

# SPORT-SCAN DAILY BRIEF

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646111 Buffalo Sabres

If they play, there will be no time for slumps or slow starts

You can read all over the Internet about speculation that the NHL still had hopes of a 60-game season had talks not broken off Thursday night to end the lockout. Gary Bettman said afterward that no less than a 48-game schedule -- the same that was played in 1994-95 -- would be considered to maintain "integrity" of the competition (like there's any integrity left here but I digress ... )

With games only canceled through Friday, it's likely the league will have to dump more off the schedule as soon as Monday (the Sabres have already had 27 canceled).

So we're close to a best-case scenario of a 48-game season. The Sabres have 46 scheduled from Jan. 1 on and it would be easy to throw two more dates in there.

With that in mind, and thinking optimistically about hockey at some point, I decided to look back to last season. You can't put every team at 48 games so I put the Sabres at 48 and it was an ugly time: The morning of Jan. 22 when they awoke on a five-game skid overall and having lost a franchise-record 12 straight on the road after a 4-2 loss in St. Louis.

The standings at that point are here. The Sabres were 19-24-5 and 14th in the Eastern Conference. But the incredible thing I found was this -- 15 of the 16 playoff teams from last season were already determined by that point.

The top eight in the East (NYR, BOS, FLA, PHI, OTT, PIT, NJ, WAS) all made the playoffs as did seven of the eight in the West (DET, VAN, SJ, STL, CHI, NAS, LA). Only Phoenix, which eventually caught Colorado, snuck in.

Most hockey observers say it's tough to come from out of the playoffs to sneak in after the new year and this certainly upholds that theory. Some people say it's even earlier, like the start of December.

One thing is for sure: In a short season, there's going to be no time for long slumps, no time for a late rush to the top eight -- which is something the Sabres have tried to pull off in four of the last five years and only succeeded in 2011.

If everything is pretty well decided by 48 games of an 82-game season, that means you better be in good shape by game 30 of a short schedule. Maybe sooner. If we get back to seeing hockey, it will make for a pretty unusual dynamic right from the start of the season.

---Mike Harrington

Buffalo News LOADED: 12.10.2012

646112 Buffalo Sabres

Kevin Oklobzija's Hockey O-zone

Posted by Kevin Oklobzija • December 9, 2012 • 4:00 pm

This was a very troubling weekend for the Rochester Americans.

Not because they lost to the Toronto Marlies on Saturday night. They usually lose to the Marlies because, since the 2011-12 NHL regular season ended, Toronto has had two full lines more of talent up front.

The weekend instead was troubling because of what the parent Buffalo Sabres have done. Or rather, haven't done.

Against the powerhouse Marlies, the Sabres allowed the Amerks to skate into Ricoh Coliseum with just 10 forwards in uniform and only 17 skaters. So against a team with a multitude of talent, the Amerks/Sabres decided they could be competitive with a short roster.

Yeah, that's a good idea. No chance anyone could get hurt during the game. No reason to think you might need to give your top guns a rest at

some point during the game, which was the second game of a back-to-back weekend for the Amerks.

And yet we're all supposed to believe coach Ron Rolston when he says every point matters, whether it's October or April.

Now, in reality, he's right when he says that. His players know it, too. After Friday's 3-1 victory over the Adirondack Phantoms — a truly mediocre, or worse, team — Amerks veteran winger Mark Mancari talked about how every point was critical. "You can say we're only 20 games or whatever into the season, but these points matter," he said. "Look at the division and the conference. You can't lose games. You lose games, you drop."

Apparently the Sabres and Amerks (the coaching staff seems to be OK with playing short) doesn't seem to care. They don't mind their drop from fourth or fifth in the conference to 11th — at the moment. By the time Sunday ends, they could be 13th.

As Clark Griswold would say, "Nothing to be proud of, Russ." Or Darcy. Or Terry. Or Kevin.

In an American Hockey League where many teams have been exponentially fortified by locked-out NHLers, the Amerks at full strength are a decent team, one probably capable of earning a playoff berth.

But when Cody Hodgson, Evan Rankin, Zemgus Girgensons, Nick Tarnasky and Rick Schofield are out with short- /medium-term injuries, and with Corey Tropp lost for the season on opening night, the Amerks would struggle to be playoff worthy in a normal AHL season.

The Amerks have been short healthy forwards most of November. They have used defensemen Drew Schiestel — a guy the Sabres didn't even want last spring — on left wing. They lacked so much confidence in their fourth line on Friday against Adirondack — Schiestel, Jonathan Parker and Max Legault — that they played only six shifts as a line.

Give Parker credit, though. He has been virtually a permanent practice player but he scored two goals on Saturday, when the Amerks fell behind 4-0 and then made it close after the Marlies set the cruise control at idle.

Now imagine if the NHL lockout ends. Hodgson goes up. So does Marcus Foligno. Yes, other teams will lose players. But this last stretch shows just how woefully short of depth the Amerks/Sabres are at forward.

And you can bet if the NHL does play this season, injuries will be plentiful up top. There will be an abbreviated training camp, meaning players will be at risk when the season starts. And then they'll be trying to jam 48 or so games into a compressed calendar. That means little recovery time for the body.

Imagine this Amerks roster without Hodgson and Foligno, and then two other forwards such as Kevin Porter and whoever going up on emergency recall after players get hurt in Buffalo.

But that's the future. Here's why this weekend was especially disturbing: The old parent team, the Florida Panthers, bolstered the San Antonio by signing veteran forward Jon Sim and veteran defenseman Mike Mottau to tryout contracts. These moves were made even though the Rampage already had six AHL-definition "veterans."

The Panthers know if the lockout ends, a player or two could go up from San Antonio. They also apparently know that if the lockout doesn't end, that their farm team isn't good enough to keep pace with Oklahoma City, Houston, Texas and other Western Conference teams. So the Panthers improved their development team.

And the Sabres? They wouldn't even call up one of their forwards under contract (such as Jacob Lagace) or find an Evan Rankin-type player from a lower league to give them enough forwards. They decided playing short, and having a defenseman on the wing, made more sense.

Every point matters? Every game is important?

Again, to steal a quote from National Lampoon's Vacation, this time from Clark's son, Russ Griswold: "Do you think mom will buy it?"

Not a chance. And Amerk fans shouldn't either.

Democrat and Chronicle LOADED: 12.10.2012

646113 Chicago Blackhawks

No new meetings on the horizon for NHL, NHLPA

TRACEY MYERS

The NHL and NHLPA have been in contact this weekend, but as of yet, there are no new meetings set for negotiations.

The league and players association haven't formally talked since Thursday, when talks certainly ended in unusual fashion. NHLPA executive Donald Fehr stated at the time the two sides were close to a deal, something he reiterated when he spoke to the Canadian Auto Workers in Toronto on Saturday. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly categorically denied the two sides were close on Thursday.

Sunday marked Day 85 of the lockout. Games are currently canceled through Dec. 14, although more cancellations could come soon. The 2013 Winter Classic and 2012-13 All-Star Game have also been canceled.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 12.10.2012

646114 Colorado Avalanche

Seth Jones, possible NHL first overall pick, learned game in Denver

By Adrian Dater

He is the African-American son of a former NBA player, and he might very well be the first player taken in the draft next year.

The NHL draft.

The place where Seth Jones first learned to skate and grew to love the game of hockey? Right here in Denver. This, in other words, is not your typical story.

Jones, 18, the son of former Nuggets forward and current Brooklyn Nets assistant coach Ronald "Popeye" Jones, is considered by many scouts the best hockey prospect from North America available in next year's draft. How did this all happen? Partially, from a tip given by Avalanche legend Joe Sakic to Popeye in 1999, when Seth was 5.

"Seth and his brothers (Justin and Caleb) and their friends all seemed to really be into hockey more than basketball. So, one day I ran into Joe, and I asked him what was the best way for him to get into hockey," said Popeye Jones, who often watches webcasts of his son's games from the West Coast after his Nets are done playing.

Sakic picks up the story: "So I told him he should get (Seth) into power skating, because I knew he was going to be big. He was going to have the size, so the better skater he was ..."

Seth, 18, is now well-known for his tremendous skating ability. At 6-foot-4 and 215 pounds, he is a top two-way defenseman on the Portland Winterhawks of the Western Hockey League and a premier player for the U.S. world junior team that will compete in the upcoming World Junior Championship from Dec. 26 to Jan. 5 in Ufa, Russia. He led the U.S. to a gold medal at the most recent World Under-18 Championship in the Czech Republic. Although he grew out of being an Avalanche fan, because it has been several years since he's lived in Colorado, Jones credits the great Avs teams of the past for getting him interested in hockey.

"When they won the (Stanley) Cup in 2001, that was real exciting and definitely got me more into it," he said. "I went to a ton of Avs games. Just getting to watch such

Popeye Jones, right, played for six NBA teams, including the Nuggets, and now is an assistant coach for the Brooklyn Nets. He sought Joe Sakic's advice when his sons wanted to play hockey. (Getty Images file)

great players like Joe Sakic and Peter Forsberg and Patrick Roy and all the others in person like I did was great and a huge influence on me."

Jones played with the Littleton Hawks and Colorado Thunderbirds as a youth but moved back to his birthplace, Dallas, at age 12. The University of Denver, like every other Division I NCAA school, tried to recruit Jones. His

older brother, Justin, briefly attended DU, starting with the 2010-11 season, but left the school without playing.

Seth Jones considered playing for North Dakota but eventually decided on playing major junior. He was drafted by the Everett (Wash.) Silvertips of the WHL, but was traded to Portland soon after.

"I owe a lot to the people in Colorado who helped me learn the game," Jones said. "Particularly, Coach (Kent) Murphy, with the Littleton Hawks."

The NHL has seen more blacks enter the league in recent years, but the majority were born in Canada. Seth is as "American as it gets," he said, but he doesn't think much about being a new racial face of the sport.

"I just think there are a lot of kids like me in the States who like the game of hockey, who caught the bug for it. I don't think it's a black or a white thing anymore. But if it helps get a few more into the game, great," said Jones, whose younger brother, Caleb, also was drafted by Portland.

The 2013 NHL draft is scheduled at the Prudential Center in Newark, N.J. His father is a native of Dresden, N.J., so Seth admits to being excited about that coming day.

"I'd be lying if I said I don't think about it some," he said. "There should be a lot of family and friends around for it, so it should be a fun day."

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Seth Jones

Seth Jones, 18, could be the first overall pick of the NHL draft next year. The son of former Nuggets forward Popeye Jones, he learned to play hockey as a youth growing up in Denver. Not only would Jones be the first African-American chosen first in an NHL draft, he would be the first black player from any nationality ever chosen No. 1 and only the seventh American.

A look at the other six:

2007: Patrick Kane, Chicago.

2006: Erik Johnson, St. Louis

2000: Rick DiPietro, N.Y. Islanders

1995: Bryan Berard, Ottawa

1988: Mike Modano, Minnesota

1983: Brian Lawton, Minnesota

Denver Post: LOADED: 12.10.2012

646115 Colorado Avalanche

NHL labor talks could resume soon

Staff Report

NEW YORK — The NHL and the locked-out players' association are talking again, and a return to the bargaining table could happen soon. After a few days to cool off following an epic collapse in negotiations, the league and the union have been in touch with each other in an attempt to restart conversations that could save the hockey season. "Trying to set up something for this week, but nothing finalized yet," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly wrote Sunday in an e-mail to The Associated Press. The lockout has resulted in the cancellation of 422 regular-season games along with the New Year's Day Winter Classic and the All-Star Game. The Associated Press

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646116 Columbus Blue Jackets

Lockout: Can NHL rebound strongly yet again?

By Aaron Portzline

Believe it or not, the NHL's labor spat still has about a month to go before it reaches a breaking point at which, in NHL commissioner Gary Bettman's words, a "season of integrity" is no longer possible.

In 1994-95, the NHL settled a lockout on Jan. 11 and opened a 48-game season only nine days later. Without announcing a "drop-dead" date last week, Bettman said: "I can't imagine wanting to play fewer (games) than that."

But if last week's flameout in collective-bargaining talks showed anything, it's how close the NHL and NHL Players' Association are to pushing yet another season to the brink. Only eight years after making history as the first major-league sport to cancel an entire season because of labor issues, the NHL is wandering down that same dark hallway again.

"Am I unhappy about the prospect?" Bettman said last week. "You bet I am, OK? It absolutely is something that torments me."

The NHL was remarkably fortunate coming out of the 2004-05 canceled season, benefiting from at least four major factors that allowed its revenue to soar from \$1.8 billion to \$3.3 billion during a seven-season span that coincided with a global recession.

Many forecast the demise of the league back then, but here's why it didn't happen:

Faster, cleaner hockey

The NHL had more clutching and grabbing than roller hockey in 2003-04. It was a league for pluggers and pugilists, the WWE on blades.

The league emerged from the lockout with a promise to enforce obstruction penalties and restore speed and skill to the game. The red line was removed to allow two-line passes to further fuel the pace.

It worked, and fans loved it. Scoring increased dramatically, smaller players were better able to compete, and games could no longer be "locked down" by big, burly players, making third-period comebacks the new norm.

Brendan Shanahan, the NHL's vice president of hockey and business development, is said to be reviewing all aspects of the game's rules enforcement.

Many believe the league has slowly allowed some interference to creep back in, and scoring has begun to dip. Some want the red line restored; others have proposed bigger nets.

But it's unlikely Shanahan will propose either. Most are relatively pleased with how NHL hockey is played these days.

Sidney Crosby

Love him or hate him, Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby is the NHL's most recognizable face and its only nationally marketable player in the U.S.

A month after the 2004-05 lockout ended, the Penguins won the NHL draft lottery and welcomed the NHL's next "Gretzky" into the league. Even non-hockey fans have heard of Crosby.

Is there another Crosby on the horizon? It's highly unlikely, but not impossible.

Nathan MacKinnon has drawn comparisons to Crosby — they're both electrifying forwards from Nova Scotia — and NHL scouts are thumbing their thesauruses for new ways to rave about MacKinnon's game. (He's draft-eligible in June if a new collective-bargaining agreement is reached.)

But most of them stop short of saying he'll be the next Crosby, the kind of player on which the NHL can build a worldwide marketing campaign.

Winter Classic

What started as a quaint homage to the game's roots exploded into a major marketing success for the league. Fans who barely watch hockey on other days of the year have come to love watching the outdoor Winter Classic on New Year's Day.

Further, when college football abandoned concentrating its top bowl games on Jan. 1 — they are now spread out in prime time during the first week of January — the NHL seized one of the great television-watching days.

Four Winter Classics are among the five most-watched NHL games in the U.S. since 1975, and the game itself was a driving force behind the NHL's TV deal with NBC Sports.

The league deserves credit for creating this cash cow, even if serendipity played a part. It's hard to imagine another such invention on the horizon.

Canadian dollar

In January 2004, the Canadian dollar rose above 78 cents against the U.S. dollar for the first time in 11 years. It didn't stop there. For five years now, the two dollars have been roughly equal, a boon to the NHL's seven Canadian-based franchises.

Canadian franchises draw revenue in Canadian dollars and pay players' salaries and other expenses in U.S. dollars. When the two dollars were so imbalanced, Canadian franchises faced a hurdle that was too big for two franchises — Winnipeg and Quebec City relocated to the U.S. in the 1990s.

Now, Canadian franchises are thriving, Winnipeg has its franchise back and Quebec City may be getting one soon.

Can the NHL expect to be so fortunate this time? Can it re-invent the game, welcome a transcendent superstar, create a cash-cow franchise and benefit from a healthy Canadian dollar?

Bettman was furious Thursday when talks fell apart after a week that had held so much optimism.

He bristled each time when asked to peg a "drop-dead" date.

"My magic date was to start the season on Oct. 10," Bettman said, referring to the scheduled opening night. "When we get to the point where we can't play a season with integrity — with a representative schedule (to decide playoff teams) — we'll be done."

And this time, unlike eight years ago, a lost season could be devastating.

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646117 Detroit Red Wings

Some players see hope for end to the NHL lockout

By George Sipple

WINDSOR -- Several players who participated in Saturday's "Rock Out the Lockout" charity hockey game expressed optimism that a collective bargaining agreement can be reached soon enough to play a shortened NHL season.

Shawn Horcoff, who played at Michigan State in 1996-2000, and Jamal Mayers, who played at Western Michigan in 1992-96, participated in the charity game after participating in the latest labor talks in New York last week. They said the sides need to get back to continuing the negotiations.

After union boss Don Fehr told reporters Thursday that the sides were close to working out a deal before the league broke off talks, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman disputed Fehr's assessment that a deal was near.

Bettman was angry and said the league's latest offer was off the table. He said the owners were expecting a yes or no answer from the players on the league's last offer, not further negotiations.

"It can't be understated how close we are," Mayers said. "For the NHL to think it was take it or leave it is unrealistic."

"We have to protect the middle class."

The league wants a five-year limit on player contracts (and seven years for a team to sign its own players). The players have offered an eight-year limit.

"We can't figure out why teams wouldn't want to sign their best players to longer than five or seven years," Horcoff said.

Mayers said agreeing to the five-year limit would devastate what the players in the middle earn. A couple of superstars on each team take up a huge portion of the salary cap, leaving the rest of the players to earn less.

Red Kettle helpers: The Wings will help raise money for the Salvation Army's Red Kettle campaign Tuesday at four locations in metro Detroit. Fans can get autographs with a suggested donation of \$10.

General manager Ken Holland and coach Mike Babcock will be at Hiller's Market in downtown Northville from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. Chris Chelios and Kris

Draper will be at Hockeytown Authentics in Troy 4:30-6:30. Kirk Maltby and Ken Kal will be at the Kroger at 31145 Harper in St. Clair Shores 5-7. Chris Osgood and Manny Legace will appear at the Kroger at 44525 Ann Arbor Rd. in Plymouth 5-7.

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Detroit Free Press LOADED: 12.10.2012

646118 Detroit Red Wings

Strategies from NHL players and owners could hurt, not help, talks

By Gregg Krupa

Donald Fehr discusses issues owners consider resolved.

Commissioner Gary Bettman and the NHL owners do not want to bargain with Donald Fehr.

In turn, Fehr, the executive director of the players' association, routinely rejects their proposals as a basis for negotiation.

Bettman and the owners spend the lockout trying to drive a wedge between the veteran labor negotiator and the players.

Fehr's calculated approach ties Bettman and the owners in knots.

For fans, what long ago seemed like a theater of the absurd has become a horror show.

Despite the operatic drama last week in the NHL talks, the negotiations are much like those during recent lockouts in the NFL, the NBA and the last lockout in the NHL eight years ago. The leagues make demands and lock out players, who scramble mightily to protect their previous gains.

In the NHL, the tactics on both sides appear to dictate games will not be played until Bettman and the owners deal with Fehr, or the players turn against him.

Bettman and the owners never have negotiated with anyone as skilled as Fehr, and the players never have had an executive director who is so accomplished.

"The conclusion I keep coming to is somehow the owners do not want to deal with Don," Mathieu Schneider, the former Red Wings defenseman, now a special assistant in the NHLPA, told The Hockey News Radio Show last week.

Bettman suggested that is not quite the case.

"We've been through four executive directors in the last eight years, and any collective bargaining is impacted by time, relationships," he said, after the talks imploded Thursday.

"It's not just the people involved or the concept of trust, it's about getting a working relationship, and we haven't had the benefit of a long-term working relationship in our sport."

Having derived big concessions from the players, Bettman and the owners last week made the negotiations about Fehr instead of the issues that remain.

Owners want Fehr out

Last week began with the players acceding to Bettman's suggestion they meet with some owners directly, without him and Fehr. Believing a deal was near Wednesday, players said they brought Fehr back in to help them close it.

"Once we made it clear we had to get our union leadership, that we've hired for this, in the room, there was just a very big change," said Ron Hainsey, of the Jets. "It was alarming.

"And I was told that if we were going to do that, it was possibly a deal breaker. It was confusing because we kind of agreed that we were moving toward each other, and we weren't that far apart."

Bettman made clear, by omission, that the problem was Fehr.

Things were progressing Tuesday, he said. But as Wednesday wore on, something changed.

"That sense of optimism was something that almost inexplicably disappeared," Bettman said. "We're at a loss to explain what happened."

Bettman and everyone who watched the events of the previous two days knew exactly what he was inferring. The players put Fehr back in the room, and Bettman and the owners want him out.

The owners' strategy worked in the last lockout. The players abandoned executive director Bob Goodenow and agreed to a salary cap.

The tactic is directly from the playbook of one of the most accomplished law firms representing management in labor negotiations, Proskauer Rose, where Bettman once worked. A partner at the Manhattan firm, L. Robert Batterman, is the outside counsel for the NHL now, just as he was in the 2004-05 lockout.

The firm also has represented the NFL. Some observers refer to it as the "lockout specialists."

On Thursday, with Fehr back at the table, Bettman and all four NHL owners attending the negotiations either did not show up for a renewed bargaining session, or they walked out while it was under way.

Limiting the damage

Meanwhile, Fehr deployed tactics of his own.

The sessions Tuesday reportedly moved both sides considerably closer on the so-called "make whole" provisions of a new agreement, which will determine how the players get their money from contracts that already are negotiated but which will require reductions because of concessions gained by the owners.

By Wednesday, Bettman and the owners said they expected the players to deliver a few yes or no answers, and an agreement might be at hand.

But instead, Fehr delved into several issues the NHLPA believes must still be resolved.

According to Bettman, Fehr switched the topic to pensions. He also requested federal mediators rejoin the talks to close that gap and others that remained.

After the brief, doomed session Thursday, Fehr went public with a bravura performance at a news conference.

Knowing that the negotiations had broken off without an agreement, Fehr launched into a list of issues on which, he said, "I think we are close."

Some listening to him thought an agreement was about ready to sign. Indeed, the next day, some criticized Fehr for leading any listening fans well down that path, knowing it was not true.

But Fehr had his own intentions. He was determined, as he has been from the start, to address the issues the players want addressed rather than proposals by Bettman and the owners, which have led to huge concessions.

Each of the "we are close" items he listed remain priorities for the players. They also are items Bettman and the owners would prefer not to discuss any longer.

As was the case in 2004-05, and in recent negotiations in the NFL and NBA, the owners are in nearly complete command.

The players yield significant ground on almost every major issue, and Bettman and the owners are unrelenting, from their opening demand that the players give up 24 percent of their total salaries, to the quick imposition of a lockout, to continuing attempts to decapitate the players association by cutting Fehr out and alienating him from the players, to the walkout and umbrage expressed Thursday because Fehr started talking about issues Bettman and the owners hope to avoid discussing.

So far, Bettman and the owners have achieved a 50-50 split of revenue, down from 57-43, before the negotiating began. That is a \$1.5 billion to \$1.8 billion concession over the course of an eight-year agreement.

The players would receive some \$300 million due them under their current contracts on a deferred basis.

The players also are poised to yield to tougher restrictions on lengths of contracts and eligibility for free agency.

It is as if the owners are spending all of their time on the players' end of the ice, scoring at will.

So Fehr rags the puck. He starts forward, feints back, fakes a pass, delivers one and gets the puck back, all in the hope of yielding as few power-play goals as possible.

Seeking even playing field

For decades, the players have coveted a more even playing field, first forming the union, then getting rid of an executive director who defrauded them, abandoning Goodenow, and hiring and firing three others when they proved ineffective.

Then, they hired Fehr.

So far, especially given the opening offer from Bettman and the owners and their imposition of the lockout, Fehr is all desperation.

He is likely to remain that way.

When the negotiations are over, the players will have gained nothing. Fehr knows his job is limiting the losses.

But they are mounting.

Bettman trembled with emotions when he talked to the media after the breakdown Thursday. Longtime observers agreed he never had looked so discombobulated, publicly.

But was it anger, or confusion, about whether Fehr had outflanked him without conceding much, this time?

Or was it the realization he might have met his match?

Something Bettman said acknowledged Fehr's tactics.

"Earlier in the negotiations, we were told that the make whole was the key element," he said. "Fix the make whole, we'll have a deal. We addressed the make whole and we didn't have a deal.

"Then it was player contracting, and we made some dramatic moves on player contracting, and that turned out not to be the key to the negotiating. And now it was the pension."

Fehr wants to address all of those issues, while Bettman and the owners want to consider them resolved.

Some owners said it is not clear the players want a deal. Bettman's series of assertions left open the possibility that Fehr is getting to the players issues in the only way he can.

At some point, though perhaps not for at least a week or two, the role playing on both sides will yield to the necessity of reaching an agreement. Some observers say despite the real or staged implosion Thursday, there will be a season, albeit one cut nearly in half., while both sides spent months choosing tactics.

But there is always a chance all of the strategizing simply will get away from them, delivering unintended consequences and the second season lost to an owners lockout in the history of the four major professional sports leagues, both in the NHL.

Detroit News LOADED: 12.10.2012

646119 Detroit Red Wings

Fans at charity game not angry at NHL players

By Ted Kulfan

Windsor, Ontario — Practices are one thing. But even a charity game such as the one played Saturday in Windsor showed locked out NHL players will need every precious second of whatever training camp there is if the lockout ever ends.

The pace of the "Rock Out the Lockout" at the WFCU Centre was quicker than what the 37 NHL players have been used to, of late, and it had nearly everyone a little winded.

"It definitely feels like you haven't played a game in a while," said Red Wings defenseman Jonathan Ericsson, who did play briefly in Sweden before returning to North America to wait out the lockout. "It (conditioning) turns to zero pretty quickly."

The lockout reaches its 86th day today with no negotiations planned this week. Bill Daly, the NHL deputy commissioner, and NHL Players Association special counsel Stephen Fehr talked by phone over the weekend.

If the two sides can come to an agreement soon, as players are optimistic they can, a 48-to-56 game regular season with a brief training camp can take place.

For the players who haven't left for Europe to play in pro leagues, camp will be beneficial.

"We might have some catching up to do once the season re-starts," Wings defenseman Niklas Kronwall said.

If the season ever does begin, a segment of fans could be ready to forgive and forget.

Saturday's game in Windsor drew approximately 4,500 fans, raising well over \$10,000 for SPARKLES, a charity for children with cancer.

Long lines for pre-game autographs, along with loud ovations during player introductions and for highlight-reel plays, showed fans — at least the ones that showed up — aren't bitter about not getting a regular dose of NHL hockey.

"We're very fortunate, we have some pretty outstanding fans," forward Todd Bertuzzi said. "It's about a 10-minute jump over the river (from Detroit to Windsor). We're fortunate they're here in support. It's like everyone else, they want to see hockey."

Detroit News LOADED: 12.10.2012

646120 Florida Panthers

David J. Neal: If NHL, players aren't careful, fans could learn to cope without hockey

By David J. Neal

The NHL and NHL Players Association aren't talking right now. They were earlier this week and seemed to be moving toward a coming together. Now, each sits while the league that's made both sides plenty of money shrinks in stature and visibility.

They're like silent spouses in opposite wings of a large house. Maybe this is what they meant when they declared after the last lockout they were "partners."

See, League Screwup called another lockout less than a decade after negotiating a collective bargaining agreement that management said solved its biggest business concerns. Soon, the league will cancel more games, maybe the entire season for the second time in what would be nine seasons.

The same Donald Fehr that helped bring you the cancelled 1994 World Series (and, to be fair, some pretty nice benefits for baseball players after that) heads the NHLPA these days. He's fully prepared to stare the nuclear option in the face with the same unblinking sour puss he shows to TV cameras.

Here's what I can tell you: The NHL manages to increase revenue, sometimes by multiples. It manages to increase overall visibility in a United States that also sees a steady increase in kids playing all types of hockey. The players manage to increase salaries by similar jumps.

They can't manage how to just keep the party going.

Also, the Private Snafu of sports leagues can't just have a lockout after a run-of-the-mill season.

1994: The New York Rangers break a 54-year Stanley Cup drought with dramatic seven-game series wins over New Jersey (arguably the greatest NHL playoff series ever) and Vancouver. The NHL is deemed "hot," especially in contrast with dull NBA playoffs, the first lacking Magic, Larry

and Michael in a generation. The Cup and Rangers stars appear all over mainstream media during the summer. The NHL follows with ... lockout!

2004: Tampa Bay, the most inept sports franchise at the end of the last millennium and the start of this one, finishes its two-year turnaround by beating Calgary in a thrilling Stanley Cup Final. Despite the change in perception from 1994, two non-marquee teams and a historically low-rated start, the Cup Final is seen by far more people than 1994's. In fact, by attendance and TV ratings, the NHL's still rolling even with a lockout hanging over their head.

The NHL follows with ... lockout! Lost season!

(A Florida team wins a championship while rebuilding a fan base, then can't really celebrate it. We know how well that works for said franchise, don't we?)

2012: Los Angeles, a franchise in the multimedia capital of the world, scrapes into the playoffs, then steamrolls its way to the first Cup in the franchise's 45-season history.

The NHL follows with ... oh, you know what.

There's a different sense among puckheads this time. Perhaps it's about anticipation.

You could see the 2004 lockout coming at least two years away. The owners figured out how to skirt their own safeguards and wreck the business that the 1995 CBA should've saved, the owners and players finish the longest pregame to a labor stoppage in sports history.

Anybody with a sense of hockey history and the cementheads on each side knew they could blow up the 2004-05 season. In February 2003, I planned my departure from the Panthers/NHL beat to coincide with that lockout.

So, though crestfallen when the NHL did to the 2004-05 season what rioters did to downtown Vancouver after the 2011 Stanley Cup Final, hockeyphiles could just shake their heads at a sport managing to meet dirt expectations. OK, fine. We'll all take a break for a year while you get your stuff together. Been spending a little too much on tickets and hockey cards anyway.

This time, though, people thought, "They can't be stupid enough to do it again, can they?" Surely, lessons had been learned.

Nope. The owners came out asking for fat salary rollbacks. The players, apparently forgetting they made up and lapped the 2004 salary rollbacks, got indignant.

This would be my 40th year as a hockey fan. I learned the game's positions on an Oakland Seals-Pittsburgh Penguins table hockey game. I grew up following both the NHL and World Hockey Association. I fell asleep calling imaginary games I saw in my head. Forechecking schemes filled the margins of some school notebooks. The 11 seasons I covered the NHL day-to-day, being in the house for more than 100 games a year counting preseason, playoff and Cup Final games, ranks as the most enjoyable extended period of my career and probably always will.

This is what should worry the NHL and NHLPA: This time around, there are more people like me who've stopped caring if they play this year. And might not care if they'll play in succeeding years.

It's a great game, guys. You're not the only ones who play it. And if you won't play it, I'll watch someone else who will.

Or, maybe I'll indulge in one of the million other things that can occupy my time, money and give-a-damn.

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646121 Montreal Canadiens

Canada has a 'Plan B' in case the NHL lockout is resolved

Eric Duhatschek

One could convincingly argue that, for the next little while, no one will be more affected by the ups and downs of the NHL lockout than Scott Salmond, Hockey Canada's senior director of operations.

Salmond oversees Canada's entry in the 2013 world junior championship this month in Ufa, Russia, and as players arrive for tryout camp Monday, the negotiations could have an impact on the type of team that Canada will put on the ice for the Boxing Day opener against Germany.

If the labour impasse drags on, Canada will have one of its deepest teams in recent memory, especially up front, where Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Mark Scheifele and Jonathan Huberdeau will be available.

If there is a resolution and NHL training camps open, then Hockey Canada will be obliged to switch to a Plan B. It will still be the usual collection of heart-and-soul teenagers that charms the country every Christmas with their efforts and commitment, but it won't have nearly the same star power.

"I've spoken personally to each NHL general manager with a player on the recall list," Salmond said. "We haven't at any time asked for a commitment. We've agreed that we'll continue to talk as things may or may not change with the negotiations and that's true all the way through. We don't have to have our roster set until Dec. 25. We're hopeful that we're going to leave Canada on Dec. 15 with 23 players who are going to stay with our team, but at this point, we haven't asked for that commitment."

Canada did get some good news over the weekend when Nugent-Hopkins announced that he would be joining the world-junior team for its training camp after spending a week in Edmonton getting his left shoulder evaluated. Nugent-Hopkins missed 20 games in his rookie NHL season, 2011-12, recovering from shoulder surgery, an injury that effectively cost him the Calder Trophy as the NHL's rookie of the year.

He had been playing this season for the Oilers' American Hockey League affiliate, the Oklahoma City Barons, and wanted to get a clean bill of health before committing to the junior squad.

Nugent-Hopkins tried out for Canada's world junior team two years ago and didn't make the cut as a 17-year-old, a not uncommon turn of events. Since then, he's played for Canada at a senior world championship – last spring – and has padded his résumé to the point where he will now slide in as the team's No. 1 centre, likely alongside Scheifele and Huberdeau, two other high draft choices who would almost certainly be on their way to NHL training camps if the lockout were to end.

Altogether, there are six returnees from Canada's 2012 world junior team, which finished with a bronze medal at the event held in Alberta.

There will be new faces in goal, where Canada has had an uneven time of it since Carey Price's star turn in 2007. For the 2013 team, Canada has invited a quartet of 19-year-olds, or players born in 1993, three from the Ontario Hockey League (Owen Sound's Jordan Binnington, Saginaw's Jake Paterson and Belleville's Malcolm Subban), along with one from the Western Hockey League (Edmonton's Laurent Brossoit).

Binnington and Brossoit were drafted by the St. Louis Blues and Calgary Flames, respectively, in 2011, while Paterson and Subban were 2012 draft choices by the Detroit Red Wings and Boston Bruins, respectively. Subban is the younger brother of Montreal Canadiens defenceman P.K. Subban and the only first-rounder of the bunch.

For decades, dating back to Roberto Luongo and Marc-André Fleury, goaltenders' performances – good and bad – have defined these tournaments. Two years ago, with Canada on the verge of a gold medal, Mark Visentin faltered in the third period of the gold-medal game against Russia and Canada finished with the silver. Last year, Scott Wedgewood took the job away from Visentin, but in the semi-final game against Russia, gave up four goals on 14 shots and was pulled.

Teams win and lose for many different reasons, but goaltenders are usually required to answer for those defeats. It is just part of the package of being the last line of defence.

"The pressure's always huge for a goaltender on this stage," said Kevin Prendergast, Canada's chief scout. When asked why they chose the players they did, he noted slyly: "The ability to stop the puck was the first thing we looked at."

In a more serious vein, Prendergast said: "All four of them have been great. Malcolm is a very athletic goaltender. Jordan Binnington has been on fire now for the last six weeks. Fundamentally, he's very, very sound. Laurent Brossoit took his team [Edmonton] to the Memorial Cup last year. He's a big strong kid. Certainly, over the last month, he's played very, very well. And Jake Paterson, though maybe playing on a bit of a weak team this year, has been the best player on their hockey club. So we felt all four of them have warranted the opportunity and all four of them will give us a good chance.

"It's going to make the competition level very good for us."

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646122 Montreal Canadiens

NHL owners are all out of tricks

Jeff Blair

The seed has been sown, the manure and water to be provided by the acolytes in the media that he and Bill Daly have BlackBerried into duty. Broadcast jobs are on offer, front-office positions at the ready.

It is too early to gauge the success of this latest attempt by commissioner Gary Bettman and his owners to cleave National Hockey League players from the leadership of the NHLPA. It didn't work a few pay cheques ago when ownership ran out the notion that Donald Fehr was withholding information from his constituents, but the holiday shopping season is upon us and now we will see the resolve of the NHL players.

They can turtle as they've done in the past and continue down the gelded path to becoming an ineffectual arm of the league, just like the NB Players Association and NFL Players Association. Or they can read between all that uncomfortable anger Bettman showed on Thursday in New York when he was outmanoeuvred by Fehr and the NHLPA, and realize a deal is there to be made soon, if they hold together.

Bettman gave them the path to follow: a 48-game schedule is the least he can do to give some type of integrity to a shortened season: in other words, the sides can get a season in if they get something done by mid-January. Bettman even acknowledged that this was "very tough bargaining," which an optimist would take as a realization that some place in the corner of his heart he's developed a grudging respect for his opponent.

Do not be misled by the two-month-old press releases run out by the so-called doves among the owners who met with that group of players; this is all playing out according to plan. Give the players a strong dose of Jeremy Jacobs, then bring in the kinder, gentler owners. Get the players to waste time that should have been spent decertifying by luring them into a meeting without their union chief. It might have worked, were it not for the idiot who suggested to players representative Ron Hainsey that they might want to come back without Fehr and get the deal done.

Really: who'd want their bad, old lawyers with them when they're negotiating a contract with a bunch of like-minded good guys – Burkie and Tannie and Vinny and Chipper. Someone did inform the owners that – much to their chagrin, it's to be sure – Alan Eagleson doesn't run the union any more, right?

So that's where we are: ownership still testing the players' resolve, making behind-the-scenes approaches to orchestrate a rebellion against Fehr while doing things they swore they'd never do and make changes to their last-ever, final, not-to-be-tinkered-with, best offer; players well aware that they can keep the owners chestnuts roasting on an open fire for three more weeks or so before the doomsday clock really starts ticking.

This was all so predictable when Fehr was brought in to clean up the players association: hockey's good-guy culture running smack into the ultimate outsider, someone whose legacy can't be damaged by the brief chapter in his book that will be his tenure as NHLPA chief, because nobody who counts in the U.S. much cares. And that's what really eats away at the owners and Bettman: Fehr has no skin in this game at all, beyond his legal obligations. When he's done, he'll move to a place where people will wonder where he's been the past couple of years.

In the meantime, the owners are down to the bottom of the bag of stupid owner tricks, and while hockey players were destined to give back more than they'll ever gain in collective bargaining the second they opened the door to a salary cap, they are close to the point at which they've minimized their losses as much as possible. Let's see if they have the stones to hang in against the wishes of the hockey world; let's see if they can stop being "good guys" and act all grown up.

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 12.10.2012

646123 Montreal Canadiens

Dave Stubbs: Price goes back to junior roots

By Dave Stubbs, The Gazette December 10, 2012

MONTREAL — Canadiens goaltender Carey Price replied to my text message on Nov. 14, in answer to a query about his whereabouts:

"I'm in B.C., not coming back."

What Price neglected to mention, obviously, is that he indeed plans to return to Montreal if and when the National Hockey League lockout comes to an end.

For going on a month, the 25-year-old has been either at his off-season home in Kelowna, B.C., or in Washington state's metropolitan Tri-Cities area, about a six-hour drive south.

It was with the Western Hockey League's Tri-City Americans that Price played four years of major-junior hockey, graduating in 2007 to a Calder Cup- and MVP-winning playoff run with the American league's Hamilton Bulldogs and, that autumn, stepping up to their parent Canadiens.

It was in the Pasco, Wash., home of Dennis and Jill Williams, his four-season billet family, that Price signed his first professional contract with the Canadiens organization on April 9, 2007, a three-year NHL entry-level deal that paid him \$2,805,000.

And it is here with the Americans that Price, who this past July 2 signed a six-year, \$39-million Habs contract, is practising once again, skating with a team whose jersey he wore from age 16 to 19.

"These guys are pretty fun to skate with, and it's giving me a bit more motivation," Price said Saturday from Washington, where he's spending some quality time with his fiancée, Angela, and her family.

"It's not like I was here such a long time ago, either. I still know the general manager (Bob Torny) very well, and the head coach (Jim Hiller) was my assistant coach my rookie year here."

Price had stuck it out in Montreal for the first eight weeks of the lockout, practising with his Canadiens teammates and the handful of NHLers who were in town scrimmaging mostly three-on-three and playing a few charity fundraisers.

But he touched base with the Americans in early November and decided to head west, an interesting situation awaiting him courtesy of Torny and Hiller.

Torny kept Price's arrival under wraps to surprise his players.

Which it did, and then some.

"It's special for our team, for him to come and skate with us," the GM told Annie Fowler of the Tri-City Herald on Nov. 19, the day Price stunned the junior roster by suiting up for his first practice at their Toyota Centre rink.

"It's amazing how time flies. When Carey walked in here today, it was like he never left. With it being the 25th anniversary of the team, it means a lot to me that he would do this. He is proud that he was a Tri-City American."

What was supposed to be a one-week stint has grown into something almost full-time for Price, who thus far has enjoyed working more than a half-dozen goalie-specific sessions with Americans netminding coach Lyle Mast.

"I'm kind of (in) full-out practice mode now," he said. "It's nice to have a little bit of structure to practice."

"And these guys all really seem to enjoy scoring on me," he added with a laugh. "They try a lot harder."

"On game days, I back off and let them do their own thing. But when they have a couple days between games, I'm out there with them in the morning. Some of these guys skate twice a day, again in the afternoon when they're done with school."

Price remembers well the buzz that he felt as a member of this club during the 2004-05 NHL lockout, when then-Washington Capitals goalie Olie Kolzig came west to skate with his own junior alma mater.

In 2005, with fellow NHL veteran and former Tri-City centre Stu Barnes, Kolzig would purchase the Americans.

"That was a lot of fun for me," Price recalled of Kolzig's lockout appearance, which forged a strong mentorship and enduring friendship. "So maybe my being here is a bit of fun for these guys now. It feels like I just left, to be honest. It's been a pretty cool experience."

Price is working hard off the ice, too, this kind of dryland and weight-room work a little foreign to him in December.

"It's kinda getting tough at the stage we're at," he admitted. "Normally at this time of year, I probably wouldn't be training this hard. I'd be practising and playing, so this is a different feeling."

A bonus is the time he's getting to spend with Angela's family.

It was here, in junior, that Price met his bride-to-be, and it is here that he is now getting to spend some time with his future in-laws while Angela plans the couple's 2013 wedding.

"It's been actually really nice for Ang to spend so much time with her family because Montreal is a long way away from her home, and then we're in Kelowna," Price said. "She's not around her family a whole lot, so she's really enjoyed her time this fall."

Price joked to me recently that as far as the wedding went, his most important role would be to arrive at the church on time with his hair combed. But out west, he's been plugged in to the planning of the nuptials.

"Ang kind of runs everything by me, but at the end of the day, this is something that she's probably been planning since she was 3 years old, right?" he said, laughing again. "I think she's already got her mind made up on things."

"We have similar tastes, which is why I'm marrying her. Everything she's thought of so far is going to make the day nice."

This time out west, of course, is made possible by the NHL lockout, which now is lumbering through its 13th week. From a continent away, Price followed last week's surreal bargaining sessions in New York, hopes of resolution soaring to thin-air heights on Tuesday before Félix Baumgartnering 48 hours later.

"The emotional roller-coaster of having so much optimism to having no hope is kinda getting old," he said. "I guess the only way I can put it is, it's been pretty disappointing."

"I didn't watch it live, but I couldn't really believe what I was reading in the newspaper. It was a weird situation."

He considers the prospects of a truncated 2012-13 NHL season and says, "There's got to be hockey. We have to play. Why wouldn't we? Hockey was growing so much. If we don't play this year, it's going to hurt everybody."

Like Canadiens defenceman and good friend Josh Gorges, Price said he won't consider serious hockey in Europe unless the plug is pulled for good.

"I want to maintain a little bit of hope and optimism that we're going to play," he said with a chuckle. "I'm just kinda hanging on 'til the bitter end here."

So until this season is salvaged or euthanized, Price will face the shots of junior players, every puck that gets past him one for an imaginary plaque of a young Tri-City American.

And for the first time since his junior days, it seems he'll be home for the holidays, he and Angela tentatively spending Christmas Eve with her family before they drive up to Kamloops, B.C., two hours north of Kelowna, to spend Christmas Day with the goalie's parents and sister.

As the NHL remains just a rumour, Price is feeling very much at home in familiar surroundings, with the team he wore like a favourite sweater for four memorable seasons.

"I'm pretty happy where I'm at," he said. "I'm having great practices here and Ang is enjoying herself being at home. So really, this is a pretty good spot for me right now."

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646124 Montreal Canadiens

Pat Hickey: CCM looking to the future

By Pat Hickey, The Gazette December 9, 2012

MONTREAL — There's more to hockey than the National Hockey League.

With the NHL lockout edging closer to a third month, the folks at CCM Hockey are driving that message home with a new advertising campaign with the theme Start Your Legend.

While CCM products are endorsed by some of the brightest young stars in the game, including Gabriel Landeskog, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and John Tavares, the latest ad campaign is centred around a group of youngsters from the Montreal area.

"The idea grew out of our first series of CCM Skills Camps," said Glen Thornborough, CCM's vice-president of global marketing. "We had eight camps across North America last summer and we have plans to double the program next year and we're also looking at cities in Europe."

With the help of minor hockey organizations, CCM identified 1,100 promising 10-year-olds to participate in the camps.

"It was free of charge to the youngsters and each of them received a pair of skates," Thornborough said. "The program was divided into three parts. There was off-ice and on-ice training as well as information on nutrition, the importance of proper sleep time and other health issues. They also had an opportunity to meet and talk with NHL players."

For CCM, it's a chance to sell the youngsters on their products and the camps also served as a testing lab for its new Crazy Light foam protective gear and the new RBZ stick.

When it was decided to build a print and video advertising campaign around the youngsters, CCM unleashed a casting director on some of the 125 youngsters who attended the Montreal camp. The youngsters are seen playing street hockey and shooting pucks in a garage, with each youngster predicting: "I am the future."

"Choosing some of these players to be part of our campaign was not difficult after seeing how dedicated they all were and how much enthusiasm they had for the game," Thornborough said.

The cancellation of the Winter Classic game scheduled for the University of Michigan provided CCM with an unexpected opportunity to expand on its commitment to youth hockey. A squirt team in New York decided to hold its own outdoor winter classic on Dec. 23 with the kids dipping into their piggy banks to rent the ice at the Lasker Rink in Central Park.

When Thornborough caught wind of the grassroots initiative, he arranged for CCM to pay for the ice. The rink management subsequently offered to donate the ice, but CCM decided to stay involved in what has become a fundraising effort for victims of hurricane Sandy.

"The kids decided that they wanted to help and we've agreed to match any funds they raise," Thornborough said.

Like most hockey fans, Thornborough is hoping for a resolution to the current lockout. And, as a company that deals with both the league and its players, CCM is quietly waiting on the sidelines.

"The lockout has hurt our sales of licensed products, but our major business is hockey equipment and our sales have been good," Thornborough said.

And that's another sign that hockey is more than the NHL.

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646125 Montreal Canadiens

Canadiens forward Blake Geoffrion has surgery on injured head

Leaves ice under own power before rushing to hospital

By QMI Agency

Canadiens centre Blake Geoffrion had surgery Friday after suffering a head injury during an American Hockey League game between the Hamilton Bulldogs and Syracuse Crunch in Montreal.

Geoffrion left the game in the first period after taking a hard check from Syracuse's J.P. Cote. After the check, Cote's skate appeared to make

contact with Geoffrion's head. Geoffrion was left bleeding, but skated off the Bell Centre ice under his own power before being rushed to hospital.

Geoffrion underwent surgery to treat a depressed skull fracture. His condition is stable and he remains at the intensive care unit, the Canadiens announced. Geoffrion's parents joined him at the hospital.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with him and his family," Bulldogs head coach Sylvain Lefebvre said Friday.

Geoffrion is the grandson of legendary Habs winger Bernie "Boom Boom" Geoffrion. Drafted in the second round of the 2006 National Hockey League draft by the Nashville Predators, the 24-year-old was traded to the Canadiens on Feb. 17 as part of a deal that sent Hal Gill to the Music City. In 55 games with the Preds and Habs, Blake has five goals and eight assists for 13 points.

- with files from Jean-Francois Cheaumont

Montreal Sun LOADED: 12.10.2012

646126 Nashville Predators

Predators prospect Mattias Ekholm proves he can play

Defenseman, now fully committed, ditches safety net

Written by

Josh Cooper

The words still sting for Predators prospect Mattias Ekholm.

Even when a questioner tiptoes around the time coach Barry Trotz called him "horrible" at the start of last season, Ekholm mentions it on his own.

"What Barry said, everybody saw it," Ekholm said recently. "It's tough for your friends to see that, but right now I feel like I'm 100 percent stronger and can deal with that adversity."

Ekholm, a 22-year-old Swedish defenseman playing for the Milwaukee Admirals this year, claims he moved past that moment. And while his defensive game still needs some work, his offensive game is flourishing in the American Hockey League.

"There's no question he can play in this game," Admirals coach Dean Evason said.

Trotz's comments came after a 5-1 Nashville loss at Vancouver. Ekholm, a 2009 fourth-round draft pick, played 13:20 and was a minus-1.

It was just his second professional game in North America, and his timidity showed. But he still had the ability in his contract to return to Sweden to play, which may have clouded his judgment.

After he returned home, Ekholm won the Borje Salming Award as the Swedish Elite League's top defenseman.

"It kind of puts one foot in and one foot out. I don't think he really had the commitment last year that was going to make him successful, because he had a safety net," Predators assistant general manager Paul Fenton said. "This year we had nothing like that."

With a full commitment to playing in North America this season, Ekholm has been able to devote the necessary time to the issues in his play. Through 20 games with Milwaukee he leads the team's defensemen in scoring with 11 points. He is a plus-3.

While his offensive skills are strong, defensively Ekholm still sometimes takes too much of a cerebral approach.

"His biggest issues do not surround the offensive zone. His instincts moving the puck are tremendous," Evason said. "His challenges are in the defensive zone. He mentioned to us he thinks in the defensive zone whereas he reacts in the offensive zone."

Still, Ekholm said he believes he has improved in that area. Whether it's positioning in his own end or how to defend different types of plays, it's all becoming slightly more natural to him.

And through the incremental steps, both he and the Predators could see a call-up to the NHL at some point this season, if the NHL's labor impasse ends.

"That's what I have to do to play in the NHL is to have a solid defensive game," Ekholm said. "That's what I work on every day. I feel better since I came to camp but I still have things to work on."

Reach Josh Cooper at 615-726-8917

Tennessean LOADED: 12.10.2012

646127 Nashville Predators

NHL players skate to remain busy

Written by

Larry Lage

Associated Press

WINDSOR, ONTARIO — Thanks to a charity game, three NHL players — Kevin Westgarth, Shawn Horcoff and Jamal Mayers — got a chance to get more comfortable on the ice than they were earlier in the week.

They were playing hockey in a Canadian rink Saturday night, two days after being part of the union negotiating team in a New York hotel where labor talks with the league fell apart.

"I'm happy to be in a situation to do it, but I'd rather be on the ice," said Westgarth, a Los Angeles Kings forward. "That's where I want to be."

Westgarth was one of 36 locked-out players in an event at the WFCU Centre — less than 10 miles from Joe Louis Arena, home of the Detroit Red Wings — that raised money for charity and gave the idle pros an opportunity to skate.

The game was sloppy and choppy early, understandably so because the lockout has lasted nearly three months, before some sharp passes and one-timers put their talent on display for about 4,500 fans.

"We all want to be playing real games," said Detroit Red Wings forward Dan Cleary, one of the players who organized the event.

"If we're not playing, we might as well do something good with our time, try to give back to the fans, to charities."

With NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman insisting the two sides are still very far apart, there's a good chance more games will be canceled soon.

The lockout has already wiped out all games through Dec. 14 along with the Winter Classic on New Year's Day at Michigan Stadium and the All-Star game on Jan. 27 in Ohio.

Bettman has said the league won't consider a season that would last fewer than 48 games — the same length it had after the 1994-95 lockout — and that seems to leave about a month to get a deal done.

The NHL and the players' association are talking again, and a return to the bargaining table could happen soon.

After a few days to cool off following an epic collapse in negotiations, the league and the union have been in touch with each other in an attempt to restart conversations that could save the hockey season.

"Trying to set up something for this week, but nothing finalized yet," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly wrote Sunday in an email to The Associated Press.

The two sides are apart on at least two key issues.

The NHL wants to limit player contracts to five years, seven if the player re-signs with a team, without a huge difference in what a player makes from year to year.

The union countered with an offer to make the maximum length of a deal for any player eight years.

Tennessean LOADED: 12.10.2012

646128 New Jersey Devils

## An Enforcer on the Ice and at the Negotiating Table

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

Published: December 9, 2012

Kevin Westgarth is well suited to be on the negotiating team for the N.H.L. Players' Association. He is a 6-foot-4 enforcer for the Los Angeles Kings, little used but with his name on the Stanley Cup. He also has a psychology degree from Princeton. And he has been present for almost every bargaining session since before the N.H.L. lockout began Sept. 16.

"I guess I have these things brimming at the top of my brain," Westgarth said Saturday during a phone interview in which he shared detailed explanations of pension benefits and contract term limits. "My wife is fed up with me talking about this."

Westgarth and several other players on the negotiating team spent the weekend filling in their fellow union members on what happened at last week's talks in New York, which ended with Commissioner Gary Bettman angrily rejecting the union's offer and pulling the league's offers off the table.

"We have gone a lot further than a great percentage of the membership has wanted us to go," Westgarth said. "I don't know how you look at our offer and say that we've been unreasonable."

Bill Daly, the league's deputy commissioner, and Steve Fehr, the union's special counsel, spoke over the weekend, but no new talks were scheduled. However, if and when they resume, Westgarth said he would be there.

"I feel like I want to protect my teammates," Westgarth said of the similarities between his role in the union and on the ice.

He added, "It's just the hockey player ethos," and the result of several philosophy courses.

Westgarth grew up in Amherstburg, Ontario, near Windsor, the son of veterinarians. He played two years of Junior B hockey, and had his share of fights, before heading to Princeton.

"It's always been a balance throughout my life," Westgarth said. "My parents said you can play hockey if you do well at school. I was lucky — it came relatively easy."

At Princeton, he took to heart the advice of Tigers Coach Guy Gadowsky.

Westgarth said Gadowsky told him: "You shouldn't say, I can't be good at hockey because I'm smarter or I have harder schoolwork. Because you're at Princeton, you should understand that you want to excel at every single thing that you do. I've never forgotten that."

Westgarth, 28, followed the footsteps of a fellow Princeton graduate and enforcer type, George Parros, 32, through the American Hockey League and to the N.H.L.

Westgarth joked that he felt as if he had pulled a page from the film "The Talented Mr. Ripley," because "my career has kind of gone side by side with George's."

On Saturday night, Westgarth scored four goals in a benefit game in Windsor that included 35 other locked-out N.H.L. players. Then it was back home to North Carolina and his wife, Meagan, the daughter of the former Pittsburgh Steelers coach Bill Cowher, to await the next round of talks in what he called "this pretty miserable business."

Westgarth made \$525,000 last season, far less than the \$12 million earned by Brad Richards and the \$9 million made by Sidney Crosby, who stood alongside him Thursday when Donald Fehr announced that the N.H.L. had rejected the union's latest offer.

But in these negotiations, the contributions of Westgarth and a group of other committed players have been invaluable to the union.

"There are a half-dozen or more players who knew exactly where we were and could detail every aspect of where we were at," Westgarth said, referring to last week's talks. The league brought in four owners to join Jeremy Jacobs of Boston and Murray Edwards of Calgary in the negotiations.

"It became obvious that the guys they brought in had nowhere near a complete understanding of what the proposals were and where we were in the negotiations," Westgarth said. "I thought it was great that Ron Burkle, Larry Tanenbaum, Mark Chipman and Jeff Vinik got involved — clearly they're passionate and care about the game — but it shows how tightly controlled the league is."

The talks broke down last week over the owners' refusal to bargain if Donald Fehr was in the room.

"Part of their tactics is to demonize Don — we've seen it before," Westgarth said. The settlement ending the 2004-5 lockout was not signed by the union's executive director at the time, Bob Goodenow. He had been excluded from the process.

Westgarth was asked if the players would agree to another set of talks without Donald Fehr present at all times.

"I think it would be unreasonable to restrict who is in the room, but that's a decision for a great number of players to make," he said.

Asked what he thought that decision would be, Westgarth called on something he learned not at Princeton but as part of the N.H.L. Players' Association.

"I might actually steal a line from Don and say I'm out of the prediction business," he said.

New York Times LOADED: 12.10.2012

646129 New Jersey Devils

All quiet on NHL labor front

By MARK EVERSON

Brooks on The NHL today may cancel another chunk of its schedule, but it still hasn't scheduled the next bargaining session with the Players Association to end Owners' Lockout III, now in Day 86.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly confirmed last night no talks are yet slated with the union after negotiations broke down Thursday evening.

At the time, union head Donald Fehr declared he believed the sides closing toward a deal, only to hear moments later the league had rejected the players' last offer. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman then said the league's latest offer was off the table.

The sides negotiated without Bettman or Fehr for two days last week and momentary optimism erupted, only to be quickly dashed. The union says it is ready to talk, while the league is said to want signs the union is ready to make more concessions.

Still, this lockout is more than a month younger than the shortest of the previous two. The one in 1994-95 ended Jan. 11. The 2004-05 lockout killed that entire season.

New York Post LOADED: 12.10.2012

646130 New Jersey Devils

Fehr factor to NHL tactic

By LARRY BROOKS

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: 12.10.2012

646131 New York Rangers

At Englewood benefit, North Jersey stars perform for Sandy relief

By BRIAN ABERBACK

Bergen County stage and television stars and tap dance phenom Savion Glover took to the Bergen Performing Arts Center stage in Englewood Sunday night to aid those affected by superstorm Sandy.

Scarlett Diaz and 'Sandy' perform Tomorrow during the 'Beyond the Storm' Hurricane Sandy benefit at bergenPAC.

"Beyond the Storm: A Relief Concert to Benefit the Victims of Hurricane Sandy" featured 20 North Jersey residents performing rousing renditions of Broadway and popular standards. All proceeds from the concert benefit the New Jersey Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund, the Little Ferry and Moonachie school districts, and PetResQ of Tenafly. Benzel-Busch of Englewood and Englewood Hospital were the night's primary sponsors.

While songs of hope, generosity and inspiration reigned throughout the night, "Beyond the Storm" began with a somber, 3½ minute slideshow of Sandy's devastation, set to Bon Jovi's "When We Were Beautiful."

Little Ferry and Moonachie took the biggest brunt of Sandy's destruction in Bergen County, with hundreds of homes flooded along with businesses and schools. Tickets were provided to three dozen residents of those towns.

"I was struck by how much dignity and pride those residents had," said emcee Nina Pineda, who reported from Little Ferry and Moonachie for WABC-TV. She recalled asking two brothers who had suffered severe damage to their house how they would get by. "We're Jersey strong and we're going to recover" was the answer, which prompted thunderous applause from the audience.

BergenPAC Trustee Kelli Rabke Agresta and Director of Education Alex Diaz, who together organized the benefit, opened with "The Prayer."

The Elisabeth Morrow School Violins, led by renowned violinist, instructor and Englewood native Amelia Gold, performed Holberg's Suite, 1 Praelude.

Bogota resident Joy Hermalyn, who has performed on Broadway and at Carnegie Hall and London's Royal Albert Hall, gave a spirited rendition of "Everything's Coming Up Roses" from "Gypsy."

Ridgewood native Ali Stroker belted out "Let Me Be Your Star" from the TV series "Smash." Stroker, 25, was paralyzed from the chest down at age 2 in a car accident and has said that achieving her dreams despite her disability serves as an inspiration to those going through hard times.

Students from bergenPac's Beyond Dance ensemble followed Stroker, performing to Whitney Houston's "Queen of the Night."

Crowd favorite Liz Gillies of Haworth took on a reflective note with a commanding, soulful version of James Taylor's "Fire and Rain." Gillies, who plays Jade in the popular Nickelodeon series "Victorious," is working on her debut album. The 19-year-old grew up attending improvisation and musical theater classes at the venue, then called the John Harms Center.

Current bergenPAC Performing Arts School students Heather Braverman, Brian Park and Hannah Faye Zarate performed "Diamonds" (Rihanna), "Bless the Broken Roads" (Rascal Flatts) and "Ain't It Good" (from the musical "Children of Eden"), respectively.

Nine-year-old Scarlett Diaz, a Bergen County resident who has starred as Little Fiona in the Broadway National Tour of "Shrek," gave a powerful performance of "Tomorrow" from "Annie," accompanied onstage by Macy the dog, who plays Sandy in the Broadway musical.

Chris Marksbury of Old Tappan followed with his original composition, "Goodbye the Jersey Shore."

After a performance by Beyond Dance, Glover astounded the audience with "Savior for Sandy," six minutes of non-stop tap, which brought the audience to its feet.

The show's final act began with a second slideshow, this time highlighting volunteers helping with recovery efforts. Diaz sang Lee Greenwood's "Proud to Be an American" and the night ended on a determined and resilient tone, as the all the performers joined in on "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," bringing the audience to its feet one final time.

Those who could not attend the concert but would like to contribute can send a check payable to the Bergen Performing Arts Center, with "Beyond the Storm" in the memo portion, to bergenPAC, 30 N. Van Brunt St., Englewood, NJ 07631.

Bergen Record LOADED: 12.10.2012

646132 Ottawa Senators

Ottawa Senators figure to grab a handful of players from Binghamton when lockout ends

By Don Brennan ,Ottawa Sun

BINGHAMTON, N.Y. — The Senators will likely pluck between 3-5 players from their AHL affiliate's roster if the lockout ends before it kills the season.

For sure a goalie, probably a forward and, because of Jared Cowen's hip surgery, either two or three defencemen from Binghamton.

"We have two goaltenders that are superb," said B-Sens coach Luke Richardson. "Take your choice."

While Robin Lehner has been the team MVP to date, it's expected he'll be kept in Binghamton to play regularly, while Ben Bishop goes to Ottawa as Craig Anderson's backup.

"It's a little tricky on defence, with Jared being out," said Richardson. "We thought we'd only lose him, plus one more D, now we're going to lose two D. And that's only if everybody is healthy. They may look at three."

Andre Benoit, Mark Borowiecki and Patrick Wiercioch are the leading contenders.

Up front, it's likely Jakob Silfverberg will get the call. Mark Stone suffered a setback when he was injured early in the season, and Mika Zibanejad has recently been sidelined by the removal of wisdom teeth and a throat virus.

"Derek Grant has been the guy that's bloomed into a real good two-way forward," said Richardson. "He's a going to be a great checking forward because he's got size and he's got a great stride, he can skate with anybody. He's getting stronger and stronger on faceoffs, and you he's getting a bit of an offensive touch.

"Not to compare him to Mike Fisher, because he has a totally different style of play, but when you get a so-called checking centre that can score goals, and kill penalties ... that's a dangerous thing. I don't know if he's ready yet, but he's getting close. He's a guy that's really put himself in a great spot."

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 12.10.2012

646133 Philadelphia Flyers

Ilya Bryzgalov reportedly sidelined with virus

Flyers goalie Ilya Bryzgalov was removed from Russia's roster after undergoing a medical exam, according to the Russian Hockey Federation's website. The national team plays in the Channel One Cup tournament in Moscow this week.

Flyers general manager Paul Holmgren did not respond Sunday to a request for information. A Russian report indicated that the goalie has a virus.

Bryzgalov, who signed a nine-year, \$51 million contract with the Flyers before last season, has been playing for CSKA Moscow during the NHL lockout.

After a slow start, he has regrouped, lowering his goals-against average to 2.41 and raising his save percentage to .907 in 10 games. - Sam Carchidi

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.10.2012

646134 Philadelphia Flyers

Bryzgalov sidelined in Russia

Flyers goalie Ilya Bryzgalov was removed from Russia's roster after undergoing a medical exam, according to the Russian Hockey Federation's website.

The national team plays in the Channel One Cup tournament this week.

There were no specifics about an injury, and Flyers general manager Paul Holmgren did not respond to a request for information.

A person on Twitter who translates Russian said Bryzgalov has a virus, based on translating a Russian video report on the goalie.

Bryzgalov, who signed a nine-year, \$51 million contract with the Flyers before last season, has been playing for CSKA Moscow during the NHL lockout. After a slow start, he has regrouped, lowering his goals-against average to 2.41 and raising his save percentage to .907 in 10 games.

Michael Leighton is the Flyers' backup goalie.

Follow Sam Carchidi on Twitter @BroadStBull.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 12.10.2012

646135 Philadelphia Flyers

All we want for Christmas is the game

An open letter to NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and NHLPA executive director Don Fehr:

Dear Gary and Don,

Best wishes for the holidays. Looks like you're going to have some extra spare time to celebrate them.

Did the labor situation really have to come to this? Wasn't anything learned from the last time a new collective bargaining agreement had to be reached (2004-05) and a season was lost?

Or the recent NBA and NFL examples, where at least they avoided a complete meltdown?

For two months you have been haggling over how to split the money and just when it appears that an accord was reachable, "new" issues like length of the deal and individual contract limits suddenly come into play.

Why weren't these points raised and worked out while all the haggling over how to split up \$3.3 billion was going on? Or maybe they were, and you just didn't tell anybody about it.

If that's the case, then why make it public now? Can't you see that every time you bargain through the media, it blows up in your face?

Example: What about when the NHL tried to push through a proposal in early November by saying an 82-game season could be salvaged if the players acceded to their wishes? That seems like a distant memory.

And what was the point of the players' association coming out Thursday night and saying the two sides were close when the league promptly shot down that notion moments later?

There's no point in getting into who's right and who's wrong here. The financial concerns of hockey are somewhat unique to professional sports because your league is like 30 fiefdoms that don't really seem to give a damn about each other. If you did, you would have a true revenue-sharing system that would require teams like the Rangers and Maple Leafs to split the profits with franchises like Phoenix and the now-transferred Atlanta Thrashers.

Your fans seem to be perplexed that compromises can't be reached on just about every problem area out there. This whole notion of "make whole" on the contracts signed before the old CBA expired seemed like a no-brainer: If one side wanted \$400 million and the other \$200 million, just split the difference at \$300 million and be done with it.

Same with the term of the new CBA: NHL wants 10 years, the union six. So make it eight. It's odd that those federal mediators who were in here a couple of weeks ago couldn't figure this out.

The sad part is that the sport and its fans wind up taking the hit when a lot of this could have been avoided. Take the NFL: That league imposed a

"lockout" many months before the first game was scheduled to be played. Both sides talked and talked and talked and had their conflicts worked out without a single game being missed.

No matter what happens here — even if the season is lost — hockey will come back. We saw this eight years ago. The hard-core fans will still come to the games, the casual ones will need a year or two to come around but in the long run, things will return to normal.

But right now, living in the moment, the sport is gone and that's a disservice to everyone, right down to the popcorn vendors and parking lot attendants.

Here it is Christmas and somewhere there's a kid hoping to find a Claude Giroux jersey under the tree with his name on it come the big morning. Yet imagine his disappointment when he goes to watch his hero and can't find him on the television.

You can say it's just business, that today's economics dictate a fair deal for both sides and these sorts of delays are inevitable, that we have to go right down to the wire sometime in mid-January and then cobble together a 48-game schedule to try to salvage the product.

We say look in the mirror. The game is producing record-breaking revenue, despite one of the bleakest financial pictures in the history of North America. To sit there and argue over to how to divvy up billions is an insult to anyone whoever laced up a pair of skates on a cold February morning and glided around a frozen backyard pond.

So our advice is to get this thing done pronto. Get into a room, lock the door and don't come out until the signatures are on the line.

Anything less would be putting your own interests ahead of the game, which really doesn't belong to you but the people who watch and pay for it.

Sincerely,

A concerned hockey spectator

Burlington County Times LOADED: 12.10.2012

646136 Tampa Bay Lightning

League, union know time is running out

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK --

The NHL and the locked-out players' association are talking again, and a return to the bargaining table could happen soon.

After a few days to cool off following an epic collapse in negotiations, the league and the union have been in touch in an attempt to restart conversations that could save the hockey season.

"Trying to set up something for this week, but nothing finalized yet," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly wrote Sunday in an email to The Associated Press.

Negotiations broke down Thursday after three straight days of talks at a New York hotel. Moments after players' association executive director Donald Fehr said he believed the sides were closing in on a deal to end the lockout, he was back at the podium to announce the NHL had rejected the union's latest offer.

Commissioner Gary Bettman followed him and angrily stated that the sides weren't close, and added he didn't know why Fehr thought they were.

The tone has changed a bit since then. Whether it has shifted far enough for the sides to come to an agreement soon remains to be seen.

On Friday, Daly said he was at a loss how to get the bargaining process back on track.

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

All games have been canceled through Friday, and more games surely will be wiped off the schedule soon. Bettman has said he won't allow a season to be played that contains fewer than 48 games per team — the length of the season that was played after a lockout ended in January 1995.

Fehr repeated on Saturday his feeling that the sides aren't far apart.

"My comments from a couple of days ago stand on their own. I think we were very close," Fehr told reporters after addressing a Canadian Auto Workers council meeting.

The lockout has resulted in the cancellation of 422 regular-season games along with the New Year's Day Winter Classic and the All-Star game. The NHL is in danger of losing its second full season in seven years. The lockout that forced the cancellation of the 2004-05 season marked the first time a North American professional sports league had a full campaign wiped out by a labor dispute.

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 12.10.2012

646137 Toronto Maple Leafs

NHL lockout: Latest collapse in negotiations just another part of theatrics

By Bruce Arthur

Once you got past the burbling emotion of Gary Bettman's aria in New York last week, which deputy commissioner Bill Daly occasionally turned into a duet, it was a rich tale in more ways than one. It was a tale of deceit and disingenuousness, of betrayal and intransigence, of villains and the gracious barons who are trying to reform them. Oh, what a story.

It wasn't all true, of course, because most stories never are. But it was, like many stories, revealing.

Bettman spoke after NHL Players' Association executive director Don Fehr had met with deputy commissioner Bill Daly and legal heavy Bob Battersman, after which Fehr delivered a carefully disingenuous speech aimed squarely at his own constituents saying the two sides were so close they could practically smell the hockey gloves. None of these things were a coincidence.

And then came Gary, raging like Lear. For something delivered from behind a worn faux-wood podium at the Westin Times Square, it sounded apocalyptic. And on further reflection, the story should probably be annotated.

Bettman's story went like this: Much progress was made during direct owner-player talks on Tuesday and Wednesday, which is certainly true. And then late Wednesday night, Bettman said, "that sense of optimism ... almost inexplicably disappeared Wednesday afternoon when the four owners returned to the bargaining process."

Essentially, he made it sound like the ghost of Don Fehr had entered the room, rattling his chains. Bettman then spoke angrily of the refusal of the players to — what, genuflect? — when the owners made a US\$100-million increase to cover existing contracts, bringing the total to US\$300-million, minus US\$50-million earmarked for player pensions.

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

So, Bettman said, the owners then specified three conditions — a 10-year CBA, five-year term limits on contracts (seven for re-signing your own players), and no buyouts or caps on escrow — and told the players that it was a yes or no, non-negotiable offer. When the players attempted to negotiate off that proposal on Thursday, Bettman didn't even bother showing up for the meeting. The NHL pulled all advancements off the table, which must be scuffed from all the things that have been put on and taken off and put on and taken off over the past few months.

"This collective bargaining agreement is a total package, OK?" railed Bettman. "Dollars are one element; the way the system works, player contracting, is another element ... The characterization that I just heard

transmitted to us, that we were close, that reminds me of the last time the union said we were close, and we were a billion dollars apart."

Cue the lightning, the gloom, and a chill in the air. Except they are not a billion dollars apart. They are, other than escrow and buyouts issues, zero dollars apart, based on the offers made this week. They are two years apart on the length of the CBA, three years apart on term limits for contracts, and there is other housekeeping here and there. But that's it. That's the gap. It's a crack in the sidewalk. Just hop across.

And that's just one reason that Bettman's song was an empty one. Yes, it was said that Pittsburgh's Ron Burkle and his merry band of moderates — Toronto's Larry Tanenbaum, Tampa's Jeff Vinik, and Winnipeg's Mark Chipman, the last of whom was believed to be involved partly to moderate union hardass and Jets defenceman Ron Hainsey — had to wear down Boston hardliner Jeremy Jacobs to add the money, believing it could be a magic bullet. And maybe Jacobs is back in charge of the process.

But it's all a charade, as much of this negotiation has been. Of course Fehr tried to negotiate off the proposal, because the NHL decided to render the proposal non-negotiable on the same night they told that bringing Fehr back into the room "could be a dealbreaker" after two long days of talks. If you were leading a union, what would be your response? Accept their terms?

Of course not. One reason Bettman and Daly were so angry, aside from the theatrical element, is that Fehr has spent this entire negotiation refusing to bargain on their terms. They offer a percentage split; he offers something based on guaranteed dollars. They try to stick; he tries to move. The owners ask what is important, and what is important keeps changing. They just want him to say yes, and he won't do it. Yet.

So of course the players didn't jump at the US\$100-million. They have been negotiating with billionaires, and they were not going to make a deal without their leader in the room, because it would be like accepting a plea bargain while your lawyer waits outside. And they know that as Bettman said in his monologue, a 48-game season is the minimum, and that means there are a few weeks left to save a season. Players worry the NHL will use term limits to create a two-tiered league, salary-wise, which could divide the union in the next negotiation, but they also want to win whatever concessions they can win.

There should be a deal this week. There should have been a deal last week. There should be peace and justice in the world, but people keep getting in the way. The league is trying to crack the players like a walnut, because this is how player unions break. Fehr is holding them together, so the owners are trying to undermine Fehr. Even Bettman acknowledged, in a relatively unguarded moment, that it was just "hard bargaining." That's how deals are made.

Maybe this gets pushed right to the brink, where there will be no room for an unstable interaction, no room for human error. But it's much more likely that this is how it begins to end.

National Post LOADED: 12.10.2012

646138 Winnipeg Jets

Hainsey not near as soft off ice

Union man displays courage of convictions

By: Gary Lawless

Go ahead and boo Ron Hainsey.

But do it because he's a soft, overpaid defenceman and not because of his union politics.

The Winnipeg Jet is drawing the vitriol of some fans for having inserted himself into the heart of the CBA battle between his union brethren and NHL ownership.

Emails and tweets directed my way in recent days have vilified Hainsey and some fans in Winnipeg are preparing to give him an earful, if and when, the Jets get back on the ice.

Hainsey has been outspoken, committed and courageous on behalf of his NHL peers. I don't agree with a lot of what he's said or the way he says it. But I commend him for taking a stance on behalf of his co-workers.

Put in the same spot, I'd hope there would be a Ron Hainsey among my fellow journalists to step forward and take on ownership.

If every employee who felt they were being treated unjustly laid down, there would be no progress in working conditions. History has shown, including hockey's, the world needs its Ron Hainseys. Ted Lindsay and his union activism invokes praise from players of his time to today. The union named its highest honour, MVP, selected by the players, after Lindsay. His contribution is not forgotten.

Hainsey believes he is continuing that important but difficult work. Owners didn't like Lindsay in his day and one can be sure Hainsey has made a few enemies on the league side. So be it.

NHL players believe ownership is trying to take advantage of them. Agree or disagree, that's what they believe.

While some have packed their bags for for a few dollars in Europe, Hainsey has had the courage of his convictions and the commitment to do the heavy lifting.

Let's not get carried away and consider him a modern day Norma Rae battling for minimum wage -- Hainsey is already a millionaire fighting for more millions -- but give him his due.

The NHL picked this fight with its players. Hainsey has fought it. He can be smug and condescending, but those aren't new character traits where he's concerned.

Truth be told, if Hainsey showed this kind of battle in his everyday game as an NHLer, he'd be a lot more useful.

There are reasons why Hainsey the hockey player is in disfavour with Jets fans. Last season he was paid \$5 million while contributing no goals and 10 assists in 56 games. Not good value.

Hainsey plays a small game with virtually no edge. OK at a bunch of things but excellent at none. He's a depth player being paid top-end money.

One theory being passed around the last little while is that Hainsey, because of his role in negotiations, won't be signed by any of the NHL's 30 teams when his current contract runs out. I don't believe this.

Hainsey will never again be handed a contract similar to the five-year, \$22.5 million pact he's been working off. But he still has value as a fifth or sixth defenceman on a low-end team's blue-line. Hainsey is still an NHL player, albeit on the fringe. He'll find work for a few more years at a much reduced rate.

Hainsey will also face some difficult times with his peers. Word is he's been disrespectful in the players' room when others have disagreed with the position of union leader Don Fehr.

Hainsey has been the caucus whip and at times can lord his knowledge over others. Don't be surprised if an opponent or two takes a run at him once the NHL gets back in action.

There are going to be wounds when all this is said and done. Players, owners and fans will all have some making up to do.

Winnipeg's passionate fans, just a year ago the most jubilant mob in hockey, have a right to be surly.

The NHL as a whole has treated its fans poorly and retribution, whether it be economic or emotional, is their right.

But Hainsey isn't alone in this or deserve any special mistreatment. Not for standing up for what he believes in.

Nope. Boo Ron Hainsey for poor play if it continues. Not for showing what this country has been built upon. Courage.

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Gary Lawless, Winnipeg Free Press

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646139 Winnipeg Jets

Injured IceCaps fall to Falcons

Staff Report

The St. John's IceCaps ran into a hot goalie as they fell 4-2 to the Springfield Falcons on Saturday night at Mile One Centre.

Max Macenauer and Paul Postma each scored power play goals for the IceCaps, who got 28 saves from Mark Dekanich.

The IceCaps were playing without nine regulars, including Alex Burmistrov, who is out with a shoulder injury and will be reassessed this week.

The primary affiliate of the Winnipeg Jets has lost three consecutive games and fell to 11-12-0-1 on the American Hockey League season.

Saturday's game marked the 52nd consecutive sellout at Mile One Centre.

The Falcons got 46 saves including 18 in the third period from Curtis McElhinney.

Ryan Johansen had a goal and two assists to pace the Falcons attack, while Brandon product Matt Calvert, Tomas Kubalik and Cam Atkinson also scored for the visitors.

The IceCaps are back in action on Tuesday against the Hershey Bears.

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ESPN / Commodore back in AHL with a mission

By Scott Burnside

NEW YORK -- There is something more circular than arc-like about the path Mike Commodore's career has taken.

Seven years ago, the big defenseman was coming off a trip to the 2004 Stanley Cup finals with the Calgary Flames when coach and GM Darryl Sutter asked him to report to the team's AHL affiliate in Lowell, Mass., during the last lockout.

Although he didn't expect it at the time, Commodore now says the experience might have been the most important period in his career.

He played 20 minutes a night, got power-play time and killed penalties.

"It was probably one of the best things that ever happened in my career," Commodore said.

Perhaps more importantly, Commodore's play caught the eye of Carolina GM Jim Rutherford and his scouts, as the Canes and Flames shared the AHL affiliate in Lowell.

When the lockout that scuttled the 2004-05 season ended in the summer of 2005, the Hurricanes acquired Commodore at the draft, and he became an important part of the team's Stanley Cup run in that first post-lockout season.

Fast-forward to this fall and Commodore is stationed at another AHL port of call. This time he is in Ontario, where he has signed a 25-game tryout contract with the Hamilton Bulldogs in the hopes that the AHL will once again provide a catalyst to good fortune at the NHL level.

Commodore, who finished last season with the Tampa Bay Lightning and became an unrestricted free agent, was working out with some of the Lightning players in the Tampa area. Some days there would be five skaters, other days there would be a dozen or so.

If he hoped to resume his NHL career, Commodore knew he had to get in more game action and get in front of NHL scouts and GMs, especially with the lockout "taking its familiar route" of seven years ago.

If the season was canceled, "I knew I was going to have a tough time getting a deal next season," Commodore told ESPN.com. "I just figured there wouldn't be any interest."

So Commodore sent a memo out to AHL clubs offering his services, and the Hamilton Bulldogs took him up on his offer, signing him to a 25-game

tryout. The tryout allows the club to make use of Commodore's experience, while he retains the flexibility to sign with an NHL club if the lockout ends in the interim.

If the lockout continues and/or the NHL season is canceled, he could then sign an AHL contract.

So far, Commodore has seen action in two games with the Bulldogs and two weeks' worth of practices. He has enjoyed his role as a mentor to a young Hamilton blue line, and he hopes that he has shown enough of the toughness and savvy that has seen him play in 484 regular-season games and 53 postseason contests to pique the interest of some NHL teams down the road.

"It went better than I thought it would," he acknowledged.

The past couple of years have not been kind to the native of Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, who turned 33 last month.

After establishing himself as a solid, hard-working defenseman who was a popular presence in the dressing room, Commodore signed a lucrative five-year deal with the Columbus Blue Jackets worth \$18.75 million in 2008-09. But he fell out of favor with former Columbus coach Scott Arniel and ultimately was banished to the team's AHL affiliate in Springfield, Mass.

On July 1, 2011, shortly after being bought out of his contract by the Blue Jackets, Commodore signed a one-year deal with the Detroit Red Wings. Opportunity and ice time didn't materialize in Detroit, and the Red Wings dealt Commodore to the Lightning at the trade deadline.

He played some, but when the Lightning fell out of the playoff race, his ice time diminished.

"I don't want to complain. But at the same time, the last two years haven't really gone in my favor," he said.

This time around, Commodore is embracing his AHL experience and the doors he hopes that experience may open down the road.

"It's completely different from Springfield," he said. "I didn't feel I should have been there. I wanted nothing to do with it.

"I want to continue my NHL career. This is the perfect place for me."

What happens next is anyone's guess, especially with negotiations between owners and players at a delicate stage in New York. But the Bulldogs are the top farm team of the Montreal Canadiens, a team that is in the midst of a major metamorphosis with new GM Marc Bergevin and new head coach Michel Therrien.

It wouldn't be a surprise at all if Commodore was asked to bring some character and grit to the Habs' locker room if there is an NHL season.

As for the lockout, it strikes Commodore as frustratingly inevitable.

"The fact that it's come to this, it's sad is what it is. But am I surprised? Not really," he said.

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NBCSports.com / Jakob Silfverberg turning heads and earning high praise in AHL

Joe Yerdon

Last season when Senators prospect Jakob Silfverberg made his debut with Ottawa, it came as a bit of a surprise. After all, he had spent most of his time in the Swedish Elite League and when he came here last season, he made his debut in the playoffs.

In the playoffs, he played on the fourth line, but his time spent in the AHL with the Binghamton Senators this season has been on the team's top line leading the way in points. While he's earned comparisons to Daniel Alfredsson, learning the North American game and playing on a smaller ice surface is the biggest adjustment he has to make.

"It's a big difference to play on a North American-sized ice rink," Silfverberg says. "I didn't expect the difference to be as big as this. I thought I'd be able to just jump in the game and be ready to go. I'd been struggling a lot early in the season turning pucks over in the wrong places and if you do that on

the North American ice you're most likely going to get caught going in the wrong end."

Silfverberg gives a lot of credit to his breakout this season to Binghamton coach Luke Richardson, a guy who's earned his own compliments from the team.

"It has to do with a lot of confidence and a lot to do with the coach telling me to play how I want to play. I feel like I get a lot of confidence from the coach and I feel like I'm playing good out there now."

Would Ottawa coach Paul MacLean approve of "playing how he wants to?" Silfverberg isn't quite so sure of that.

"Ha! I don't know about that," he says with a laugh. "You still have to know when to chip the puck in or to make a play. You still have to keep the creativity you have in you. That's what makes a team good. Every player's got their own creativity and everyone is good at different things."

Silfverberg's play is earning him praise from opponents as well. Phoenix Coyotes young star defenseman and current Portland Pirates leader Oliver Ekman-Larsson speaks well of his fellow countryman.

"You always have to check your shoulder to know he's out there," Ekman-Larsson says. "He's a really good player. Good shot, good skater, good hockey sense."

Judging by what Silfverberg was able to do in their 6-1 win over Portland on Friday night, he's got the good stuff down pat.

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NBCSports.com / Duchene signs with Ambri-Piotta in Swiss league

Joe Yerdon

Yesterday we told you about Matt Duchene's final game with Frolunda in the Swedish Elite League and how he was headed to Switzerland. Today, he announced who he'll be playing for.

Duchene, via Twitter, said he signed with Ambri-Piotta in the Swiss National League. In 19 games with Frolunda, he scored just four goals and added 10 assists. He also had a bit of a struggle dealing with both his teammates and the officials in Sweden.

In Switzerland, he'll be joining Vancouver Canucks goalie Cory Schneider who recently joined Ambri-Piotta. Former Penguins forward Richard Park is also playing there but on a full-time basis.

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NBCSports.com / Hugh Jessiman: Regrets? He's had a few

Joe Yerdon

It's been a long, strange, and often difficult trip for former 2003 first-round pick Hugh Jessiman.

When the former 12th overall pick finally played in a couple games for the Florida Panthers in 2011, he was the last player from the first round of the 2003 draft to make his NHL debut, just eight years after being picked by the New York Rangers.

Now he's with the Ottawa Senators organization trying to make things happen in Binghamton. Thinking back on how his pro career started, he says he'd have done things a little differently.

"When you're young you're inexperienced. You live and you learn from your mistakes. It sounds cliché but it's so true," Jessiman says. "I don't blame anybody, I always look in the mirror. But, as a veteran now, I try to be the guy to help out the rookies now. I try to be a good guy for us."

So far this year with the Binghamton Senators, Jessiman has four goals and four assists in 20 games. The night I saw him was a three-point effort (1g, 2a) in a 6-1 win over Portland.

He says if he had a chance to do his time at Dartmouth all over again, he would've thought a bit more about when to go pro.

"I think if I were to do that decision again, I would've stayed. I came off an injury and turned pro. I don't know what the thinking was behind that. Obviously there was a lot of pressure from New York. A lot of pressure. You want to make the organization happy. I think coming off an injury and not giving myself enough time, I think that's something I would do over."

That injury held him to just 12 games with one goal and one assist during his junior year at Dartmouth. After that, he decided to turn pro. Was it pressure from the Rangers or from himself that made him jump?

"It was a little bit of both. I think a lot of those guys [in the 2003 draft] left after two years of school. I decided to stay for that third year and really dominate," Jessiman explains.

"The Parises the Vaneks, they really dominated that second year [of college]. I really wanted to have a year like that and then I go get injured in the fourth game of the year. You're done. After that, I think at that point it was more pressure from me. So, like I said, it's no one's fault. I feel fortunate I got drafted by my home team and now... Here we are."

He's still a big guy with a big body, he's 6'6" 220 after all, and he hopes that when the lockout ends he'll get a chance to show he can be a contributor. Now that he's 28 years-old and with his eighth organization, the time for him to prove himself is right now... If it hasn't already passed him by.

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NBCSports.com / Despite Thursday's meltdown, NHL and players' union still talking

Joe Yerdon

After Thursday's media meltdown in New York City, one that could've seen the NHL lockout take a turn for the worse, things are not as ugly as they seem.

Dave Molinari of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reports that the league and players have spoken this weekend and ESPN.com's Pierre LeBrun says it's Bill Daly and Steve Fehr doing the talking. TSN's Darren Dreger adds to this saying both sides are pushing their leaders to get back to the table and close out a deal.

That's the upside to that news. The downside is no meetings have been scheduled yet.

It's hard to imagine both sides will let things escalate further to put the season in danger. As it is, the NHL still has its games canceled through the 14th and if there's no progress made soon, we could be in for another round of cancellations soon.

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NBCSports.com / Record-breaker Brust hoping his AHL play earns him eventual NHL job

Joe Yerdon

Barry Brust hasn't played in an NHL game since 2007 with the L.A. Kings, but his recent run of hot play in the AHL has him thinking big for when the lockout ends.

Ben Kuzma of The Province spoke with the 29 year-old Abbotsford Heat netminder and new AHL shutout streak record holder to find out he's itching for the chance to get back in the NHL.

"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."

The issue Brust will run into being in the Calgary Flames' system is the other two goalies he's sharing time with in Abbotsford. Former first-round pick Leland Irving as well as upstart Danny Taylor.

Backing up Miikka Kiprusoff in Calgary is a tough job because it means a lot of time waiting for a chance to play, but Brust feels he's ready for that second chance at NHL glory.

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