and must find a backup to fill that void while Eddie Lack gets his game in order and gets over a hip strain.

Although Brust has appeared in just 11 career NHL games, and an eight-game suspension last season in the German elite league for cross-checking an exuberant goal scorer in the head made many wonder what was going on between his ears — he received an eye-popping 109 penalty minutes in 33 games — they now wonder how Brust has found his game again. And found patience with just one minor penalty.

A 6-1-0 record with the Heat — which includes three shutouts and 268 minutes, 17 seconds without allowing a goal to break Johnny Bower's 55-year-old minor-league record — will command attention. So will a 0.99 goals-against average and .958 saves percentage. After all, his NHL bottom line is 2-4-1 with a 3.70 GAA and .878 saves percentage with the Los Angeles Kings.

Now Brust competes for ice time with Danny Taylor and Calgary Flames first-round pick Leland Irving.

"Three goalies have kind of been a blessing because I've been able to work with Jordan Sigalet so extensively and he's refined my game," Brust said of his goalie coach. "I'm still pretty aggressive in there, but it's in a more calm direction and more focused. Having three goalies here wouldn't be possible if we didn't respect each other and embrace the situation."

"If there's anything in our game, Jordan can get on it right away and the way he communicates with us is a big positive. It's second to none."

"We all understand there's a lockout going on and we're thankful we have a place to play. A lot of good goalies out there are not even playing now."

Despite a good 2010-11 season with the Binghamton Senators, Brust bolted to the Straubing Tigers of the German elite league and gained more notoriety for a loss of composure than winning as the club advanced to the postseason for the first time in franchise history. After Eisbaren Berlin forward Florian Busch scored en route to eliminating the Tigers, Brust took exception and pulled a Ron Hextall.

"They're clamping down on hits to the head and I kind of got a little bit angered," recalled Brust, a 2002 third-round draft pick of the Minnesota Wild. "The guy was celebrating in my crease and I didn't like it too much. I was sorry in the long run and it cost me \$2,500 euros."

Reuniting with Heat head coach Troy Ward while improving his fitness and level of expectation have provided Brust with the perfect platform to jump back into the NHL. Despite a sparkling 13-4-3-2 record, the Heat win by outworking the opposition, icing the top-ranked penalty kill and getting great goaltending. The offence was ranked 19th in the 30-team loop heading into weekend play — the Heat play Sunday afternoon against the Marlies in Toronto — and top-point producer Sven Baertschi, who's out with a concussion, was 38th overall after 19 games with 17 points (6-11). It has placed a priority on goaltending.

"The way I've grown and the success I've had at AHL level, I'm ready to make the next step," said Brust. "It's going to take a few steps and a few bounces but I'm prepared for it."

Much more than with the struggling Kings in the 2006-07 season, where Brust took but three AHL starts into his first NHL encounter. Promoted from the Manchester Monarchs because the Kings didn't want to expose Jason LaBarbera and lose him to waivers, Brust was lit up in a 7-4 loss to the Phoenix Coyotes on Nov. 30. Two weeks later, when Dan Cloutier was

injured in the warm-up, Brust made 34 saves in a 4-2 win over the Sharks in San Jose.

"My last NHL opportunity was given to me on luck and circumstance and it was a surprise thing for me to end up in L.A.," admitted Brust. "I was wide-eyed and bushy-tailed and it was a good experience for sure, even though it was a tough gig for me. We had one of the worst teams in the league."

Those Kings were the third-worst at 27-41-14, gave up the fourth-most goals and used five goalies — Sean Burke, Mathieu Garon, Yutaka Fukufuji, Brust and Cloutier. If anything, Brust's agent Kurt Overhardt believes his client's survival instincts could turn him into the next late-blooming goalie. Especially if that German loop suspension doesn't overshadow a 19-12-0 season and 2.47 GAA and .916 saves percentage last season.

"He's had nine lives," said Overhardt. "He's not that [suspended] guy. He's not hotheaded and he's also been very grounded and accountable. It's always been up to him and now he's proving it. The sky is really the limit for him."

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 12.09.2012